

# Bird City dairy plans milking by August

## New business should help town, schools

By Karen Krien

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Huge buildings are going up along U.S. 36 two miles east of Bird City in an economic development success that could bolster both the economy of this tiny town and the future of its schools.

Work started April 1, and by the middle of August, more than a thousand cows should be living at the Bird City Dairy LLC, producing about 8,000 to 9,000 gallons of milk a day. Within months, the numbers should more than double.

Just 70 miles south in Rexford is another family dairy. Both operations are owned and operated by Tom and Judy McCarty and their sons, Clay, Ken and Mike, who will be managing the Bird City dairy.

"We plan to have the dairy up and running by Aug. 20, in time to enroll the workers' kids in school," Mike McCarty said.

Contractor Larry Wilhite said he has built several dairies, many of them in Texas. Mr. McCarty said he knows what he is doing, and when he says the dairy will be ready to go by August, it will.

The dairy will bring jobs to the county and help farmers by using 6,000 tons of alfalfa a year. It will also increase Bird City's population and help the Cheylin Schools. The entire county should benefit from the development.

Mr. McCarty said eight workers will relocate from the Rexford dairy to Bird City and another 11 will be hired. In all, he said, there should be around 20 new students entering the Bird City schools.

Cathy Domsch, director of the Century II Foundation and the main recruiter for bringing in the dairy, said one of the big objectives was to increase school enrollment. Every town needs a school, she said.

Shortly after the dairy starts milking, Mr. McCarty said, the herd will increase to 2,100 head and eventually it should grow to 3,200.

A 920-foot "free stall" building will be able to hold up to 1,000 cattle. Two holding pens will be home to others because, Mr. McCarty said, some cows seem to like it that way.

"Some cattle do better on dirt rather than cement," he said. "We don't make the cow fit our system — they are given options."

The operation will turn over about one-third of the herd each year because of health issues, milk production and reproduction, he said, but they have their own heifer replacement program.

"As we move forward, having our own replacement program gives more control and less risk for disease," he said, adding that knowing the genetics of the cattle can help improve the herd.

The milking parlor, equipped to milk 60 cows



**CREWMEN UNDER THE GUIDANCE** of Wilhite Dairy Construction work long hours to complete the 920-foot "free stall" building which will house about 1,000 cows. The dairy,

two miles east of Bird City, will be up and running by the middle of August.

— Photo by Casey McCormick/The Bird City Times

at a time, will run 24 hours a day. Two 6,400-gallon stainless steel tanks will hold milk. A special-needs building is north of the main buildings, where the McCartys will take care of their own veterinary work, a commodity barn to store corn and feed and a shop for equipment repairs and a scale.

Mr. McCarty said they want to be good neighbors, and it is important to the operation to produce little odor. Liquid manure will be managed in a three-stage gravity separation system, he said, starting with a sand separation area. From there, the waste water flows into a series of settling basins where the solids are retained. Finally, the liquid will flow into a 53-million-gallon lagoon storage area.

Mrs. Domsch said money to build the dairy came through a revolving loan fund. The foundation worked with banks in Texas and north-west Kansas to raise \$9 million.

When asked when the dairy would be paid off, Mr. McCarty said he had never known a dairy to be paid off. Some just owe less money than others. He said they will continue to invest money to make the dairy bigger and better.

Mr. McCarty and his wife Amy will move to Bird City by the first of August. They have two boys, Logan, 2, and Colton, 4.

Mr. McCarty said he and his brothers are the fourth generation dairy farmers. They came to Rexford from Pennsylvania seven years ago. He said the country and milking business there are much the same as it is in Cheyenne County, except for the increasing urban development back east.

"Cheyenne County is a great area with good people," Mr. McCarty said. "We are excited to be here."



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