

Brothers start dairy of their own

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

CASTLEFORD, Idaho — After interning on their uncles' dairies in California, Jerome and Nathan Vander Poel started their own dairy.

"Our dad is a veterinarian, and our uncles milk cows, so we grew up around dairy cattle," Jerome said.

"A year ago we talked about starting a dairy in Iowa or Nebraska. Then we had a chance to look at Idaho and decided this was where we wanted to go," he said. "My brother and I are young — I am 20 and Nathan is 22 — and Idaho has a growing dairy industry. This dairy at Castleford was one of several we looked at that was for sale."

It was closed but the brothers determined that it had a lot of potential. It also needed some work on the facilities.

"Then we hand-picked cows from dairies across the U.S. to fill it



Heather Smith Thomas/For the Capital Press Brothers Jerome and Nathan Vander Poel bought a farm near Castleford, Idaho, last year and started Northern Sky Dairy from scratch.

up," Jerome said.

"We started with Holsteins, but in January started adding Jerseys because of the way the markets have grown," he said. "We like a balance, to have both breeds."

The nice part about starting from scratch was being able to select only the cows they wanted.

"Some dairies, everything is already there when you buy them, including the cows. In a way that would be easier, since we had to bring everything in and fix everything up. But every cow here is one we wanted," Jerome said.

They are milking 800 cows but plan to keep expanding.

"We wanted to start small and build up. Winters here are totally different than California, so we wanted to start with something we could manage, and test this area before we got really big," he said.

"We made it through the first winter, which everyone is telling us was the worst in 30 years, so I think we can handle it!" Jerome said. "That was the biggest test, for us."

He and Nathan plan to grow their dairy — and buy more.

"On our next dairy we hope to just buy it with everything already

there," he said. "The way we did this one, going through the whole starting process, is a lot tougher."

They have a lot of plans, he said.

"We have uncles in the dairy business and they are good mentors," Jerome said. "My brother and I have seen about 100 different dairies, run many different ways, so we were able to put our dairy together the way we wanted."

They are also familiar with animal health, from helping their father.

Theirs has been a valuable education.

"Neither of us went to college. We chose instead to have a hands-on education in the dairy. Even if you do go to college, you have to come back and learn it through experience on a dairy," he explained.

"Some things, you have to be there to learn it, and some things you learn the hard way and that's the best teacher. If you make the wrong decision you'll remember it and never do that again," he said.

Eventually they will keep a lot of heifers to help facilitate expansion plans, but it will take a little time to build up the replacement program.

The two brothers always had a partnership in mind.

"It's been a great adventure, because when we came here it wasn't like having a family dairy to start in, or to ask a family member for advice," he said.

"We had to piece everything together ourselves and learn quickly," he said.

They grew up near Modesto, Calif., and their uncles have dairies near Bakersfield.

"When we graduated from high school we migrated down to Bakersfield and started learning the dairy business — and then we ventured to Idaho," Jerome said.

The goal is to keep their cows healthy and happy.

"A happy cow is a happy life. As long as the cows are happy, we're happy!"

TRUCK SCALES • LIVESTOCK SCALES • WAREHOUSE SCALES • RENTAL SCALES

Your Truck and Livestock Scale Specialists

NEW SCALES

USED SCALES

MOBILE & STATIONARY



We are happy to announce we have acquired
Sanstrom Scales in Twin Falls, ID.
We look forward to serving their long-standing customers.

Steve Orr • 503-510-3540



Oregon

Scio
Bend

1-800-451-0187

Washington

Spokane
Benton City

509-535-4295

Idaho

Twin Falls
Nampa

1-800-451-0187

www.scalesnw.com • SteveOrr@scalesnw.com

SCALE SERVICE • SYSTEMS • PARTS • SALES & CONSTRUCTION

D17-2/#7

M.H. EBY complete line of AGRI-TRANSPORT

- Livestock
- Live Floor Bulk
- Semi Trailer
- Commodity Trailer
- Gooseneck
- Bumper



Stock Trailers built for the commercial livestock hauler and priced to compete. 76 years experience has built a heritage of innovation.

Western Oregon, Washington & No. California distributor of the

ARROW CATTLEQUIP PORTABLE LIVESTOCK HANDLING SYSTEM

Quality-built to take the stresses of being towed over pastureland and rough terrain.

Call Diamond K for details.



Diamond K Trailer Sales

Your All Service Dealer

Halsey, OR

541-740-5135 • 541-953-7548 • 541-369-2755



Stop in or visit our website diamondksales.com to view our inventory....
Goosenecks • Tilts • Dumps • Truckbeds • Enclosed Bumpers • Parts & Service

D17-1/#5