

KANSAS Farmer

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Dairy grows in Kansas

Key Points

- Dairy operation a longtime family business for Boersmas.
- Their move from New Mexico allowed the dairy to grow.
- Rotary milking parlors chosen for efficiency, ease of operation.

By P.J. GRIEKSPoor

TED Boersma says there is dairy in the family genes.

His dad's uncle started out in dairy in California in the early 1930s. Ted and his father began dairying in New Mexico in 1984. His wife's father was a dairyman. And in November of 2008, the family sold two dairies in New Mexico and moved to western Kansas.

"My wife and our youngest kids actually moved here in July of 2007," Ted says. "My son was just getting ready to go into seventh grade and the twins were going into ninth grade. We knew we were making the move, and it just seemed best to let them start a new school in their new hometown."

The move, he says, was prompted by the desire to expand the operation to provide for a growing number of family members who wanted to be part of it.

"About the only way we could expand in New Mexico was start a third dairy," he says. "But in Kansas, we could build bigger and have everything at one location. Kansas is similar to New Mexico in many ways — the weather is similar, conditions are the same; cows thrive here."

When the construction of Forget-Me-Not Farms was com-



MOVING MILK: Ted Boersma says Forget-Me-Not Farms ships about 500,000 pounds of milk a day from the dairy near Cimarron.

plete, Boersma moved to Kansas to join the family, bringing 5,000 cows with him. "It was pretty exciting, getting all the cows moved and broke to the barn," he says.

The dairy has since added about 2,000 more cows. It ships 10 to 11 tanker trucks a day — more than half a million pounds of milk — to bottling plants in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Texas and Iowa.

The 7,000 cows milked daily

are divided into two herds, one for each milking parlor.

"When a new heifer comes in, she gets a white ear tag or a yellow ear tag, and she spends the rest of her life in that herd," Boersma says. "The milk is kept completely separate."

That operation allows them to experiment with different programs and feeding rations to compare herd performances, he says.

He chose rotary milking par-

lors, which one of his workers christened the "dairy-go-round," because of their efficiency and the ease with which he thought workers could learn the routine, he says.

The dairy has five worker stations, each with a specific job description for the point in the milking cycle where it is located.

Boersma says the startup of the business, right before a major down cycle in dairy, was difficult,

but it helped that it was well-capitalized from the sale of the New Mexico properties.

"I think something a lot of people miss in looking at dairy is that you have to always be anticipating next year. If you have a good year, you set something aside to handle the challenges that are sure to come up," he says.

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NewsWatch

Must 'family farm' also mean 'small'?

By P.J. GRIEKSPoor

MOST of the activists in the environmental movement would call Forget-Me-Not Farms at Cimarron a "factory farm" just because of its size: it's a two-parlor dairy operation, milking 7,000 cows and producing a half a million pounds of milk a day.

To the owners of Forget-Me-Not Farms, the Ted Boersma family, that title just doesn't fit.

"We're really a family organization," Boersma says. His daughter Naci, the third of eight daughters, works in the spacious second-story office that overlooks Milking Parlor 2. Children's toys are parked neatly in corners — but are not so neat on most days, Naci says.

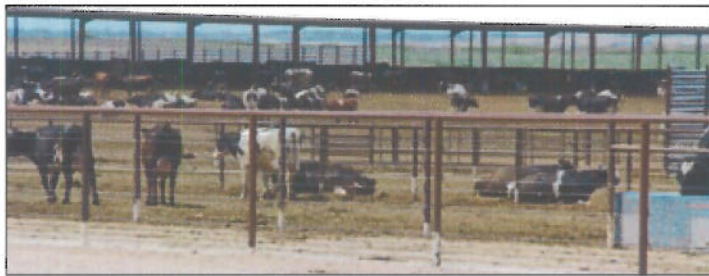
"My kids are here a lot," she says. "This is actually a day care," Boersma laughs.

Boersma says suppliers and visitors think he has the best job in the world.

"Every time they pop in this office, I'm got a grandkid on my lap," he says.

Life at Forget-Me-Not Farms is family-centered and Christian-based.

The name, Boersma explains, came from a Scripture passage in Deuteronomy, where God reminds the Israelites to remember him when they are settled in the Promised Land, their barns are full, their fields are fertile and times are good. He says it also has meaning to the family because they left behind numerous friends and family members in New



Key Points

- On surface, Forget-Me-Not Farms meets the "factory" definition.
- As with many farms, one family owns and operates Forget-Me-Not.
- They emphasize children doing what they want and trying to fit it in.

Mexico, and want to be remembered there.

Meeting worker needs

"We have an orientation for new employees that tells them about our focus, and lets them know that we are faith- and family-based," he says. "We find that also fits most of our workers."

Boersma says most of the 60 dairy workers are Hispanic immigrants with families. He says they are hardworking, committed to family and community, and fit in well in the local Kansas culture and lifestyle.

CONTENTED COWS: Two large, open shade barns and lots of open space are "home" to the cows at Forget-Me-Not Farms at Cimarron when they are not in the milking parlor.

"Most of my workers, probably more than 80%, even close to 90%, started here within 90 days of the time we opened," he says. "They are dedicated to this job, to their families and to this community."

He says he was touched by a 2010 incident, when one of his workers was very ill and faced a long time off work.

"The guys came to me and wanted to know if I could take a portion of each of their checks to make up the pay of the man who was sick," he says. "I was so touched by that, I matched whatever amount they wanted to give, so that worker's family didn't miss a check. But that's the kind of people these guys are."

The Forget-Me-Not offices are decorated with biblical wood carvings done by

Boersma's brother-in-law, an ordained minister who carves wood as a hobby.

"He brings them in with a little description of what the message is supposed to be," Boersma says. "We have them up and on display with copies of the description. When the guys are standing in line, waiting for their paychecks, they get a chance to look them over and to read. It helps reinforce the message of what we're about."

He says ideas for how to expand the business to include more family members abound. They have thought about adding a day care available to worker's families if one person wants to work in early childhood education. They have also thought of putting in a sandwich shop that features homegrown products.

"I tell the kids that we are in dairy because that's what I do, but they can do anything, be anything, they want to be. My dream is to find a way to make those dreams work out in expansions of the family business and keep everyone together."

Boersma says the biggest change from New Mexico has been getting used to the big spaces of western Kansas and small-town life.

"In Clovis, we could stand on the back porch and see the lights from five or six dairies. Here, it is far more spread out. But overall, the dairy community is pretty close-knit. You get to know the people in the industry and they get to know you. The difference is, here you don't live so close together."

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