

On the Move

District 11 OYDCs Jim and Tara Good made a fresh start dairying with help from the CWT Herd Buyout Program



Five years ago, District 11 OYDCs Jim and Tara Good, along with his father Jerry, of Med-O-Bloom Farm, L.L.C., operated three separate dairies, where they housed and milked a total of nearly 600 cows. In 2004, they participated in the Cooperatives Working Together (CWT) program and had their bid accepted. After the initial shock and overwhelming decisions that need to be made, the Goods seized the opportunity to consolidate their dairy operation to just one modern facility.

“It was early winter when the cows left,” Jim says. “We wanted to prevent water lines in the barn from freezing and we also wanted to retain our current employees, so we knew we would have to get back up and running as fast as possible. Fortunately, we had a large herd of heifers and we were able to purchase a lot of milk cows right away.” Through the CWT program, only milk cows are removed from the herd, not heifers. Shortly after, the Goods were milking about 250 cows in their newest facility.

Prior to the herd buyout, the majority of the Goods’ cows were registered Red & White Holsteins, most of the cattle purchased afterward were registered and grade Black and White Holsteins. However, the majority of their heifer herd included high genetic quality Red & White dairy cattle, which has allowed them to maintain their prominence in the Red & White dairy cattle industry, preserving a part of Med-O-Bloom Farms’ history. The Goods also utilize crossbreeding in their heifer herd for calving ease.

The Goods currently lease the newer facility where they house and milk their cows, approximately 20 miles away from their original family farm. The original farm is nearly adjacent to the town of Caledonia, and can be seen from the local high school. With urban sprawl encroaching, Jim and Jerry decided to sell the family farm to a local developer.

The original farm is virtually surrounded by subdivisions, but since the housing market has slowed, the Goods are taking advantage of the opportunity to lease their old facilities from the developer, using them to house dry cows, raise heifers and calves and pasture these animals spring through fall. All of the cows freshen on the original farm and are transported to the new facility within 24 hours of calving.

“At first we had concerns about having to transport the cows shortly after they calve, but they do well,” Jim says.

Urban sprawl was just one of the factors that went into Jim and Jerry’s decision to move the milk cows to a more modern but leased facility. The pair knew major improvements would need to be made to the original farm in the way of cow comfort in order to increase milk production and lower the herd’s overall Somatic Cell Count. The owner of the new facility wanted to get out of dairying and focus on cropping, so he and Jim worked out an arrangement where the landlord puts up most of the feed and hauls most of the manure to crop ground.

“We were challenged at getting production out of the cows at our old facility,” Jim says. “Milk production went up 12-15 pounds per cow just from going to the more modern facility. We weren’t sure what to expect when we moved the cows, but knew the increase in milk production would offset the rent.”

Jim attributes the increase in production to several factors. The old facility had smaller freestalls and feed bunks were outside in a feedlot. The cows did not like going to the bunk in the heat of the summer or the chill of the winter. At the new facility, cows are housed in sand bedded, appropriately sized freestalls with alley feeding inside.

Herd health has also improved, and the herd’s cull rate has decreased from 40 percent at the old facility to 27 percent at the new farm. Foot health has improved, reproduction rates, according to Jim, are among some of the best in the industry and the herd’s SCC dropped dramatically — now consistently in the 130,000 to 150,000 range.

In the summer months, misters keep the cows cool and help reduce fluctuations in milk production due to heat stress. Misters and fans in the holding pen also help to keep the cows comfortable. “On a hot day it’s like a car wash in there — the cows are very content,” Jim says.

The majority of Jim’s time is spent with the milk cows, 20 miles away from home. As a former Michigan State University Extension Agriculture agent for Barry County, Jim has dealt with a work commute before and says that the overall herd performance increases he is seeing at the newer facility easily justifies his “time on the road.”

Tara is in charge of the farm’s accounting, record keeping and herd records, something she enjoys doing. The Goods track their financial progress through spreadsheets Tara generates on a monthly basis, focusing on profitability.

“I’d rather be out working with the animals than sitting in front of a computer,” Tara says. “But I do like to work with numbers.” Tara, who formerly worked in an animal reproduction lab at MSU, recently took over supervision of the farm’s calf raising program, giving her the chance to have more interaction with the animals.

~ Med-O-Bloom Farm ~



Jim and Tara Good with their children: Meghan, 9 and Shannon, 6

One Thing that Makes a Difference on Our Farm is...

our attention to details in every aspect of our operation. Being well informed enables us to set goals and plan for the future.

~ MMPA Members of ~
District 11
Grand Rapids Local

~ Herd size ~
430 milking and dry

~ Replacements ~
450

~ Acres Farmed ~
700

~ Milking Set-Up ~
Double-12 parallel parlor

~ Ag and Dairy Involvement ~

Through MMPA, Jim has served as a delegate, is vice-president of the Grand Rapids Local and a member of the State Resolutions Committee. He is president of the Kent and Muskegon Counties DHI and a past director of the Red and White Dairy Cattle Association.