

Aviation and Agriculture in the Alps

Kaitlyn Gisler

We are pleased to share this update from past dairy producer and BC Holstein News writer, Kaitlyn Gisler.

We have exchanged our little farmhouse in the Lower Mainland for an apartment overlooking a cobblestoned courtyard in Sion, Switzerland, population 35,000. We have arrived here because of aeroplanes but not only in the conventional sense.

My partner George has been hired as a technician by a company spearheading electrified aviation. Their headquarters are in Sion which has a regional airport for test flights. This company is in growth mode and is looking keenly beyond the Alps as they develop their innovative, battery-powered design. As foreigners to Switzerland, George and I are looking keenly *around* the Alps at our new surroundings.

Sion is located in a valley, carved between the mountains. Crisscrossing the low to mid elevations are vineyards. Sion is considered the driest and sunniest city in Switzerland and one of its biggest wine producers – Fendant being the region’s popular white wine. The vineyards add a visual marvel to the sweeping Alps but are eventually surpassed by grass until the grass too dissolves into the rocky, bare peaks.

Where there are not vineyards, but meadows and fields, the four-legged pride and joy of Valais (our canton/province) can be found. The first source of great pride is the Valais Blacknose Sheep, mostly raised around Zermatt which is Matterhorn territory. However, our city has adopted four ewes as a natural mowing initiative in the city’s greenspaces. Valais sheep have been bred for alpine terrain, meaning they are hardy right down to their curly, white and black wool.

This is Switzerland, so there are cows to be discovered. Another source of pride for our region are the brown-black, stocky Herens cattle. Yet again, bred to thrive in alpine terrain. These cows are small and hardy, raised first for meat and then milk but loved most for their attitude. When we first read about the cow fights, alarm bells rang in my head with conflicting ideas of this so-called neutral country we’re calling home. Further research was warranted. We discovered that Herens are innately hierarchal and there is no bloodshed at these scuffles.



Top - The historic Valère Basilica sits atop a knoll in the town of Sion.

Center - Sion, Switzerland is the stunning new valley town where Kaitlyn and George are having an adventure.

Bottom - The vineyard-lined hillsides around Sion make for an incredible setting.



Every May, farmers and breeders in Valais bring the ‘queens’ of their respective herds together. Horns are locked and the ground is cut up by hooves as the Herens wrestle in specified age and weight classes. A winner, ‘Queen of Queens’ is celebrated from each grouping, and she is *collared* with a special cow bell which she wears in the alpine pastures for the summer.

We’re surrounded by mountains as we were in the Fraser Valley, but our peaks are higher and a little more razor-edged. We still hear the familiar revs of tractors but instead of working in large grass fields, they’re in a vineyard. Planes zigzag across the same blue sky but some of these planes are electrified. It all feels vaguely of home, but with a Swiss-twist, and we are grateful for this adventure.



PREMIUM STEEL FRAME DAIRY BARNs

Take your dairy operation to the next level with a WeCover barn. Promoting better airflow and natural light gives cattle a healthier environment for better production, and your building will look great while doing it. Custom built to your needs with a fabric or steel roof, you’ll be glad you went for the premium solution.



1-866-606-9122
wecover.net

