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Kewaunee County Farms: A Global Model

Forget the old-time, plows-and-cows image of the family-owned American dairy farm. The typical Kewaunee County farm today is a technologically advanced, sound agri-business that remains family-owned and is a model for maximizing high food production with an ever-shrinking environmental impact.

In fact, in the revolutionary world of agricultural innovation, our County's 189 dairy farms are showing the rest of the world how it's done. That's quite a claim, but the numbers back it up!

Kewaunee County ranks as the [second leading dairy county](#) between the Atlantic Ocean and the Rocky Mountains. Our 42,000 cows produce, on average, 24,300 pounds of milk per year per cow. Each cow generates about \$21,000 per year in economic activity, reports Jim Smidel, farmer and Baylake Bank business banker.

This adds up to jobs ... lots of them. Kewaunee County agriculture employs 2,600 people, providing 25 percent of the jobs in the county. That generates approximately \$500 million in revenue each year.

Even in a stagnant economy, the demand for skilled workers keeps growing. "We are starving for new people," says Andy Barta, assistant manager at the Rio Creek Feed Mill and a lifelong farmer. That is why the industry has become heavily involved in technical colleges, "to help prepare people for jobs in agriculture."



Farmers are Prime Energy Producers

In recent years, Wisconsin farmers have proactively engaged in the renewable energy business. Joe Kramer, Senior Project Manager for the [Energy Center of Wisconsin](#), reports, "Wisconsin has jumped to the forefront of implementing animal waste-to-energy systems... they turn our state's existing waste into high-value products."

Wisconsin is the home of 29 methane digesters, with four in Kewaunee County. Through the process, digesters churn and heat manure. The gases released from the manure are captured and run through a mechanical system converting it to electricity. Our county's four methane digesters produce approximately 50% of the energy used on all dairy farms, says

Kristy Pagel, Kewaunee County Economic Development Corporation board chair and regional sales manager for Diamond V, producer of nutritional fermentation products. "Renewable energy production (biogas and wind) is the third largest product produced from dairy farms behind milk and beef," adds Pagel.

Minimalizing the Environmental Impact

Today's farming is also about being a leader in recycling. "Cows are natural recyclers. They are able to consume many manmade byproducts, like cottonseed, for example, as a source of protein, fat and fiber in their daily diet, that would otherwise end up in our landfills if it wasn't recycled by cows," says Pagel.

Preserving land is a high priority too. Take the disposal of ma-

nure, for example. Spring runoff of manure used to pose a problem, says Smidel. However, the whole approach to manure management has changed dramatically and improved. "I would say that 80 to 90 percent of farms today have manure pits. This alone has decreased runoff. Plus, when we do dispose of manure, a valuable nutrient, much of it is being incorporated through use of a drag-line which directly in-

jects it into the ground. This limits the odor and reduces runoff."



Did you know: Wisconsin still makes the best cheese!

In 2013, points out Jim Smidel, Wisconsin cheeses took gold medals (first place) in 47 of the 78 categories in the annual competition hosted in Green Bay. We not only produce the best cheese, but we also produce the most. "Wisconsin is the #1 cheese producer in the nation. If we were a Country, we would rank #4 in the World in terms of pounds of cheese produced."

The Family Farm: Same but Different

Family farms and food production have evolved dramatically in recent years. On one hand, says Pagel, "The dairy farmer today still holds the same core values: Passion for what they do, strong work ethic and the ability to produce a safe, wholesome, natural product; that hasn't changed. What has changed is how these family businesses and facilities have modernized," she adds, "utilizing technology."

Farms have grown and become more efficient. The average herd size in Kewaunee County is 222 cows, explains Barta, with over 96 percent of the farms in the county still being family owned and operated.

The result is an economy of scale, with fewer farms producing more reducing the carbon footprint. "The average farmer today feeds 155 people," says Pagel. "Farmers represent less than two percent of the population required to feed the entire

world." It's projected that by 2050, the world will need 70% more food than it does today, she adds, "we will keep looking for new technology and innovation to meet the world demand."



The Barta Family

A Revolution in Technology

Farmers in our area, says Smidel, adopt and adapt to new technology quickly. For example, he explained, we can expect unmanned “drone tractors” in the very near future, guided by onboard computers and GPS tracking.

Plus, explains Barta, we are now using “variable rate fertilizers that, based on the needs of the land, are applied where they are needed most. We used to farm by the field; now we farm by the foot. Also, we can now plant different varieties of corn (up to five or six) in one field, changing on the go, based on moisture and

fertility. We are also looking at variable rate manure spreading from trucks with different types of fertilizer. The machine automatically adjusts, based on the soil needs.”

The bottom line: Dairy farming has become a global industry, with exports increasing dramatically in recent years, as people in developing countries seek better nutrition. As other countries improve their standard of living, says Smidel, this has caused a “growing demand for beef and other products. The

global economy is demanding more.” The dairy farms in Kewaunee County are leading the industry and at the same time are helping to meet the global need by doing it in an environmentally responsible way.



Check out Investors & In-Kind Contributors @ WWW.KCEDC.ORG

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Breakfast on the Farm— 2013

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Mark Your Calendar

KEWAUNEE COUNTY BREAKFAST ON THE FARM — JUNE 16, 2013

With the support and sponsorship of the [Kewaunee County Dairy Promotion Committee](#), the Kewaunee County 31st Annual Breakfast on the Farm will be held on June 16th from 8:30 am to 12:00 pm at Norman Acres located at N1235 County B, Kewaunee. Norman Acres is a fifth generation farm and has been in the Hlinak family for over 155 years. Norman Acres currently has 55 cows and farms 221 acres.

The all-you-can-eat dairy brunch menu includes a ham & cheese omelette, pizza, fresh rolls & butter, cheese samples, strawberry sundaes, yogurt samples, deep-fried cheese curds, mozzarella sticks and milk. There will be a Non-Denominational Church Service starting at 7:30 am. Entertainment throughout the day will include performances by the Sugarbush Boys Polka Band. Children's activities include horse drawn-wagon rides, petting zoo, face painting and many other fun filled games. Admissions is \$6 for adults, \$3 for children ages 4-12, and kids age 3 and under are free.



A majority of the material for this publication is written by John R. Ingrisano – Business journalist, educator and marketing strategist. He can be reached at john@jringrisano.com. This publication has been edited by Jennifer Brown with the Kewaunee County Economic Development Corporation. (920) 487-5233 or Brownjk@kcedc.org