

# Cuteness reigns during tour of dairy farm

By GAIL OBERST  
For the Capital Press

It would be hard to decide which was cuter: the calves or the children.

Luckily, there was no need to choose sides during a recent school tour of Rickreall Dairy, the first of the year for tour leader Stacy Foster. Cuteness reigned among the young of both species.

Rickreall Dairy — with nearly 3,500 head one of the largest farms in Oregon — conducts tours for school children each May and fall. An increase in funding for the tours has expanded the tours to September through October.

The two dozen children who toured the plant this day ranged in age from toddlers to teens, all from Salem-area home schools. With them were a dozen adults.



Joy Foster, 10, lets a calf suck on her finger during a tour with other children at her grandparents' Rickreall Dairy.

"I grew up doing what you are about to do," Foster told the group. The oldest of four

Kazemier siblings, Foster and her parents moved 25 years ago to Rickreall, Ore., with her grandfather's herd from Chino, Calif.

When she was old enough, Foster worked in the dairy office, but quit the full-time gig when her three children were born. For the past seven years, she's been the spring dairy tour leader, thanks to support from the Oregon Dairy and

Nutrition Council, formerly known as the Oregon Dairy Products Commission, which pays for her time. The commission this year expanded support to allow her to host nearly double the visitors in the spring and in the fall. Last spring, the dairy hosted about 1,500 guests.

The tours begin with a warning for city kids: "Every building will have a differ-



Nate Kazemier, 21, son of the owners of Rickreall Dairy, snuggles with a Holstein cow in the maternity barn.

ent smell. You'll get used to it," Foster said. Further orientation included production notes: Each of the 1,700 milking cows average about 10 gallons of milk per day. Most of Rickreall Dairy's milk goes into Fred Meyer's gallon jugs via the Farmers Cooperative Creamery.

The tour begins in the calf barn — calves weigh just 85 pounds at birth. As adults, they weigh around 1,300 pounds, eating nearly 150 pounds of feed per day, Foster explains. The tags in their ears have computer chips that allow staff to track everything from health to production. The children reach into the pens quietly, and giggle as the calves attempt to suck their fingers.

In the milking parlor, children gathered at the far end of a double row of Holsteins backed up to machinery that will automatically

milk them and measure their production. A milker gives a low whistle and the cows move out, making room for the next group. Milking continues all day long, during which each cow is milked three times.

The tour is not all serious. Nate Kazemier, Foster's 21-year-old brother, grabs a swollen cow teet and sprays his sister with milk. On the way to the maternity barns, Audri Evans, 5, of Salem, shyly says she has a joke:

"Where do cows go for vacation? Moo York!" she says.

In the maternity barn, Nate delights the children by jumping the fence and cuddling with one of the cows lying in the straw.

"He thinks he's a cow," his sister notes.

Teachers and administrators who want to take a classroom tour can email Foster at dairytours@hotmail.com.

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