

*"We're rock stars of the environment!" Sarah Roy*

Norwood Centennial Farms receives all 4 MAEAP certifications on March 28, 2024.

Just eight miles south of Charlevoix on Route 31 there stands, arguably, one of the most remarkable dairy farms in the entire country: Norwood Centennial Farms, at 1498 Barnard Road. Created and run for almost 100 years by a handful of individuals springing from the same family, their names are Rolland and Mary Baumbach, Grace (Baumbach) and Harrison Warner, their son Doug Warner, and today, Doug's daughter Sarah (Warner) Roy, and her husband Jason. Sarah may properly lay claim to the "rock star" title because it is she, following in the footsteps of her father, who saved the farm through several decades of enlightened struggle. Doug himself had to overcome PPB, getting crushed by a semi and fighting off a maddened bull.

"Sarah took over the farm three years ago. "I was going to sell after 45 years," Douglas recalls, (too much paperwork), "but she took over."

That's a big job by itself and Sarah found good help near the home she occupies with Jason outside Chicago. She alternates visits home with time devoted to the farm.

Today, Sarah declares, "we use as much of the cow as we can," producing record amounts of milk, beef sticks, summer sausage, ground beef, suet wreaths, and soon to be a line of A2 Fromage cheese spreads.

Now, when you think of milk, you think of all that's involved and, especially, of the need for an impeccably clean environment: That's where the Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program comes in: MAEAP, as it is known, is an innovative program that helps farms of all kinds and sizes prevent or minimize agricultural pollution. And, for those who succeed, Norwood Centennial stands at the very top.

Participants can be recognized as top stewards of the environment; they can qualify for regulatory protections and preferred consideration for technical help. A great many farms are already there but "Norwood Centennial Farms was the first farm in the area to jump on board," Sarah says, the first farm to qualify in the Charlevoix, Cheyboygan, Otsego and Emmet region.

"As long ago as Sept. 28, 2006, we had our cropping system certified, and we were the first to receive any certification in our region." The farm has to recertify every five years. This dates to Dec. 2, 2009. "We have taken great strides to ensure that the farm reflects commitment and good stewardship of our land and water," Sarah notes.

You can't have cows and milk without growing crops, and the Cropping system reviews wherever crops are grown, it reviews risks related to pesticide, nutrient application and erosion control.

"So far," Sarah says, "3,743 farms in the State of Michigan have at least one certification. Norwood Centennial Farms has all four. Only 36 other farms in the state of Michigan have four."

So: you have the Cropping System, you have the Farmstead System, the Livestock System — involving manure storage and disposal (Oldtimers can recall ancient manure spreaders with stained siding, underneath which it read: New Idea.)

And the fourth system to be certified is the Forest, Wetland and Habitat system. Norwood Centennial Farms has forests and wetlands sufficient to qualify — “we have that system,” Sarah adds, noting that it was not easy to certify any of the systems. As seems apparent, the four systems clearly exhibit Norwood Centennial Farms and Michigan agriculture’s commitment to a safe, healthy environment.

Meanwhile, a lot has been happening at Norwood Centennial Farms, as the record shows: “We produce A2 milk,” Sarah notes, “naturally lactose free, which is easier to digest. It took 12 years of breeding the A2 gene into the herd.” Seeing a need to adjust dehorning practices based on societal opinions, Norwood Centennial Farms started breeding the “polled” gene into the herd three years ago. “Polled” means horn free. “It’s exciting to see genetics at work” Sarah declared. Several of their calves are being born polled already.

What’s next for Norwood Centennial Farms you might ask? “We like to keep people guessing, but we are willing to do whatever it takes to keep our family legacy alive in Northern Michigan.” Sarah exclaimed.

If you are interested in learning more about the farm you can visit the website, [norwoodcentennialfarms.com](http://norwoodcentennialfarms.com) or follow the farm on Facebook and Instagram.

By Larry Smith

*Larry Smith was the managing editor of Parade magazine for 20 years. He also worked for the New York Times. He is the author of several books, including The Original, which is set in Antim County. He lived on Norwood Centennial Farms as a teenager, in the 1950’s.*