

Hale Valley Holsteins: 'Tillamook was the place' for this family dairy



By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

TILLAMOOK, Ore. — Few dairy farmers have North America's 48th largest dairy processor in their backyard.

After 52 years in the dairy business, Dave Hale of Hale Valley Holsteins says that, aside from his family, situating his farm in Tillamook County, Ore., was the best move he's ever made.

Hale belongs to the Tillamook County Creamery Association, a 75-dairy cooperative headquartered in Tillamook, serving on its board of directors the past nine years.

He was in high school when his brother, a dairy farmer in Northern California, was drafted, and Dave helped cover for him, milking morning and night through his junior and senior years.

After his brother got back, Dave went to work for a heifer

replacement outfit until, a year and a half later, his own draft notice arrived. He spent all of 1969 in Vietnam and was discharged in 1970.

Hale didn't waste any time going after a dairy of his own.

"Somebody told me if I wanted a dairy, Tillamook was the place," Hale said. "I got out in May 1970, bought the dairy the end of June and was producing milk by Aug. 1."

At 22, Hale was the youngest dairy farmer in the area, which then had 440 dairies, each milking an average of 30-35 cows.

"That was right about when the new regulations started coming in," Hale said. "Everybody had to go Grade A — no more wooden barn floors or milking in cans."

Now 75 dairies dot Tillamook County, each milking about 330 head.

As Hale's dairy grew, he bought out several other farms

and now produces about 7.5 million pounds of milk a year, most all of it going into Tillamook's famous cheese.

He milks 320 cows and maintains 40 dry cows and 300 heifers and calves.

"Around here, we take great pride in our quality and the creamery rewards us with a quality premium for that good milk," he said. "That's how we make quality ice cream and quality cheese."

Being paid well helps make up for the challenges the coastal area poses to the dairy farmer, namely the rain — 90-100 inches a year requiring longer manure storage and delaying cows' pasture access.

But the coastal climate is perfect for the cows, and their crops don't lack for water.

Hale farms 450 acres, including 120 acres in silage corn; the rest is pasture.

"The last couple years we've had one of the largest crops in

the county — close to 30 tons per acre — and we don't even have to irrigate," Hale said.

At a time when burn-out runs high and some generational dairies reach an end, Hale is grateful for his good fortune.

"My sons Gary and Jason are walking in my footsteps and will take over when I retire," Hale said. "It will be a challenge for them with all the environmental and animal welfare issues, ag overtime rules and the constant documenting."

"I'm extremely proud of my kids and grandkids," Hale said. "The kids grew up in 4-H and FFA and showed cows competitively, and now my grandkids are showing cows and calves and loving it.

"It's the most enjoyable time in the summer when the grandkids come over to get their animals ready for the fair," he said. "It's the highlight of our year."

Brenna Wiegand/For the Capital Press
Ruby loves trailing her grandfather, Dave Hale of Hale Valley Holsteins, on his daily rounds. The Tillamook, Ore., dairy was started by Hale in 1970 upon his return from Vietnam.



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