

# Dairy: Easterday family plans to reopen state's second-largest dairy

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Cody Easterday said the company plans to invest \$15 million in the dairy, including completion of a wastewater treatment system that was never finished under the previous owner and bringing the farm into full environmental compliance.

"It's a state-of-the-art dairy. It just needs to be finished, and it needs to have the correct management," Easterday said. "It will be a solid, environmentally sound dairy."

## First dairy

While Easterday Farms has decades of experience running ranches, farms and feedlots in Washington, this will be the family's first foray into the dairy industry.

According to its CAFO application, Easterday Farms Dairy will have up to 28,300 cattle, though not all of those will be milking cows. The dairy lists 8,000 mature dairy cows and 2,650 dairy heifers housed under roof, along with 1,700 mature dairy cows and 5,950 heifers in open confinement.

Some 10,000 cattle will also be kept in open confinement for beef production.

"We've operated CAFOs in Washington," Easterday said. "We understand it. We're good, clean operators and we know what we need to do."

In Oregon, CAFOs are jointly regulated by the state Department of Agriculture and Department of Environmental Quality. Permits must include an Animal Waste Management Plan that describes how the farm will handle large amounts of manure without contaminating groundwater or surface water.

Easterday Farms Dairy expects to generate roughly 5.4 million cubic feet of liquid manure, 5.9 million cubic feet of solid manure and 11.7 million cubic feet of processed wastewater annually. That's enough manure to fill 128 Olympic-size swimming pools.

The dairy plans to recycle all that nitrogen-rich manure by using it as fertilizer on the surrounding farmland, growing irrigated crops, such as potatoes, onions and wheat, as well as forage for cattle. Easterday said the manure will be applied at agronomic rates on 5,390 acres of cropland.

By operating in a closed-loop system, Easterday said the farm will reduce its purchases of commercial fertilizer by about 3 million pounds per year.

"We think that it's going to work really well," he said.

## Permit review

Wym Matthews, CAFO program manager at the Oregon Department of Agriculture, said there is no timeline for reviewing Easterday Farms' permit application.

Once the agencies have written a draft permit, Matthews said it will be made available for public review and a hearing. He suspects there will be a lot of interest in the Easterday Farms proposal, based on the fallout from Lost Valley.

"The site is exactly the same," Matthews said. "The concerns, at least in our minds, are no different."

The site is within the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area, designated by DEQ in 1990 for having elevated levels of groundwater nitrates that exceeded the federal safe drinking water standard. A



Capital Press Photo/George Plaven

**Cody Easterday, president of Easterday Farms, said he hopes to open Easterday Farms Dairy by fall 2020.**

coalition of environmental, animal rights and small farm advocacy groups opposed Lost Valley from the beginning, raising alarms over potential harmful impacts on air and water quality.

As the facility racked up violation after violation, the groups called for a moratorium on so-called "mega-dairies" until regulators could strengthen protections. So far, that has not happened.

In a written statement, the 13-member coalition urged Gov. Kate Brown "not to repeat the same mistakes and hope for a different outcome."

"If Governor Brown's Department of Agriculture has really learned the lesson of the Lost Valley disaster, it will not entertain another 'too big to fail' mega-dairy permit for nearly 30,000 cows on the same site," the groups wrote. "Allowing a new mega-dairy in an area with existing groundwater pollution, water scarcity and air quality issues will only exacerbate these public health, economic and environmental harms."

## Completing infrastructure

Cleanup is still under-

way at the dairy, and Easterday said it's gone smoothly. The milking parlor and barns were scrubbed down, and wastewater lagoons are gradually being emptied.

It's a far cry from photos of Lost Valley that showed cows standing ankle-deep in manure, and reports of overflowing lagoons and illegal wastewater discharge.

Lost Valley owner Gregte Velde declared bankruptcy and lost control of the dairy — as well as two other dairies he owned in California — in September 2018 for reasons that ranged from cash flow problems to alleged gambling and drug abuse. A federal trustee, Randy Sugarman, was appointed to manage Lost Valley, overseeing the sale and cleanup.

Easterday Farms was the lone bidder at auction. Cody Easterday said it is "the right place and the right facility" for a dairy.

"I think all the pieces are here," Easterday said as he toured the dairy last week with a reporter. "The initial design of the dairy is very solid."

Waste from the cows is separated into solids and liquids. Liquid manure is held

in open-air lagoons, which have the capacity to store 10.4 million cubic feet of liquid for up to 134 days during an average year. From there, it is pumped to irrigation pivots and applied on crops.

But Easterday said the system was never finished, meaning it could not reach enough land to accommodate the volume of manure the herd produced.

"Part of the issue with compliance is the waste system was not completed, and not adequate to some extent," Easterday said.

Easterday said the farm will not bring any cattle onto the dairy until all the infrastructure is completed. Similarly, solid manure will be kept on an impervious soil pad and used as fertilizer or composted for animal bedding.

Matthews, the CAFO program manager, said conditions of the dairy's permit would likely follow the same general guidelines as Lost Valley, which at the time was held up as having the most extensive monitoring of any facility in the state.

"Once the facility is built and functional, our plan for a dairy this size would be to be out there (for inspections) three or four times a year," Matthews said. Ordinarily, CAFOs are subject to an inspection every 10 months.

## Community partners

At full capacity, Easterday said the farm and dairy combined will have about 100 employees, including new hires from local communities. "We're going to be the pride of Morrow County when we're done here," Easterday said.

Don Russell, a Morrow County commissioner, said he met with Easterday ear-

lier this year and is confident the dairy can be run responsibly. He pointed to the success of Threemile Canyon Farms, located west of Boardman, as proof.

With 65,000 cattle, Threemile Canyon Farms is Oregon's largest dairy. It opened in 2002 and supplies milk to Tillamook Cheese, which runs a plant at the nearby Port of Morrow.

Russell said the businesses offer good-paying jobs, and because of their large scale they can offer benefits that smaller dairies can't — such as more regular work hours, and investing in technology such as methane digesters that reduce air emissions and create renewable energy.

Problems with Lost Valley, Russell said, boiled down to management. In the end, he said the state's regulators did what they were meant to do.

"We know it can be done right," Russell said. "I think, locally, people understand that we had a guy who had an addiction problem, and didn't do things right."

Easterday said the dairy could consider a methane digester in the future, but that is not in the immediate plans. The goal, he said, is to open Easterday Farms Dairy by fall of 2020.

As envisioned, the dairy would produce 550,000 pounds of milk a day. He said they are still looking for buyers, but are confident in the dairy market.

Easterday said the farm is prepared for the scrutiny that will inevitably come with operating the dairy, and is looking forward to the opportunity.

"We knew the environment we were going to be in," he said. "We're prepared. We think we have a great story."

# Rick: Man honors brother by winning championship buckle

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State University football team and eventually got a full-ride scholarship. By that time, he weighed 185 pounds, still small for college ball, but he wasted no time worrying about his lack of bulk. Retherford credits his father for infusing him with tenacity.

"That man convinced me I was as big and bad as anybody else," Retherford said. "He instilled in me the ability to believe in myself."

Just after transitioning from walk-on player to scholarship athlete, Retherford suffered a huge setback. A teammate found Retherford's "varmint pistol" under the front seat of his car and accidentally discharged the gun, shooting Retherford. The blast left him without the use of his right arm and with a bullet lodged in his neck.

He fought his way back to health, got back on the team and finished out his college football career as if the accident had never happened. In one game against University of Oregon, Retherford intercepted a 54-yard pass to cement the win.

The book "Rod" chronicles Retherford's extraordi-

nary life. A stack of the books sits on the counter in Retherford's saddle shop next to photos of him playing football and riding broncs.

The book, however, doesn't describe the latest chapter in Retherford's life.

With his eye on making good on his long-ago promise to Rick, Rod got back into rodeo at age 54.

"I hadn't been on a bucking horse in 25 years," he said. "I didn't practice. I just entered and got on."

He had a rough first ride. Coming out of the chute, the bronc banged Retherford's shoulder against the fence and then flung him to the dirt. He lay on the ground with a broken hand and two crushed vertebrae, before rising gingerly to his feet. The cowboy refused the offer of a re-ride, then reconsidered after his brother-in-law (who Retherford said didn't realize the seriousness of the injuries) called him a "daisy." In pain, he climbed on the next horse and rode to second place.

"I wasn't no daisy," Retherford said.

He healed and continued to ride bareback, transitioning eventually to saddle bronc, Rick's event. Last month at

age 60, Retherford entered the Buckeye Senior Rodeo in Buckeye, Arizona. The bucking horse he drew ran a short ways and veered to the left, jumping and kicking. Retherford held on tight.

"Rick was always on my mind," he said. "I just had it in my head to get this done no matter what."

Retherford prevailed. The championship buckle he won bears an extra inscription that reads, "For Rick." The new buckle replaced the old calf riding one he had worn for years to remember his brother.

On a day following the rodeo, Retherford was tooling a belt in his saddle shop when a thought came out of the blue. It had taken 45 years to fulfill his promise. It dawned on him that Rick's football number at Grant-Union High School was 45. It felt like a sign that everything had worked out just right.

Retherford still misses Rick every day.

"He was a good kid that everybody liked," he said. "He was a friend to everyone. He was a cowboy."

Contact Kathy Aney at [kaney@eastoregonian.com](mailto:kaney@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0810.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

**Benny Young, left, and Jamie Maxwell drove the final portion of the race stage to Pendleton Tuesday night. The car, a replica of the original 1909 cross-country Model T to compete in the cross-country race, is driven by a team of drivers.**

## Tour: Model T tour commemorates race

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trailers because they broke down. Several drivers also spoke in reverence of the 1909 teams. Those fellas did not have the advantage of the interstate system nor plenty of fuel stations, and traversed tough terrain in a mere two weeks.

The Model T Ford Club of America organized the anniversary adventure, thus all the cars are Model Ts. They span years of that production line, from early models to the final version in 1927, and most teams and cars are from the East Coast and Midwest.

Ryan Hauge, of Louisiana, brought his wife and their two young children on the trip. He said they love the 1926 Model T, and the design makes it plenty comfortable to drive, even for hundreds of miles a day at a mere 38 mph.

His brother and his uncle also are part of this tour, he said, but the Model T is a part of his family.

"My grandparents dated in the one they have had since 1921," he said. "I learned to drive in that car. My brother learned to drive in that car."

Likewise, John Huitt



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

**Ryan Hauge helps his son Maddox, 3, steer a 1926 Ford Model T in a parking lot. Hauge learned to drive in his grandparents' 1921 Model T and has driven them for much of his life.**

said Ford cars have been a staple of his family since he was a boy. He and his wife, Thelma Huitt, came to the tour from their home in Victoria, Australia, and they may have the only Model T on the tour with an Oregon license plate. They own three of the cars back home, he said, but bought the 1927 Model T from a family in Eugene. They said they plan to visit them after the tour.

Kim Kramer said she and Jerry got into Model Ts after a convention of the cars came through their neck of Indiana in 2008.

"They had a 1,000

Model Ts at that event," she recalled.

They caught "the bug," she said, and had to have one. She said it was not surprising the rest of the drivers felt the same way.

The group departs Wednesday morning for Yakima, and from there makes the final push. Hauge said while coming up to the end is exciting, he's also feeling a tinge of sadness.

You can follow the Ocean to Ocean Tour on the Facebook page for the Model T Ford Club of America.

# Shutdown: Lexington reopens

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the day of the meeting to remind them.

"To hell with protocol," one man retorted. "It's your actions that count."

He and others said it was part of city councilors' jobs to keep track of when they needed to be at meetings without having someone "hold their hand."

John Renfro, who served as Lexington's mayor several years ago when Kemp was on the city council, told the room that they were lucky to have her as mayor.

"I've had a taste of what you're going through, and why you'd want this job beyond me," he told Kemp. Residents of the town of

238 seemed to have gotten their frustrations out Monday, however, and on Tuesday refrained from commenting on the budget when given the opportunity.

The budget of \$737,549 passed unanimously, as did required resolutions to levy taxes in the town and accept state revenue.

After the meeting, Kemp said she was pleased to have the whole thing behind her. She had been distracted at work and kept up at night worrying about the city, she said.

"I did not want this to happen," she said, adding that leading the city was "not a game" to her.

She was grateful for Eddie Dickenson, the city's

maintenance person, for fixing a major water main that broke during the shutdown even though he had technically been laid off and was well within his legal rights to refuse to come in and work for free.

"I was not going to leave the town without water," he said.

He said he had "sat around about as long as I could" the past week and a half and was thrilled to be able to officially return to work Wednesday morning. He celebrated by doing one of the jobs that had gone undone while city hall was shut down: throwing away a dead mouse that had been caught in a trap for several days.