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Fernandes Farms: Continues to thrive despite water challenges

By **JULIA HOLLISTER**
 For the Capital Press

TULARE, Calif. — Third generation dairy farmer Landon Fernandes knows all about dairy. He grew up on the farm, raises 3,700 heifers and milks 5,000 Holsteins and Jerseys twice daily on the family's 1,260 acres.

"My father, Joey, brother Preston and I work together operating our family's dairy operation — Fernandes Farms," he said. "Our cows are housed in corrals or free-stall barns where feed is brought to them daily. We use our land to grow forage crops that are harvested and fed to our cattle."

The family operates four separate dairy facilities: No. 1 Fernjo Farms, No. 2 Fernjo Farms, Diamond L Milk Co. and the newest, Fernridge Farms.

Two of the facilities have parallel milking parlors, one has a herringbone milking parlor and one has a parabone milking parlor.

Fernandes is on the Tulare County Farm Bureau Board of Directors and is soon to be a member of its executive committee as second vice president.

"He is a professional



Fernandes Farms

Two generations of the Fernandes family operate Fernandes Farms near Tulare, Calif. From left are Preston, Landon and Joey, their father.

young dairyman who always gives the extra effort to be an ambassador for dairy, and share insights with media and host tours," said Tricia Stever Blattler, the county Farm Bureau's executive director. "He's a strong example of the next generation of dairy producers in California that want to be progressive in their business and stewardship goals."

Although the farm's day-to-day operation runs smoothly, the biggest challenge is the drought that affects the entire dairy industry. There are about 1,200 dairy farms in California, and 99% are family-owned.

"The drought is a big issue and one that has caused

a lot of hardship for a lot of good people in this industry," Fernandes said. "The current threat of water shortages leads to more problems."

The limited surface water deliveries dairymen and farmers have received over the past three years have forced many to rely more heavily on groundwater pumping to grow crops and provide water to their cattle.

The new Sustainable Ground Water Management Act is now restricting how much water dairy farmers are allowed to pump out of the ground on their property. The limited water supply is forcing many farmers in the San Joaquin Valley to fallow farmland.

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