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SPRING 2011

## Kewaunee County Dairy Industry The Economic Impact of the Dairy Farm

“Passion” and “excitement” are two words that keep coming up when talking to dairy farmers in this area. They have a lot to be passionate and excited about. The dairy farmers in Kewaunee County have embraced technology and sound business practices. As a result, their cows are among the most productive in the state and the country. In terms of the local economy, “this area is blessed to have a good mix of dairies ranging from small to large,” says Bill Koffman, DVM, Dairyland Veterinary Service, Casco. “Both sizes are needed to keep the supporting businesses strong. Dairy farms are large consumers of products, feed,

equipment, services, nutrition products, and more,” he explains. This explains why approximately one in four workers in the county is employed in agriculture or an agriculture-related business. “Kewaunee County has approximately 36,500 cows and ranks number two in the state for the level of production,” says Kristy Pagel, regional sales manager for Diamond V, which provides farmers with nutritional fermentation products. She is also vice-chair of the KCEDC Board of Directors and co-chair of the KCEDC Agriculture Committee. Pagel adds, “Dairy producers are not only committed to maximizing production while

controlling costs, but they are also extremely passionate about great cow health.” This is why it is no surprise that agriculture in Kewaunee County generates \$487 million a year in economic activity, with “Dairy” being the leading contributor.

**JUNE IS DAIRY  
MONTH**



## Thriving Community of Family Farms

Did you know -- all the dairy farms in Kewaunee County are family farms? These family farms range from as small as 30 cows to more than 4,200 cows. Kewaunee County is fortunate to have a vast range of all sized family farms.

Barry Fenendael, with his two brothers, Lonnie and Shane, own El-Na Farms LLC. The farm has been in the family since 1858. They're sixth generation dairy farmers, and their children are already looking to step in as the next generation. El-Na Farms LLC (named by combining their parents' first names) in Rio Creek started with eight cows and 80 acres. "We now milk 1,000 cows and run 2,900 acres," says

Fenendael. The biggest reason the family farm is thriving in Kewaunee County is technology. Fenendael explains, "We brought in new technology to help us become more efficient and continue to produce high quality products. The dairy has modernized with a 40-stall rotary milking parlor and free-stall barns. All this helps make the cows more comfortable, to be able to maximize their efficiency to produce more."

Cornette Dairy in Luxemburg is proof that the family farm doesn't need to be huge to be profitable. Though milking only 250 cows (small by today's standards), "we have the highest producing cows in the county," claims co-owner

Tom Cornette, "with a rolling herd average of 31,000 pounds of milk per cow each year.

"Technological advances have always been a part of dairy farming," Cornette adds. Plus, there is a positive attitude among dairy farmers in Kewaunee County. "There are a lot of progressive-minded dairymen in the county, people who are excited about the dairy business."

"Everything changes, and farmers in this area have embraced that," adds Fenendael. As a result, "we become better at what we do and produce a more efficient product. What we do is also better for the environment."

"Kewaunee County dairy farming is unique throughout the nation in terms of green technology"

Don Niles  
Dairy Dreams

## Kewaunee Dairy Industry Greenovates

"Kewaunee County dairy farming is unique throughout the nation in terms of green technology," boasts Don Niles, co-owner of Dairy Dreams, LLC, in Lincoln, which milks 2,800 cows.

"We're producing more milk than ever before," he says, "and we're doing it with fewer and fewer resources." In 1975, Kewaunee County cows produced an average of 10,000 pounds of milk per year per cow, measured by what is called a "rolling herd average." Today, says

Niles, each cow averages 25,000 pounds, a 183 percent increase. (The cows at Dairy Dreams average 29,600 pounds.) "And we're doing it with just 23 percent of the resources that were needed back in 1944. We're using 35 percent of the water we needed then."

Niles points out that cows today are generating only 24 percent of the manure they did in the past, with much of that going into bio digesters, which converts waste into electrical energy. Between the county's two

existing bio digesters, plus two more being built, "we will be digesting the manure of 9,500 cows. That's a quarter of the manure in the county," says Niles.

Today's cows are also recycling other waste products, including cottonseed. "For every four cotton t-shirts that are made, four pounds of cottonseed are produced," says Niles. What was once a waste product going into our landfills is now a viable ingredient that cows can utilize.

# The Future of Agriculture

Twenty years ago, young people didn't perceive the dairy industry as a potential career pathway. Today, that's all changed - in Kewaunee County, at least. "Our kids are interested already and love to be here and a part of what we are doing," says El-Na Farm LLC's Barry Fenendael.

One of the biggest changes that has taken place is the mindset toward the vast career options that agriculture offers, Kristy Pagel shares. More people are considering the dairy industry for their post-secondary schooling by "enrolling into tech schools, four-year and master's degrees and even PhDs. We're fortunate to have schools in Wisconsin and the Midwest that support agriculture."

"Agriculture, particularly the dairy industry is far more than simply feeding and milking cows these days. Careers which include agronomics, engineering, sales, finance, legal, equipment operation, and communications are just a few," says Pagel. "With modernization and adoption of new technologies, there is not a field today that cannot be incorporated into agriculture somehow."

Northeast WI has a strong agricultural infrastructure and the KCEDC is committed to fostering the long-term future viability. To encourage young people to enter careers in agriculture, KCEDC Agriculture Committee has begun a campaign to promote information about career options available.

"Over the last nine months," says Pagel, "committee members have spoken in all school districts within the county at their career fairs." The committee has appreciated the opportunity and looks forward to working with the districts even more in 2011.



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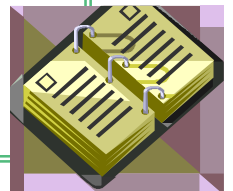
# Mark Your Calendar

**May 11th: Buy Local Workshop & Meeting/Social/Dinner** - Buy Local celebrates the return of Rick Brooks for a consumer focused workshop on May 11th at the Bank of Luxemburg at 3:30 - 5pm. Directly following the Buy Local Network will convene for cocktails (5pm – 6pm) at the Boardinghaus Pub in Luxemburg. Dinner will follow at 6pm. Cost is \$10/pp. For more info contact Jennifer Brown at [brownjk@kcedc.org](mailto:brownjk@kcedc.org) or 487-5233 or visit [buylocalkewaunecounty.org](http://buylocalkewaunecounty.org).

**June 2nd: Dairy Kickoff Breakfast** - Help kick off June is Dairy Month at the Dairy Kick Off Breakfast. Breakfast starts at 6:30am. Program begins at 7am. Guest Speaker is Don Niles. See you at CJ's in Kewaunee. Purchase tickets at the door for \$7/pp or at any Baylake Bank.

**June 6th: Luxemburg Chamber Golf Outing** - Attend the Annual Golf Outing, which benefits the Kewaunee County Buy Local Network. Registration at 10:30am. Golf at 11:30am. Dinner to follow at 5pm. Contact Stacy Bouche at 639-4689 or visit <http://luxemburgchamber.com/events/Golf-Outing/>.

**June 12th: Breakfast on the Farm** - Annual event features an area farm and “farm breakfast”. The year’s host is Casco’s Dairy Dreams, LLC. The entire family is welcome from 9am to 1pm. Adults are \$6; Children 4-12 are \$3 and 3 and under are free.



Material for this publication is written by John R. Ingrisano – Algoma-based business journalist, educator and marketing strategist. He can be reached at [john@TheFreestyleEntrepreneur.com](mailto:john@TheFreestyleEntrepreneur.com) or (920) 559-3722.

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