

Regulations rile California dairyman

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

SANTA ROSA, Calif. — A third-generation dairy farmer, Doug Beretta, says the best part of his day is knowing he is taking good care of his cows and helping to feed the world; the downside is complying with regulations.

“Waking up each day, walking to work outside, being your own boss and working with the cattle is the best,” he said. “When you see that 2-year-old heifer have her first calf and start to milk her, it really brings a good feeling knowing you raised and cared for her. It is a big accomplishment.”

Beretta started working on the dairy at the age of 8 and started relief milking when he was 14. Today he owns and operates Beretta Family Organic Dairy with his wife,

Sharon, two of their children and four employees.

The 350-cow operation has been certified organic for 10 years.

Beretta Dairy sells the milk as a raw product to Wal-laby Organic Yogurt in American Canyon.

“We have Holsteins, Jerseys and crossbreds,” he said. “The crossbreds are mostly Jersey-Holstein crosses, with some other breeds such as Montbeliarde and Swedish Red. The cows are about two-thirds Jersey and Jersey crossbred and about one-third Holstein.”

Beretta’s average work day is long — 10 to 12 hours. He also sits on many boards and committees that are ag-related. There are days that he puts in 10 hours, goes to a board meeting at night and gets in bed around midnight and gets up at 5:30 a.m.

He said the dairy industry is a job but it is also a way of life.

According to Beretta, the list of challenges facing California’s dairy industry is long.

“I think regulations — water quality, air quality and animal welfare — are the top of the list,” he said. “People are sitting in their offices making rules that affect all of agriculture who have never run a business, been on a farm, or understand the passion farmers have for their animals and land.”

Animal health is a particular concern for him.

“Without healthy animals and healthy farmland we



Courtesy of Doug Beretta

Doug Beretta, a third-generation dairyman from Santa Rosa, Calif., loves his work but maintains that regulations make it hard to stay in the industry.

would not have a business,” he said. “People have to understand that farm animals are cared for better than some humans, but they are not our

pets that we bring in the house every night. How many people know that have a doctor on call, a nutritionist that tells them what to eat and four to

five people watching over them? Our veterinarian is on call 24 hours a day, our nutritionist visits the farm monthly and is a picture or email away if there are any problems.”

Beretta theorizes that the challenges are some of the reasons fewer people are going into dairy than in the past.

“California has lost over 600 dairies in the last five years, maybe even more than that,” he said.

“I think the decline is due to many things. Low milk price, cost of doing business — labor cost, environmental cost and added regulations,” he said. “Other crops can be planted to make a better living without working 24/7.”



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