

DAIRY

Alyza Kuipers tends to the calves at the family dairy in Tillamook, Ore. The Kuipers moved from Washington State to Tillamook just seven years ago in search of a more stable milk market.

(Kuipers family/Contributed)

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Kuipers family moved dairy from Washington to Oregon

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

After decades of dairying in Mount Vernon, Wash., the Kuipers family relocated to Oregon's Tillamook County in 2019, selling their entire operation and purchasing a turnkey dairy — cows, equipment and land included. They were driven by a desire for stability.

"Milk prices weren't good," Garrett Kuipers said of their time shipping to a struggling processor in Washington. "There were times when we went behind \$20,000 or \$30,000 a month."

In Tillamook, the difference was immediate. A stable milk price set annually by the local creamery provided something they hadn't had in years: predictability.

Still, dairying on the Oregon coast comes with its own challenges. The region experiences about 100 inches of rain annually — nearly triple what they experienced in Washington. Managing mud, timing manure application and maintaining forage quality



Cory and Charlene Kuipers, Cory's father Garrett and loyal employee Felipe Martinez are joined by third-generation members Tripp, Weston, Rylie, Alyza, Parker and Sailor. Their entire extended family came along when Garrett and Sheryl Kuipers relocated the dairy from Washington State to Tillamook, Ore., seven years ago. (Kuipers family/Contributed)

require constant attention.

"If you're getting paid for your milk, you can put up with a lot of things," he said.

Manure, often misunderstood by the pub-

lic, is central to their system.

"Manure is one of the most eco-friendly things you can be doing," he said. "If you didn't put it on, you'd get a quarter of the crop."

Today, the family milks 700 cows, evenly split between Jerseys and Holsteins. Despite the large herd, they choose to milk conventionally vs. going robotic. Upon their arrival, the Kuipers built a double-18 parallel milking parlor. They run two shifts a day, milking the entire herd in about five hours.

"Everybody gets two days off a week," Kuipers said. "Our employees like the schedule, they like the pay, and we provide housing."

The key, Kuipers said, is training everyone to do everyone else's job.

"That is the best thing we ever did," he



Father and son team Cory and Garrett Kuipers manage the family dairy in Tillamook, Ore. Kuipers Dairy milks 700 cows, evenly split between Jerseys and Holsteins, and milks conventionally vs. with robots. (Kuipers family/Contributed)

said. "It makes you feel good to know it's handled if you need to step away."

Growing their own grass and corn silage across 400 acres helps reduce feed costs — one of a dairy's biggest expenses.

Like many in agriculture, the family also faces rising wages, taxes and regulatory pressures. Changes such as agricultural overtime rules have reshaped labor management, while broader political debates around farming practices add another layer of uncertainty.

"There's a disconnect," he said. "People making the rules often don't understand agriculture."

Even so, he pushes back on common misconceptions about dairy farming, particu-

See Kuipers, Page 3

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Kuipers

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larly around animal care and environmental practices.

“These cows eat premium diets; we have a full-time nutritionist,” Kuipers said. “We keep our cows clean and comfortable and treat them like royalty.”

In an era when many small dairies are disappearing, he sees Tillamook as something of an exception — a place where farms of varying sizes can still survive.

The move also brought the family closer together. Since relocating with son Cory, all three of their other children and their families have followed, creating a multi-generational operation that includes 10 grandchildren and good odds the dairy will stay in the family.

“The boys are definitely going to be dairy farmers; it’s all they talk about,” Kuipers said. “They’ve all got their own little farms here and they’re making silage and pumping manure with their play tractors — it’s something to behold.

“The good Lord has blessed us.”



Sheryl and Garrett Kuipers on their Tillamook, Ore., dairy. Kuipers Dairy milks 700 cows, evenly split between Jerseys and Holsteins, and milks conventionally vs. with robots. (Kuipers family/Contributed)

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Idaho family dairy milks Brown Swiss, Holsteins

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press

Kim and Richard Korn have a small family dairy at Terreton near Idaho Falls, Idaho. Richard grew up on a dairy near Nampa, Idaho. He and Kim met in 4-H and FFA, and got married in 1977.

"My family had beef cattle, but dairy cows are great. When his dad retired, Richard and I moved our share of the cows to this little farm in 2004."

She and Richard built their herd to 100 cows but today milk between 65 and 70. The herd has registered Holsteins and registered Brown Swiss.

"The Brown Swiss started as our kids' FFA

projects. Our son David didn't want to go to college, so he works with us, and our daughter Becky lives in Mud Lake and manages the Stockman Supply store in Terreton. She owns half the Brown Swiss cows in our herd, and helps out whenever we need her," Kim says.

Becky and her husband have a 10-year-old son, Boden, who comes to the dairy every Friday when there's no school and every day during the summer while his mom works. He helps with many things and shows dairy heifers.

The Korn family likes the Holstein and Brown Swiss.

"The Brown Swiss have high component lev-

els in their milk, but so do our Holsteins; we've been genetically selecting for these traits and now have some Holsteins that are right up there with the Brown Swiss and close to some Jersey cows," Kim says.

Holsteins have advantages in a dairy because they produce so much milk, but their main drawback is how big they are.

"They eat more feed!" she says.

"We don't hire any help; it's just our family. It's hard to find people who are willing to do this kind of work on a dairy," she says.

"We don't farm any ground here; we only have 18 acres, so we use it for pasture and buy our feed.



Korn family photo taken when receiving DFA award in 2019. (Korn Family/Contributed)

When we first moved here, we were one of the first farms to grow corn silage, but now there are ranchers with feedlots, growing corn silage. We don't have any trouble finding beautiful corn silage."

Farm equipment and fuel are costly; it makes more sense to buy the feed.

"Plus, if you have a bad year for crops, you can find better hay somewhere else. If you had to grow it and it got rained on it would not be dairy quality," she says.

Their cows have access to pasture.

"We are producing pasture-based milk and get a premium for it. The milk is

marketed through the Dairy Farmers of America (DFA) co-op. Right now, it goes to Blackfoot to make pasture-based cheese for Chipotle Restaurants, a nationwide chain," says Kim.

The cows go to pasture every day except during winter.

Their cows calve year-round, with a ready market for bull calves.

"Newborn dairy bull calves were not worth much in the past, but today are worth a lot, especially the beef-on-dairy crosses. People who get calves from me have been doing it for years; they know these calves are healthy. We keep the calves

for three days and they have colostrum and vaccinations. They don't get sick," she says.

Baby beef-cross calves are worth about \$1,200, but even Holstein calves are worth a lot today.

"We sold some three-day-old Holstein bull calves recently for \$950 apiece."

Holsteins do well in the feedlot, with a good carcass; they just take a little longer than beef animals to finish.

Kim serves on the Idaho Dairy Products Commission and the Dairy West board.

"Dairy West is the check-off program for Idaho, Utah, Oregon and Washington — to promote dairy, working with exports and various companies to use more dairy products. Milk is almost just a by-product now; more people are interested in cheese, yogurts, and other protein products as health foods."

In 2019 the Korn family won the Dairy Farmers of America (DFA) Mountain Area family farm of distinction award. This award recognizes dairy farmers who excel on their operations, in their community and in the dairy industry.

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Small family dairy focuses on Guernseys

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press

Keeley and Justin Ritter have a small dairy, Loleta Farms, just outside Coeur d'Alene, Idaho near the small town of Worley. When they decided to get a family milk cow, Keeley did some research on various breeds, and the Guernsey jumped to the top of her list.

The main reason was that more than 90% of Guernseys are A2/A2. Another reason she chose Guernseys is the quality of their milk and its excellent flavor.

"The color of Guernsey milk is golden. Up until the 1950s, it was the preferred table milk to drink. Guernseys were more prevalent than Holsteins," Keeley says.

Beta carotene in the milk gives it that golden tinge. Beta carotene is the precursor of vitamin A in all fresh green forages. A Guernsey doesn't break down the beta carotene (from the feed) as much, and more of it ends up in the milk.

"This is healthier for the people who drink it because it is great for eye health and vision, heart health, cognitive function, etc. Guernsey milk also has more vitamin D, calcium, and other beneficial nutrients, including three times more Omega 3 fatty acids than milk from some of the other standard breeds today," she says.

"These were some of the nutritional reasons I chose Guernseys, along with their wonderful disposition. They are also not as susceptible to milk fever as Jerseys or Holsteins, or calving difficulties."

"The one thing that needs to be improved with Guernseys is fertility. The



Ellie, Justin, Keeley, Hunter and Hudson Ritter of Loleta Farms. (Ritter family/Contributed)

DPR (daughter pregnancy rate) is not as good as it should be, so we are working hard to turn that around," Keeley says.

Guernseys tend to have long productive lives.

"Longevity is rare in most dairy cows but we continue to breed for cows that can keep milking adequately into their teens, continuing to breed and be productive," she says.

Their family dairy sells milk in 13 grocery stores in four counties in north Idaho.

"We were blessed to be able to buy most of our cows from a farmer in Galt, Calif., who was retiring. His dairy and his family's passion for Guernseys began

in the 1950s so our genetics go back a long time. His parents were from Switzerland. He is in his 70s now and was looking for people who would love his cows and appreciate all the hard work that went into making them the best," Keeley says.

One of the ways he did this was by implementing the aAa breeding program — a strategy that can help breeders improve their cows.

"It was designed by a man named Bill Weeks in 1950, with the goal of breeding the perfect cow with proper mating—finding the right bull for the right dam."

Bill Weeks was a prominent Holstein cattle breeder and inspector, and his aAa analysis is a breeding tool that analyzes the structural make-up of cows and aims to breed healthier, balanced cows with improved longevity. It focuses on areas for improvement in the cow, regardless of breed or genetic merit.

"It is one of the best ways that we can improve cows, to last better in a long productive life," says Keeley.

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Four generations are on the Leuthold Dairy

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

Leuthold Dairy in Tillamook, Ore., is in its sixth generation, with four generations on the farm today.

With so many family members passionate about the dairy and its future, communication is key.

"A lot of little things crop up when you just keep your nose to the grindstone and

don't take the time to communicate, align your priorities and make decisions as a group," Carol Marie Leuthold said, "and this is a unique time in the life of our family because we made the decision to go robotic."

Carol Marie and husband Dan Leuthold are the third generation, and from the time their grandson Bryan returned to the dairy 10-plus years ago, after working several years at Tillamook County Creamery, he



Sheryl and Garrett Kuipers are flanked by family, including loyal employees, at their Tillamook, Ore., dairy. When they relocated from Washington State, all four kids and their families joined them on the Oregon Coast. (Kuipers family/Contributed)

was enthusiastic about going robotic, but they just weren't ready to make such a leap.

However, in the ensuing years the family embarked on extensive research. Bryan toured with both the major manufacturers of dairy robots and family members visiting numerous robotic dairies, from neighboring farms to those across the country and as far away as Scotland.

"We're small; we only milk about 240 cows," Carol Marie said. "It's just not the way we've done things, but with labor the way it is and all the demands and regulations, we decided to go ahead and do it."

Dan and Carol Marie's son Todd and his son Bryan are in charge these days, and Bryan's wife Justine is indispensable with her calf-raising skills. Leuthold Dairy's Jersey and Holstein herd produces about 14,000 pounds of milk a day, all of which goes into Tillamook cheese.

They embarked on the project late last summer and were supposed to be milking by Thanksgiving, but the robots didn't arrive

until late April. Reasons include a six-week construction delay, city and county requirements and having their robots stranded in Customs for six weeks.

"We're in the midst of finishing the installation, and then the cows will need to be retrained," Leuthold said.

Four DeLaval robots, each able to accommodate 60 cows a day, will wash, feed and milk around the clock while recording comprehensive data on each cow. Statistics show cows average 2.7-3.1 visits to the robot milker a day, depending on how the farmer sets the parameters.

The system will notify Todd and Bryan day or night about any abnormalities, giving them a jump on remedying situations, such as cow health issues, that the human eye may not detect for a few days more, or equipment problems.

"It will be different," she said. "Instead of managing employees, they'll be managing robots, which will make demands that the employees didn't."



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Dairy weathers challenges of Oregon coast

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

For more than a century, dairy farming has been woven into the Martin family's identity.

Today in Tillamook, that legacy continues at Martin Dairy, owned and operated by Chad Martin and wife Fran, his sister Rhonda Silveira and their mother Gwen, with fifth- and sixth-generation family members pitching in.

Chad's great-grandfather immigrated to a small Portuguese farming community in Stratford, Calif., in 1908. In 1995, the Martins relocated to Oregon's North Coast, drawn by farmer-owned Tillamook County Creamery.

"You're not going to find a better milk market than Tillamook," he said.

Today, the operation milks approximately 700 Jersey cows on a 210-acre dairy. Another 800 include breeding stock in their successful breeding program begun by Chad's late father Norman.

In 2025 Martin Dairy was ranked No. 1 in the nation with a herd average JPI (Jersey Performance



Chad and Fran Martin in a rare moment of leisure on their Tillamook, Ore., dairy farm. The farm is nationally known for its extraordinarily successful breeding program. (Martin family/Contributed)

Index) of +222 on 749 cows in the Top REAP (Registration, Equity, Appraisal, Performance) Herds by Average Cow JPI and among the top 60 herds for genetic merit.

"We're not trying to make show cows," Martin said. "Our main goal is production — how much cheese we can make out of every cow."

They grow alfalfa on a 450-acre ranch in Burns.

A couple of years ago, the Martins adopted robotic milking technology.

"We didn't get that big 15% jump they said we

would," Martin said. "But production keeps going up, and we've got fewer people running around."

Even with a good market and added efficiencies, dairying in Tillamook remains expensive. Its coastal location and rugged terrain put farms off major supply routes, and they must truck in goods, driving up transportation costs. High rainfall, often exceeding 100 inches annually, adds further challenges with mud, infrastructure, and manure management.

"No matter what you do, everything just costs more

here," Martin said. "Feed, fuel and repair costs are all rising faster than milk prices."

Manure management is a constant balancing act in the wet coastal climate. While valuable as fertilizer, the volume produced requires careful storage and application planning.

"You can only store so much manure," he said. "At some point, you're either applying it to fields or dealing with overflow."

Regulatory uncertainty adds another layer of concern, including proposed measures such as Oregon Initiative Petition 28, which would significantly affect livestock operations.

Despite the challenges,

family remains central to the operation. Martin's sister manages the books, while his daughter Taryn manages calf care. Nephews help when they can, and his mother is affectionately known as "The Big Kahuna."

Martin credits his wife Fran, who was a veterinary practice manager for more than 15 years and helps wherever needed, for much of his success, including her skilled care when he contracted a serious case of COVID-19 in 2021.

"Without her, I don't think I'd even be here," Martin said.

Fran said it was horrible that he couldn't even go outside, let alone work, for over

two weeks.

"He's usually out there every day; a 12-hour day is short for him," she said. "I had to call in reinforcements."

Looking ahead, Martin is realistic about industry trends.

"I don't think there will be many dairies left here in 15 or 20 years," he said. "You can only spend so much money to keep going."

Still, his commitment is unchanged.

"I love what I do — developing the finest milk cows and providing food for people," Martin said. "However, people need to understand where that food comes from, or everything will end up being imported."






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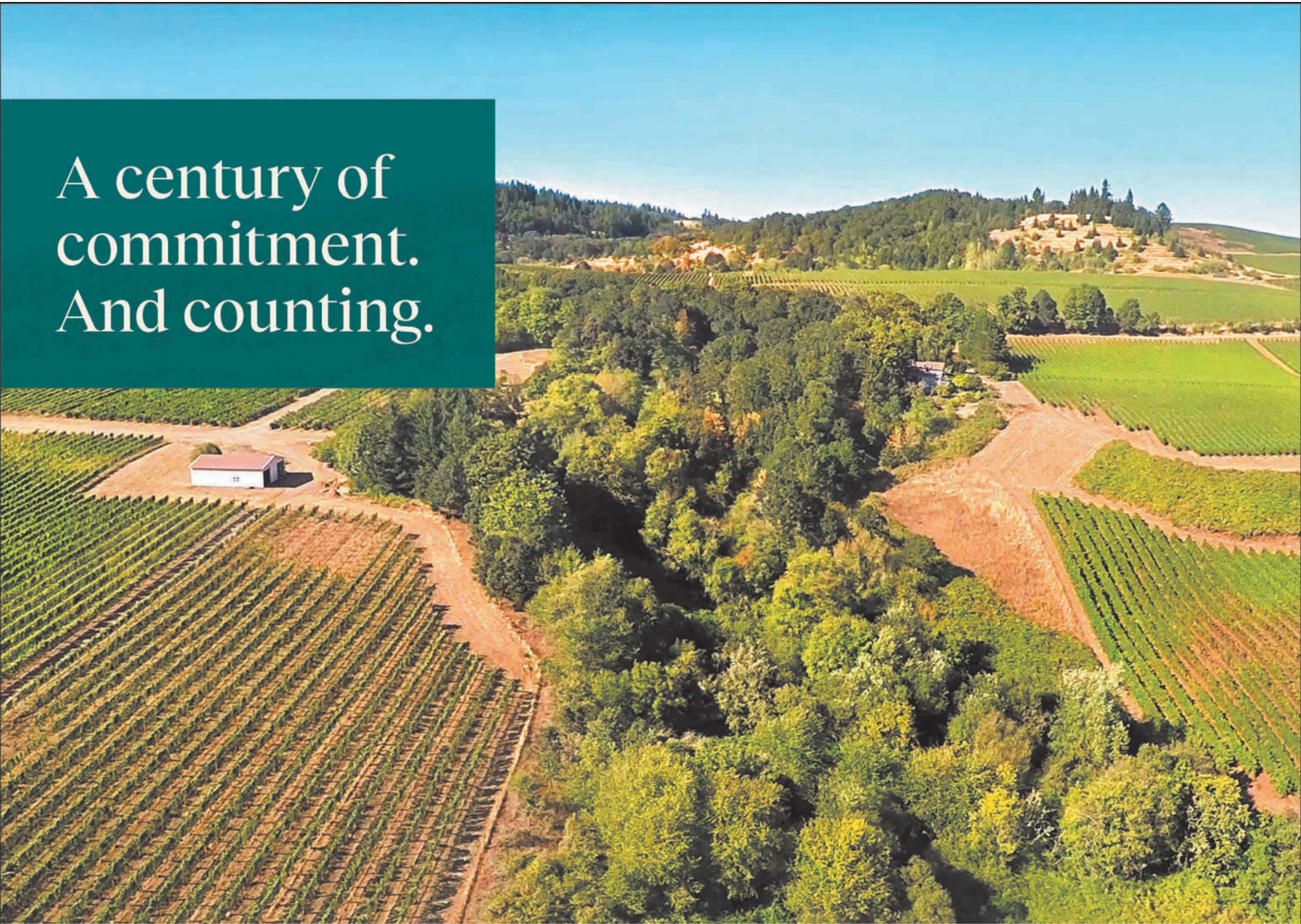
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