

Dairy helps tiny town, school district thrive

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

A dairy built eight years ago near Rexford has made a big economic impact on the town of 160 residents, drawing new businesses and filling classrooms at the schools.

"If the dairy left here, the town would dry up," said Vic Kyle, who moved his engine repair shop from Menlo, eight miles south of Rexford, last year.

Today, he's established along side the Country Store, a convenience shop on U.S. 83 just south of Rexford. He said the dairy, owned by the Tom and Judy McCarty family, has been a tremendous asset to the community. Kyle said among his employees are the wife of one dairy worker and a daughter of another.

"People from the dairy shop here for their noon meals, essential food items and gas," Kyle said, "and their children are educated at the school here."

Tom and Judy McCarty packed up their four sons, all their belongings, and an entire dairy operation and moved from Wyalusing, Penn., to Rexford in 1999. McCarty, and sons Mike, Clay and Ken, as well as fourth son, David, who manages a dairy outside Syracuse, Kan., believe moving to Kansas was a good decision.

"We had no inkling of the impact we'd have on the school and economics of this area," Tom McCarty said. "We're working with 14 families and about 30 children."

At the dairy, 5 1/2 miles southwest of Rexford on U.S. 83, the McCarty's 16 employees generate about 13,000 gallons, or two semi-trailer loads, of milk each day. Milking 22 of 24 hours each day, the dairy operates on three shifts, which rotate each month. Mike McCarty said the rotation schedule was suggested by the employees so time with their family could vary.

Day shift leader Leonardo Ortega said he enjoys working at the dairy because, although he earned an accounting degree in Mexico, he was only able to make \$80 per week there.

"I like working here because I work every day and had no pay in Mexico," Ortega said.

Tom McCarty said while talk of Congressional changes for immigrant workers was a hot topic earlier this year, things seemed to have

settled down.

"Things are stable," he said.

McCarty attributes the success of the dairy to his sons' hard work and a crew of good employees. He said respect and determination are elements paying off for the McCarty family, now in its fourth generation in the dairy business.

"With three boys here, we definitely can do more than we are now," McCarty said. "We are in a position to have more management skills used and have the ability to expand the boys' horizons. That's our biggest goal."

Dave Williams, owner of Dave's Auto and a member of the Rexford City Council, agrees with Kyle about the dairy's economic impact on Rexford.

"It has had a very positive impact, on my business anyway," Williams said. "And as far as I'm concerned, it has had a positive impact on the community."

Williams said because the dairy is so close to Rexford, the town has become home to many of the employees' families. Rexford City Clerk Jolene Hansen said 11 houses in Rexford are rented to the McCarty family for its employees.

The Golden Plains School District has also benefited from the McCarty Dairy.

In the summer of 2000, the district employed Velma "Chachi" Ochoa as its first bilingual interpreter. Ochoa's husband, Lionel, is the dairy's foreman. Besides Ochoa, numerous staff members at Golden Plains have earned an endorsement to teach English as a Second Language.

In the 1999-'00 school year, the district had seven Hispanic students. Last year there were 19.

Board clerk Betty Barnett said Golden Plains benefits by having the children of McCarty Dairy employees attend school at the middle and high school in Rexford or the grade school in Selden. She said because the district employs teachers endorsed in English as a second language, the district not only received state aid, which in 2006-'07 was \$4,316 per student, but bilingual weighted full-time equivalency rating of 3.5 percent times the \$4,316 for an additional \$15,106 for each child. The two figures added together increased the district budget by \$97,110. Golden Plains anticipates receiving \$98,415 in state aid next year because of the 19 children of McCarty Dairy employees.

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