

# North Coast dairyman adds social media to mix

By **JULIA HOLLISTER**  
For the Capital Press

Fifth-generation California dairyman Cody Darst says his family has a joke that explains why they raise Jersey cattle.

"The joke is we raise Jerseys because when they step on your foot they are small enough that you can quickly shove them off," he said. "Jersey cattle are the preference of the family as well as tradition, knowledge of mating selection and familiarity."

The farm, on California's northern "Lost Coast" near Ferndale, was started 91 years ago at the current 120-acre location by Darst's great-great-grandfather. Through those years the family has continuously maintained a purebred Jersey herd even as it adapted to the changing markets and industry.

Nine years ago the family made the transition to certified organic, allowing them to capture a higher price point and providing financial sustainability for the family's legacy.

Many of the farm's practices continue the traditions of the region, making for a particularly easy transition to organic agriculture. In addition to the organic certification the farm maintains several other certifications, including Verified Non-GMO and Certified Humane.

"I grew up on the family dairy just as my father and grandfather did before me and worked alongside them each day in the barns," he said.

Today, the farm and herd are owned in a partnership between Darst and his parents.

The "Foggy Bottoms" herd usually consists of 120 head milking with additional young stock and dry cows. Currently they milk 105 head, due to the drought in California. Faced with escalating feed costs they made the decision to downsize the herd,

culling the lowest-producing cows and freeing up pasture land for hay.

Darst also removed 10 acres from pasture rotation and planted alfalfa. With the exception of the grain ration they were able to carry the herd through the past two winters without purchasing feed.

"The Jersey herd earns its name from the valley we live in," Darst said. "Nestled in the Eel River Valley along the coastal range, the area is colloquially known as the Foggy Bottoms" because of the fog banks that roll in off the Pacific Ocean.

He also decided to keep the name for their Facebook fan page name — "Foggy Bottoms Boys."

The dairy sells its milk to Rumiano Cheese Co. in Crescent City, Calif., where it is processed into organic cheese, butter, whey protein and dried edible lactose.

Rumiano Family products can be found in all 50 states and 10 countries.

Although he would recommend dairy farming to others, he admits there are some souring challenges.

"Certainly the growing and often suffocating regulatory

burden faced by dairy farmers in California is a monumental challenge," he said. "We have come to depend heavily upon our trade associations such as Western United Dairymen to help us navigate these waters and remain within compliance."

However, he said that is only part of a much larger issue.

"The consumer has become far removed from the food supply and with the accessibility of information (both good and bad) they have become largely misinformed," he said. "Coupling this with the fact that as an industry we have until recently been largely reactionary, we now face a public with an often poor perception of us. This seems to translate to increased regulation as people attempt to defend against what they perceive as a threat to their health and environment."

Realizing this, Darst has attempted to open up to the public through social media.

"Utilizing Instagram and Facebook, we chronicle the daily life on our dairy combining a bit of humor and fun with the realities of dairy life," he said.



Fifth-generation farmer Cody Darst raises Jersey cows on California's North Coast. He chronicles daily life on the dairy using social media.

Courtesy of Cody Darst

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