

People & Places

How one dairy got through dry year

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

ORLAND, Calif. — Last year was a tough one for northern California dairy farmer Martin Poldervaart, who only received 6% of his water allocation due to the ongoing drought.

Fortunately, he was able to overcome the challenges with the innovative technology and management he's adopted over the past several years.

"This year was just a challenge for water," he said.

He usually plants every available acre to winter forage, corn, sorghum/sudan-grass and alfalfa. But he found out in April water from the irrigation district was going to be sparse. He planted his usual winter forage acres but followed with just 200 acres each of alfalfa and corn.

He used the district water to keep the alfalfa alive and water from his two wells to keep the corn going.

"It's been a challenging year, to say the least," he said.

In addition to the water shortage, milk prices weren't up to par, and feed costs were high. But like most dairy producers, he figured out ways to tighten the belt and borrowed a little money.

"We were fortunate to grow a good crop the year before. But this will be a year we use up all of our inventory before the new crops come in," he said.

All the crops he grows are for the cows, mostly silage and alfalfa for dry hay. But he still has to buy feed commodities — and those took a pretty good jump in price at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021, he said.

"Farming is there to support the dairy. In some years, the dairy supports the farming," he said.

But both took a hit last year. Fortunately, he had already put practices in place to help him weather the situation.

Tillage practices

"For our area, we were really the first ones to incorporate strip till and no-till. It had its challenges, but it's worked pretty well," he said.

That saves on tillage costs



The Poldervaarts: From left, Trina, Martin, Jared and Sammie.



MTSJ Dairy

A computerized inventory system helps Martin Poldevaart track his silage and feed use.

and pre-work before planting, with savings on fuel, equipment, maintenance and time. He knocked down the number of passes in his corn fields from six to two. The turn-around between crops is quicker, it saves time and money and he doesn't need as much irrigation water.

"It definitely makes a big difference. With the cost savings, it helped out a lot," he said.

He had to work to get the same yields as conventional crops, and now they're pretty close, he said.

He's also experimented with corn, with the help of DeKalb, to find more drought-tolerant varieties. Adoption of new genetics also applies on the dairy side and helped him get a higher price for his milk and calves.

Genetics improve

"With the dairy, we've worked 10-plus years very heavily on genomics," he said.

All his animals are genetically tested, and he uses sexed semen on the better half of the herd.

"That makes a big difference in how quick the herd improves. That translates into quite a bit more milk, and higher-quality milk," he said.

In 2010, his annual milk production was 23,000 pounds per cow on a rolling herd average. Today it's 28,000 pounds, and he's increased the butterfat and protein in the milk. Higher fat and protein content translates into a larger milk check, he said.

He uses beef semen on the lower half of the herd

to get a better price when he sells those calves for the beef market.

Tracking inventories

On the feed side, he uses cloud-based software to track inventories each day. The software deducts from his inventory the amount of alfalfa, silage and commodities he's feeding each group of cows.

"Through the tracking program, we are able to keep track of all of our feed inventory and costs to make sure we are being efficient and using the ingredients to their fullest potential. There is no longer any guessing or estimating involved," he said.

He's also used drones to calculate his silage inventory.

In 2015, he installed 805



MARTIN POLDERVAART

Business: MTSJ Dairy

Location: Orland, Calif.

Age: 50

Cows: 900

Farmed acres: 270 owned, 350 leased

Crops: Triple crop winter forage, corn and sorghum/sudan, alfalfa

Practices: Conservation tillage

Irrigation: Flood, putting in a linear system

Employees: 12 full-time

Affiliations: Dairy Herd Improvement Association, FFA, 4-H

Family business: Wife, Trina, keeps the books and genetic records; son, Jared, helps with the farm and has a baling business; daughter, Sammie, is working on a master's degree in dairy nutrition and helps with cow nutrition.

solar panels to help offset high energy costs. They provide electricity for the milk barn and some pumps and wells and will have paid for themselves by 2024.

All of the practices he has incorporated helped him deal with the challenges in 2021, but he's not done yet. He's putting in a linear irrigation system to maximize the acreage and dairy wastewater and get more uniform application. He hopes to install robotics for the dairy in the next few years.

"You have to do anything you can to stay up on anything that's new," he said.

He'll keep utilizing conventional practices that work but will continue to look for practices and technology that improve efficiency, he said.

E. Oregon teen raising steer, plans to donate beef to food bank

By DICK MASON
EO Media Group

SUMMERVILLE, Ore. — The Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank is set to receive a one-of-a-kind 1,200-pound bonus thanks to the generosity of an Imbler High School senior.

Tel McBride is raising a steer for his senior project and plans to donate all of the meat from it to the Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank, which is operated by Community Connection of Northeast Oregon. McBride said he wants to make beef available to those in need because the price of meat has gotten so high during the past year.

Audrey Smith, manager of the Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank, is delighted about the prospect of receiving meat from the steer.

"Beef is our No. 1 requested item," she said.

Unfortunately, the North-



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Tel McBride with his cattle at a Summerville ranch on Jan. 17. He is donating the beef from one of the steers to Community Connection of Northeast Oregon as a part of his senior project.

east Oregon Regional Food Bank rarely can provide beef because the cost makes it prohibitive. Smith said in the five years she has been manager of the Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank, it has been able to offer beef only a couple of times.

Smith is McBride's mentor for his senior project and said she is impressed by the

steps he has taken to make sure the meat from the steer will be able to be distributed by the food bank. The Imbler senior is ensuring the meat processing company is properly certified so the meat meets government health standards for public distribution.

The steer is one of five McBride is now raising and

among about 30 he has raised altogether.

McBride started raising cattle at his family's home more than a decade ago. He stopped for a few years and then started raising cattle again in 2017. He said raising cattle is a process of perpetual discovery.

"It is fun. Everyday I learn something new about them," he said.

McBride, whose mother, Susy, works for Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, added that cattle can be unpredictable.

"They keep you guessing," he said.

McBride said when cattle make up their mind to do something they are hard to stop.

"If they want to go somewhere they will go there," he said.

McBride's interest in cattle dates back 15 years when he was visiting a ranch in North Powder run by Butch Mas-

call, who offered a free calf to him if he could lasso the animal with a rope.

"I lassoed it on my first try," he said.

McBride's family took the calf home and proceeded to help raise it. McBride went on to raise more cattle, while receiving guidance from Mascall and former La Grande Police Chief John Courtney.

McBride plans to sell off his cattle after graduating from high school so he can have a chance to attend a school in Hermiston for railroad conducting. After graduating from there he plans to pursue a career in railroads.

He will be following the lead of his father, Kevin, who works for the Union Pacific Railroad.

McBride said that he will likely return someday after high school to again raising cattle at some level because it is in his blood.

"It is something I really enjoy," he said.

CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

TUESDAY-THURSDAY FEB. 1-3

Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show: George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston, Texas. The convention will include industry speakers and educational events. Website: <http://www.ncba.org>

TUESDAY-THURSDAY FEB. 8-10

World Ag Expo: 9 a.m. International Agri-Center, 4500 S. Lasplina St., Tulare, Calif. One of the world's largest ag shows returns this year to Tulare, Calif. With hundreds of exhibitors, presentations, seminars and other events, the World Ag Expo

attracts attendees from around the nation — and the world. Website: <http://www.WorldAgExpo.org>

WEDNESDAY FEB. 9

Intro to Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) is an internationally recognized method of identifying and managing food safety-related risk. Participants will receive an International HACCP Alliance seal and certificate. Website: <https://techhelp.regfox.com/introhaccp2022>

Horse Keeping and Land Management Masterclass Series: The Tualatin and Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Alayne Blicke of Horses for Clean

Water are presenting this masterclass series. Whether you're new to horse-keeping or have years of experience, this course will help you learn ways to simplify your chores while managing your property in a way that benefits the entire ecosystem. Free workshops will be held virtually on Wednesday nights from Feb. 9 to March 16 at 6:30-7:30 p.m. Registration id required. Sign up at <https://bit.ly/3Kmq95Qd> Questions? Contact Kristina Peterson at kristina.peterson@tualatinswcd.org

WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY FEB. 9-12

Organic Seed Growers Conference: Oregon State University Campus. The Organic Seed Growers Conference is the larg-

est event focused solely on organic seed in North America, bringing together hundreds of farmers, plant breeders, researchers, certifiers, food companies, seed companies, and others from across the U.S. and around the world. Farm tours and short courses are held prior to the full two-day conference. Website: <https://seedalliance.org/>

FRIDAY-SATURDAY FEB. 18-19

Oregon State University Small Farms Conference (online): Everything you ever wanted to know about succeeding as a small-scale farmer. Website: <https://bit.ly/3lA8jx9>

THURSDAY FEB. 24

Virtual classes for pesticide applicators (online): 8 a.m.-noon. There will be virtual classes for pesticide applicators' recertification, offered by Oregon OSHA and the Oregon Farm Bureau Health & Safety Committee. The virtual training will provide continuing education credits for any pesticide applicator licensed in Oregon. Participants will receive pesticide recertification CORE credits to maintain an applicator's license. The four CORE credit hours provided are approved by the Oregon Dept. of Agriculture's "Worker Protection Standard: What You Should Know." Website: <http://www.OregonFB.org/pesticideclass>



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