

McCarty Dairy - 2

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“What’s important is the fit.” That statement might apply to your suit or your shoes. It also applies to economic development. This is a story of a dairy enterprise which came to rural Kansas – in large part, because the “fit” felt right. It’s today’s Kansas Profile.

Last week we met Tom McCarty and his four sons Clay, Mike, David, and Ken, owners of McCarty Family Farms LLC in northwest Kansas. Today, in the conclusion of our two-part series on these entrepreneurial dairymen, we’ll learn about their innovative marketing agreement and care of natural resources.

The McCartys were a long-time dairy family in Pennsylvania, but when they needed room to grow in the 1990s, they relocated to rural western Kansas.

Why? Well, what’s important is the fit. In a nutshell, dairies are a good fit with the Kansas agribusiness economy. Unlike the congested areas of the east coast or California, rural Kansas has lots of livestock feed and room to grow. Rural Kansas also needs more people and more jobs.

The McCartys built their first dairy at Rexford and expanded through the years. Their next dairy was built near the rural community of Bird City, population 472 people. Now, that’s rural. Now the McCartys are operating a dairy near Scott City as well.

The three dairies produce about 59,000 gallons of milk per day. They milk about 7,200 cows – twice a day, 7 days a week. Wow.

In 2012, the McCartys announced the completion of a multi-million dollar milk processor and evaporator at the Rexford facility. In June, they signed an exclusive rights agreement to provide all of the condensed skim milk for Dannon Yogurt’s plant in Fort Worth, Texas.

In the main facility at Rexford, McCarty Family Farms has positioned itself as a “net-neutral, or a net-negative water user,” according to Ken McCarty.

“We’ve added 500 head of lactating cows,” he said. “Cows drink a lot of water, [but] we actually draw less water out of our well today than we did a year ago.” Water to the facility is filtered, purified and eventually used as drinking water. It is then drawn from the milk in the newly-built evaporator, and used in lagoons and cropland.

“The lifecycle of a gallon of water on this farm is pretty dynamic,” Ken McCarty said. “Water can be recycled anywhere from two to six times on this dairy before it eventually ends up out on the fields. We use zero commercial fertilizer on our ground and we also have enough effluent waste to spread on other farmers’ grounds, where they have to use zero commercial fertilizers. We recycle all of our sand bedding. Everything is done on these farms for economic reasons but also for sustainability reasons. We try to recycle and re-use and be as efficient as we can be.”

Tom McCarty says taking care of the land “is what we do. We take pride in taking good care of cattle; employees get a lot of training in doing everything properly. Environmentally, we’ve had a very good relationship with the [Kansas Department of Health and Environment].”

The McCartys also credit K-State Research and Extension faculty for their assistance. “K-State helped with the dairy’s overall concept and the basic ideas and

critical components,” Ken McCarty said. “We don’t have time to pour over research journals and do studies, that’s why we lean on those guys. They’ve been a phenomenal help.”

“By bringing the McCarty Dairy to northwest Kansas and creating the jobs and...increasing the enrollment in schools, that has made a huge impact for us,” said Christy Rocca, director of the Thomas County Economic Development Alliance. “This is what it’s going to take to bring people back to northwest Kansas.”

“What’s important is the fit.” Yes, that statement is true of your shoes, your suit, and the type of businesses we recruit. We commend Tom, Clay, Mike, David, and Ken and all the McCarty family for making a difference by making a new life in Kansas. Their innovative dairy production seems to be a good fit with the high plains of Kansas, and if the shoe fits, wear it.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.