


# Normandes: problem-free French cheese specialists

The Normande breed has its origin in the similarly named region of Normandy in the north western part of France, and in its pure state is valued for its placid temperament and problem-free performance... and because of the favourable milk composition for cheese production. In addition, the red & white speckled French cattle are especially popular in North America, both for pure breeding and crossbreeding.

 BERT WESSELDIJK

After Holstein and Montbéliarde, the Normandes form the 3rd largest dairy breed in France. With more than 230,000 cows on milk production recording, which are primarily found in western France (Normandy and Brittany), they attain an average production of 8000 kg 4.25% 3.50%. With the high protein component and the favourable Kappa Caseïne (BB), the Normande cows are considered true cheese specialists. Annually, the French AI's sample about 100 young Normande sires - 50 at Evolution, 40 at the new organization Origen Plus, and 10 at Genes Diffusion. The total index (ISU) consists of production (40%), udder-health (18.5%), type (18%), fertility (15.5%), longevity (5%) and milking speed (3%).

## COMPONENTS & STRENGTH

'The strength of our selection program is not only related to the number of bulls that we sample annually. We also put a lot of effort into creating bulls with a high genetic level. With that, we pay attention to outcross pedigrees,' says Jean-Christophe Boittin from Evolution, who for selection can draw from the supply of more than 200,000 cows on milk production recording and a nucleus of 7000 elite heifers. Each year, Evolution evaluates 3500

Normandes for genomics. According to Boittin, farmers are looking for bulls that transmit sufficient milk, positive components, good health traits and sound type. 'With that, udders and feet & legs are the most important. And strength is considered more important than stature.' One of the most popular sires at Evolution is Arantilly. Strong points in his transmitting pattern, according to Boittin, are strength and type and the excellent feet & legs. In addition, he has positive components and a limited inbreeding coefficient within the breed. Another much-used transmitter from the recent past is Redondo. 'He is extremely all-round and thus easy to use. For export, Redondo is still one of the most prominent bulls.'

## GENOMIC SIRES

At Origen Plus, Fornells, Gallieni, Folden and Galhileo are the most used sires. 'That's because they score well for feet & legs and production: And because their daughters stand out for beautiful and healthy udders,' says Matthieu Chambrial from Origen Plus, who indicates that right now farmers are using 75 to 80% young genomic sires, compared to 35% two years ago. For breeding progress, the arrival of genomics has been really important to the breed, says Chambrial. 'We are now work-



Derline, daughter of the influential sire Redondo, was crowned Normande Champion during the Space Show 2013.

ing with more heifers and are using a much greater variety of sires of sons. Thanks to genomics, we can also be more serious about selecting for functional traits.'

## NORMANDE GENETICS

Besides more than 550,000 inseminations in their homeland, large amounts of semen from Normande sires are exported to various countries in Europe and South America: But also to North America, where Normande semen is sold by Normande Genetics. 'The most important market is the biologically oriented farms that graze their cows. Normande sires are also used for crossbreeding with Holsteins,' explains Jerome Chateau from Normande Genetics. In both cases, farmers are especially looking for bulls that do not breed a lot of stature. 'For this reason, the daughters of Redondo are really appreciated. I have seen a lot of Redondos and they are the perfect size.' Compared to other "strength breeds" such as Fleckvieh and Montbéliarde, the Normandes, according to Chateau, have increased the least for stature. 'It is a compliment to the breed that in the past 10 years, many average sized cows have won at important shows.' Other traits receiving attention from Chateau in the selection of bulls are calving ease, fertility, udder and feet & legs. 'Feet & legs turned out to be the weak point of the Normandes during the breed comparison in Ireland. In the meantime, the breed has made enormous gains in this area. Nevertheless, in the selection of young sires I remain vigilant.' Another point on which the Normande breed has made a lot of progress in recent years is protein component, according to Chateau. 'This is also due to Diametre, the grandsire of Redondo. He was able to combine high production with high protein. With his tremendous popularity, the breed was able to make a lot of progress on this trait.' ●

Fornells (Uperise x Rubafix).



Arantilly (Nephelion x Girophare).

