

Farmer finds niche with organic milk at his robotic dairy

By DIANNA TROYER
For the Capital Press

Cows were not alone in their need of training at southeastern Idaho's first robotic dairy.

"It takes about three days to train 90 percent of your cows to get milked automatically, about three weeks for the reluctant cows to learn to come in to be milked, and about three months for the farmer to realize he can sleep in," says Heber Loughmiller, who opened Hillside Dairy near Connor Creek in June 2015.

The dairy's automated milking system allows his 100 cows with Holstein, Jersey and Swedish Red bloodlines to voluntarily walk into a parlor to be milked. When done, they meander back to their grassy pasture to graze.

"Production won't be as high as at a traditional dairy, about five gallons per cow a day, but that's OK," Loughmiller says. "The cows are content, we're providing a quality product, and the land isn't overgrazed and has



A robotic arm with an optical laser scanner helps locate the teats.

Dianna Troyer/For the Capital Press



Dianna Troyer/For the Capital Press

Heber Loughmiller checks the controls in the milk parlor.

healthy organic content."

He sells the organic milk to Sorrento Lactalis Inc. in Nampa, where it is made

into string cheese.

As a cow comes into a stallion, an overhead computer scanner reads its tag.

An individualized amount of alfalfa pellets is dispensed, based on the cow's condition and milk production.

While the cow is eating, a mechanical arm with water and rotating brushes gently washes the teats. Once the teats are clean, the brushes retract and a milking machine extends to the udder.

"It locates the teats with an optical laser," Loughmiller says. "Each cow takes about 5 to 7 minutes to milk."

In his office, Loughmiller logs onto his computer to read vital information about the day's milking. The software tracks nearly a dozen factors, including average milking times and fat content.

Loughmiller became interested in running an organic dairy after buying a ranch at Connor Creek eight years ago.

"We ran beef cattle but were looking for a different grazing program that would best suit the land, which is hilly and a little rocky. We have about 200 acres that can be grazed."

After doing research, he decided to start an organic dairy with cows grazing on grass pastures instead of be-

ing confined to a lot.

"Years ago, dairy cows grazed on pastures, so this really is nothing new," Loughmiller says.

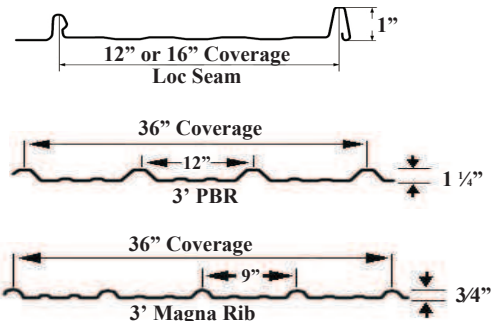
His parents, Bill and Colleen Loughmiller, invested in the dairy.

"My dad has always been an entrepreneur, so when I told him about this idea, he said it sounded crazy enough to work and told me to go for it."

Running a robotic dairy allows Loughmiller the flexibility to still sell crop insurance for Sloan-Leavitt Insurance Agency, a job he has had for several years.

"I have some great customers and want to continue serving them, which I'll be able to do with this type of dairy. It's been exciting so far. We hope one day to pass along the business to one of our kids."

Metal Roofing and Siding



SALE White Magna Rib \$1.55/LF

Quality Steel Buildings



- CHOOSE YOUR SIZE
- CUSTOMIZE YOUR DESIGN
- CALL FOR QUOTE!
- PRE-ENGINEERED STRUCTURES

www.metallionindustries.com



METALLION INDUSTRIES

HOURS:
Mon. - Fri.
8:00 - 5:30

503-630-7740

Fax 503-630-7770
850 NW Park Avenue, Estacada, OR

"LIVE EVERY DAY FOR JESUS!"

D16-1/#7

IRRIGATION EQUIPMENT

BOUGHT. SOLD. CONSIGNED.

Design of Effluent Handling Systems

- Gates, Valves & Aerators

New & Used Parts

- Aluminum Pipe • Certa-lok
- Siphon Tubes • HDPE
- Sand Media Filters
- Wheel Lines • Pumps

PACIFIC
SOUTHWEST IRRIGATION

Office: (209) 460-0450

Fax: (209) 982-1832

www.pacsouthwestirr.com

Carlos (209) 481-7677

Jim (209) 986-0099

D16-1/#18