

HOARD'S DAIRYMAN

Hoard's Dairyman:

Sustainability award recipient shares their story

Date:

Thu, 04/12/2012

Yesterday, Holsum Dairies, LLC opened their farm to the public, sharing the many ways it's committed to environmental stewardship.

by Hoard's Dairyman staff

As a Green Tier participant, Holsum Dairies, LLC, Hilbert, Wis., has a commitment to environmental stewardship. "We are environmentally conscious and want to know the impact our practices have," noted Kirk Vander Dussen and Bob Nagel. Both individuals are herd managers on Holsum's two 3,600-cow sites. The dairies are also co-owned by Ken Buelow.

During an open house sponsored by the Wisconsin Green Building Alliance, Vander Dussen and Nagel explained the green practices their dairies have implemented to an agriculturally naïve audience. Their focus on sustainability of the community and natural environment helped them earn their place in the elite group of dairies presented sustainability awards from the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy.

"We look at our facilities from a cow's perspective – not a builders. The dairy at Elm though, was designed from an energy efficiency standpoint. It had a focus toward the environment without impacting our profitability," noted Nagel. Holsum Elm sits on 89 acres.

Four key focus areas

The farm focuses on sustainability in four areas: milk production, feed, waste management, and genetics.

He added that the dairy's manure pits weren't built to an agricultural standard but rather, the industrial standard. "Agricultural standards require six months of storage. Our pits have 14 months of storage." They also contain all runoff, ensuring that excrement can't reach groundwater. Corn silage and haylage are stored on a 6-acre concrete pad that slopes to a sump to collect leachate and debris. After collection, it is pumped to the pit.

To help the audience understand how their digesters work, they likened it to a giant concrete rumen. Anything that ends up in the pit stays in the digester for 20 days. The solids are then used to bed while the liquids are hosed onto fields and used for fertilizer.

“In addition to the environment, we have a commitment to our community,” added Vander Dussen. “We need them more than they need us.” In the community, the dairies work with 40 different farmers to meet their feed needs and dispose of manure. “We have a waiting list of people who want manure for their fields they added.” Twice a year, they also open their doors to the public, and provide manure solids for neighbors to use in their gardens.

“Sustainability is a culture we have put in place on our dairies. Our employees are trained and understand our impact on the environment and our commitment to sustainability,” added Vander Dussen.

When asked why Buelow chose the sustainability route, Vander Dussen was open about the connection between what they do and how it impacts profits. “When Green Tier was created, it was a platform that Buelow could benefit from. Sustainability and profits go hand in hand. The principles behind reduce, reuse, recycle make us money. In the end, what we are doing is good for the environment, good for our checkbook, and good for our neighbors.”