



WESTERN ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCERS
ALLIANCE

July 24, 2024

A re-cap of Milk & Cookies with the Cows (and their Farmers, too!)

On July 17th, **Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (WODPA)** and the **Sonoma County Farm Bureau (SCFB)** hosted a tour in Sonoma County thanks in large to funding from the **California Cattle Council (CCC)** as well as sponsors including American AgCredit, Clover Sonoma, Straus Family Creamery, Organic West Milk, California Milk Advisory Board and Valley Ford Creamery.

WODPA and SCFB submitted a proposal to the California Cattle Council in February 2024 for an idea that resulted in *Milk & Cookies with the Cows (and their farmers, too!!)* where we invited people to participate in farm tours, lunch & cheese tasting and rounding out the day with milk and cookies on the farm.

We started the day meeting at SCFB's office where we coffee and yogurt donated by Clover Sonoma. We went around the room introducing ourselves and highlighting what we hoped we would gain from the day. Then it was on the bus destined for our first farm tour – Bianchi Dairy in Two Rock.

Immediately upon arrival, we all covered our shoes with biosecurity booties to ensure we were not spreading unwanted germs. We were greeted by Ed, an employee and friend of the owners for many years, and Susan, one of the owners. We started in the milk barn where we gazed upon a state-of-the-art design with most of the milking machine pieces underground resulting in a very quiet milking parlor and incredibly calm environment for cows to milk in. After a lengthy conversation with the group, we ventured up to the loafing barn, stopping by the calves for a chat about their welfare and the reasons for them living in their own hutches for the first couple weeks of life. We talked in depth about the ration fed to all the animals and highlighted the many different businesses that are affected by the dairy including but not limited to feed companies, semen companies, nutritionists, towel/uniform cleaning companies, etc. We finished up our tour and boarded the bus headed for lunch.

Lunch was courtesy of American AgCredit and Valley Ford Creamery complete with appetizers of delicious cheeses before indulging in locally caught albacore melts, valley ford cheese melts, and kimchi melts. We heard from local farmers, advocates and processors and had some delightful conversations before wrapping up lunch and boarding the bus for our final farm tour.

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Our tours rounded out at Berretta Dairy with Jen and her dad, Doug, tag teaming the tour. Before we could walk through the free stall barn, we were roadblocked by some very happy jersey cows on their way to get milked. Once they crossed, we were free to walk through the barn and learned about the many ways the Beretta family has worked to secure grants as well as invest themselves in improvements on their dairy. They have focused their efforts on funding projects that will improve their soil, manure management, pastures, energy usage and quality of life for their animals, among many other things. We talked extensively about their many projects over the years and dabbled in some cow pets before heading over to chat about the calves. Once we got to the calves, Jen shared with us that they are part of a study on group housing for their babies in conjunction with UC Davis. We saw multiple breeds of dairy cows and talked about the differences between them. We wrapped up that conversation just in time to break off into groups and go watch a bit of milking in their “California flat walk- through” before gathering back in the front of the dairy for some Clover milk and locally sourced cookies. Clover representatives, John and Hannah, handed out some goodie bags and we headed back to the bus destined for the SCFB office.

We wrapped up our day with raffle prizes donated by the California Milk Advisory Board, Straus Family Creamery and Organic West Milk. We recapped the day with all of those in attendance and went on our merry way.

This was an unforgettable day where we played a critical part in connecting policy makers and government officials (like the mayor of Cloverdale and a representative from First District Supervisor Gorin’s office), influencers (like #MeatDad and #thesaladlab) and professionals from local businesses like Sonoma Clean Power and Recology Sonoma Marin as well as numerous others to the people and cows that provide our food. We are so thankful to the community of Sonoma who were willing to step out of their comfort zone and come along for a day with the cows and their farmers. And we are extremely grateful to the farmers who were willing to allow us a peek into their everyday lives on their farms. Again, we want to give a big thank you to the Sonoma County Farm Bureau and California Cattle Council for working with us to make this day happen!