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MY STORY OF JUNIOR HOLSTEIN WORK

“As a farmer, it’s important that we keep all of our cows content and healthy. It’s a good business practice, but it’s also second nature to dairy farmers who love their animals.” Quote on the Dairy Farming Today website.

Hello! My name is Rocco Cunningham. I am 16 years old and the son of John and Lynn Cunningham, and the brother of Christian who is ten. We live on a 50-acre farm in Penngrove, California. We raise young stock and recently started milking four cows a few months ago. The fact that our mature cattle are now cared for by us, the days are filled with excitement as the reality of our dream has taken shape. My Holstein project is my life; add schoolwork, wrestling and it gives me a full schedule. My father and I are partners in our herd of 50 animals we call R-John Registered Holsteins, which is located in Northern California, just an hour north of the Golden Gate Bridge. Our farm is in the agriculturally rich Redwood Empire, more commonly known as Sonoma County, California. The terrain has many hills and valleys with lots of trees, streams and cows.

At our farm, I am in charge of all medical needs, breeding selections, feed management and I research pedigrees when considering a purchase. Of course, I am still the wingman, which means I get the majority of the hands-on dirty work. My dad drives the tractors and I work the gates and the shovels. He really likes to operate the tractor...and we both know that one day soon we will have to switch it up! I like to be involved in all aspects of our heifers and cows’ development; we have a very strict daily routine. Each morning at 5:30 am I get up and head to the barn to milk. My dad meets me in the new barn at 5:45 am and he starts feeding the heifers and dry cows. We do not ship our milk, but I use the milk to feed the calves by bottle or bucket. Before I leave the barn I check each animal to see if they are eating well and feeling healthy. I list ear tag

numbers on our white board in the barn if an animal needs attention later. Then it's time to get ready for school!

In my early years of showing, we had trouble with over conditioned heifers and cows at the shows. Until two years ago, my father was in charge of the feeding program. I decided to make a change so that our animals would be in more desirable body condition. I decreased the fat intake by eliminating some corn and increased the amount of protein by adding calf manna. It has made a world of difference! My animals went from fat, round and over-conditioned cows to strong, chiseled dairy heifers. Now that I have started handling the feed rations my dad will ask me, "What should I feed this cow, or that heifer?" These questions give me confidence in my decision making skills.

I believe clipping and washing the show string every other afternoon with shampoo and conditioner is important. Starting about a month before show season starts, through to the colored shavings of Madison; I have learned this helps their hair grow thick and soft, making it easier for me to fit them to their best. I had not qualified for the WDE Showmanship class for three years. Finally, last year I made it to the fitting portion of the class. I was so happy to be the last name called as the first place winner during the award ceremony! I am proud that my cattle compete well in the show ring, especially because of my efforts before the show.

Some of my earliest Holstein memories were at my grandmother's dairy just a few miles up the road. I helped my aunt and uncle bring in fresh cows, feed calves, scrape the barns clean, and all those little things that need to be done. The best chore of the day was always trying to be stronger than the hose when I helped wash down the milk barn. The experience of working at my grandma's has helped me become a hard worker since I

worked for someone else. On their dairy, I learned more efficient ways of doing traditional tasks and I still use the same techniques today. It was rewarding to be given more and more challenging tasks as I grew older and could handle more responsibility.

I admit that I am an over-achiever! I hold high standards for myself and am proud to maintain a 4.0 GPA since the 5th grade. My parents won't allow me to hold down a structured job outside our own feed mill and store. During non-wrestling or Dairy Bowl practice season, I make hay and grain deliveries. I am paid hourly and it never seems to add up to much when I try to pay for my own gas or go to the movies. I am thankful my parents take into consideration my good grades, leadership responsibilities in 4-H & FFA, and the work I do for my own cattle everyday. They reward me with Holsteins, and I really appreciate their encouragement and involvement.

Working with cows is my first love, but a very close second is working with the other Junior Holstein members. It really isn't work at all, it's just plain fun hanging out with other kids from California or other states who love the dairy industry. Receiving Wisconsin's Badger Dairy Camp's Sportsmanship Award, earning High Individual in Reasons at dairy judging contests, leading the junior meeting at California's Cow Camp and even studying 1000 Dairy Bowl Questions everyday for a month before the National Convention is fun! All the fun started when I joined our local junior Association six years ago and I was hooked by the time Kirsten Areias found me. The rest is history! Since then I have held the state junior office of Vice President, and currently I am serving my second term as the President for the Redwood Empire Junior Holstein Association. This year the local Adult Holstein Association honored me with the distinction of being their Outstanding Junior Member. In the California Junior Holstein Association I have also

been very active. We have had the pleasure of visiting other areas that host the California Holstein Convention. One of my favorite memories was the Monterey Bay Aquarium for Host Night and we occupied the whole facility! At each State Holstein Convention I participated in the Dairy Bowl, Dairy Jeopardy, and the speech contest. I have been on the winning Dairy Bowl teams, and have won Jeopardy two years in a row. After winning the state speech contest, I competed at the National Convention. The biggest and most awesome event finally happened. After three years of competing at the National Holstein Convention, I was a member of the national winning Junior Dairy Bowl Team at the National Convention in Wisconsin last year. California's first nationals win ever! As the California Junior Holstein Association Vice President, President Taylor Pires and I extended an invitation to all the Juniors to come to California in 2009 for the National Convention. It is an exciting time to be involved with the California Junior Holstein Association as we host the National Convention in Sacramento, California. The leadership opportunities provide us with experiences that can build friendships with kids all over the United States. We are the future of the Dairy Industry, and even though there are really tough obstacles to overcome the future still holds hope. We have great things planned...