

Winter requires preparations on the dairy farm

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

Alan and Barbara Mann of Abiqua Acres Dairy outside Silverton, Ore., live a stone's throw from their daughter Darleen Sichley, son-in-law Ben Sichley and their two young boys. The younger couple went into business with Darleen's parents last year.

They're also a short walk from the 90 registered Guernseys they milk twice a day. The young stock they raise adds 100 animals.

Working six cows at a time, each milking takes about three hours.

"We do all the milking ourselves, which is pretty rare for dairy farmers," Alan Mann said. "My wife and I and Darleen and Ben are the entire crew."

Though their day-to-day lives maintain the same rhythm, the cows' lives change with the season and that takes planning, provision — and extra work.

"Making sure the barns are ready for them is a big part of what we make time for right now," Alan Mann said. "Right now there isn't

much to eat out in the pasture, but they still get exercise and get to go out."

In winter the cows are kept in a free-stall barn where they can roam, eat, drink or lie down at will. The beds are rubber tires embedded in concrete with sawdust on top.

"It's nice and cozy for them," his daughter, Darleen Sichley, said, adding that despite there being close to 100 1,200-pound Guernseys at large in the open-air enclosure, there's plenty of room. Many cows will choose a particular bed for the duration.

The new arrangements mean all of their feed must be delivered twice daily. A nutritionist helps them re-balance the menu to account for the lack of grass.

"The biggest preparation is getting feed for the year stored," Alan Mann said. "We feed about 600 to 700 tons of cannery waste corn silage, which is in our bunker silo now and we try to get 300 to 350 tons of Eastern Oregon alfalfa hay under a roof before winter weather comes."

The cows are eating about two 1,000-pound bales of hay a day, the average cow eat-



Photos by Brenna Wiegand/For the Capital Press

Darleen Sichley, left, and her mother, Barbara Mann, of Abiqua Acres Dairy tackle the twice-daily milking detail. They and their husbands, Ben Sichley and Alan Mann, carry out all the milking themselves.

ing 100 pounds in return for about 53 pounds of milk, or about 6 gallons.

"We also increase our insurance coverage once all the feed is stored to avoid a catastrophic loss should a fire start in our hay barn," he said.

Manure handling becomes a much bigger deal when the cows are confined, and when it gets real cold they need to keep ahead of the pipes so they don't freeze.

Should the electricity go out a tractor-powered generator means the milking schedule is not disrupted.

"We really appreciate the power company when we see the amount of diesel it takes to get through just one milking," Barbara Mann said.

Once in a while weather prevents the milk truck from making it to all the farms on the route.

"We are only allowed to hold milk in our own storage tank for 48 hours, so there have been times when we have had to dump milk," Alan Mann said. "Generally our co-op covers that loss for us if it is through no fault of our own."



Darleen Sichley, left, and her father, Alan Mann, handle feeding time at Abiqua Acres Dairy. Last year Darleen and her husband, Ben, joined her parents, Barbara and Alan Mann, in the business.

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