

Pleasant Meadow Creamery Paul and Debra Herndon broke ground on their latest milking parlor and bottling plant at Pleasant Meadow Creamery south of Sandpoint, Idaho, in 2018.



PLEASANT MEADOW CREAMERY Family's raw milk dairy grows with demand

By BRIAN WALKER
For the Capital Press

SANDPOINT, Idaho — One milking cow was all it took for Paul and Debra Herndon to start selling milk to friends.

"We had more milk than our family of four could deal with in 2011 when we started," Paul said. "We then had to add a second cow in order to meet demand from more friends."

The Herndons' Pleasant Meadow Creamery, a 60-acre, family-owned organic dairy south of Sandpoint, started humbly, but now sells raw Guernsey milk to 12 retail stores in North Idaho.

"We've grown slowly and methodically since 2013," Paul said. "We purchased a base of A2A2 Guernsey cows from Iowa, Wisconsin and Oregon and have grown by rearing offspring."

The farm is now milking up to 18 cows with a target of about 22 by summer 2022.

"We settled on Guernseys for flavor and milk quality," Paul said.

The fields are certified organic and the cows are in the final months of the transition toward the standard.

The employees milk into bucket milkers instead of a pipeline.

"It's a slower milking process, but helps assure the highest quality raw milk going out the door," Paul said.

Paul and Debra are the shareholders of the farm. Paul is the chief herdsman and makes the hay and field management decisions. Debra does bottle washing, bottling, books and general management.

Grown son Christopher is the main milking employee. The Herndons have two school-age girls who feed heifers and clean cow areas. The farm also has a part-time bottling and delivery driver.

"The business model is good, but we're working with live animals so things naturally don't always go according to plan," Paul said. "I love the cows and enjoy working with them, and we've found the family greatly benefits by doing this together."

"We are all together every day, homeschooling our kids. For the two who have reached adulthood, they are described as some of the hardest workers people have seen by folks who know them."

Paul said the family has stayed the course because customers love the milk.

"That's why we got a family cow — we wanted grass-

based organic raw milk and nobody was producing it at the time," he said.

The farm also leases 60 acres nearby for hay producing and manure spreading.

"The way we are farming, we don't really produce any odors," Paul said. "There is no manure lagoon. All waste is solid waste and is composted in the fields. Our area is still rural, so there are no encroaching subdivisions."

The milk is sold at all Super 1 Foods stores in North Idaho, Pilgrim's Market in Coeur d'Alene, Winter Ridge Natural Foods in Sandpoint and Only Local in Sagle.

Paul said the population growth in the area has posed an interesting trend.

"Every time we think we are about to maximize the market's fluid milk capacity at our price point, we find out we're not there yet," he said. "Our grocery shelves are sitting empty some days, and it is our goal to get to a point where that is not the case."

The pandemic has made receiving a few supplies more difficult, but market demand for milk has not been affected, Paul said.

"Gaining cows fast enough to meet market demand has probably been our biggest challenge," he said.



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