

Farm makes move to where the feed is produced

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press

Tom DeVries grew up on his father's dairy near the little town of Orting, Wash., and he continues that legacy today.

"Dad started that farm in 1960, then helped me start my own dairy near Olympia. I

dairied in Olympia from 1984 until 2001," DeVries said.

By the late 1990s his farm and his father's farm were both getting a lot of environmental pressure.

"We set up a partnership and moved both herds here to Moxee (5 miles from Yakima)," DeVries said.

"We started building this

facility in 2000 and moved our dairy here in 2001. A few years ago I bought out my dad when he retired. We farm about 1,500 acres (1,100 leased) and grow most of our own feed — triticale, corn, wheat and hay," he said.

They also raise their own heifers.

"They stay here until they

are 3 months old, then we send them to a custom feedlot to develop them. When they are about 21 months old and confirmed pregnant, they come back and we calve them out," DeVries said.

"We have mostly Holsteins but about 20 percent of our cows are Jerseys and crosses. We bought a lot of cows to get to this size herd and ended up with some Jerseys and kept breeding them," he said. "We usually use sexed semen on those, to produce only heifers, because Jersey bull calves are not worth much."

The Jersey-Holstein cross cows have done well. They are smaller than Holsteins and eat less feed while still producing a lot of milk. Overall, they are more efficient, he said.

Hybrid vigor is helpful, and possibly adds longevity to the cows.

"We used some Swedish Reds some years back, for that reason, to gain more longevity," DeVries said.

His wife, Heather, is office manager.



Tom DeVries

DeVries Family Farm Dairy

Owner: Tom DeVries
Farming: 1,500 acres
Location: Moxee, Wash.
Dairying since: 1984
Milking: 4,300 cows

haul it over there," he said.

"About 50 to 70 percent of our income goes for feed, so if you can reduce that cost you can be more profitable. You are better off to be where the feed is, and haul your milk to the people, than to haul the feed," he explained.

There is a lot of pressure on dairies to move away from population centers.

"People don't want to live near a dairy. Dairies are moving farther and farther out from the cities," DeVries said.

"I wanted to be in the dairy business since I was a kid. It was more fun 20 years ago than it is today, however, with all the environmental rules and paperwork. The regulations and employee records make it to where I never have much chance to leave the office," he said. "A person has to be really dedicated to continue doing this, or so deep in debt that you can't get out!"

Dairying is a challenge, every day, he said, but he still enjoys the cows.

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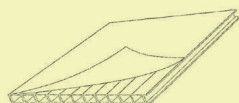
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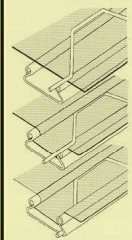
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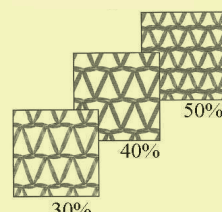
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The milk goes to Darigold, which is based in Seattle and owned by about 500 dairy farmers who are members of the Northwest Dairy Association.

"They've had a plant here in Sunnyside for about 20 years and just opened a new facility. They also have plants at Issaquah, Seattle, Chehalis and other locations. We are located on a highway and most of our milk goes to the west side of the state because they can't process all of it in the local plant," he said.

The area around Yakima is ideal for dairying, with good climate and a lot of feed grown in the region.

"This is another reason I moved from the west side of the state; there wasn't as much feed available over there. When I was at Olympia I had to buy feed here and