

# WISCONSIN STATE FARMER

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## DNR permits hog CAFO in Crawford County despite local worries

**Laura Schulte**

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

Wisconsin's pristine Driftless Area will soon be home to a new industrial farm capable of producing thousands of pigs, after the Department of Natural Resources approved its pollutant discharge permit.

The approval allows the farm to move forward with the construction of its new facility, without any requirements for monitoring water quality in the area, nor limiting the number of animals allowed to be housed on the property.

Roth Feeder Pig II, owned by Howard "AV" Roth, will produce up to 140,000 weaned piglets a year, which will then be transported to other farms to be raised for meat production. The farm will also house about 5,100 female pigs and about

See CAFO, Page 3A

### Isherwood: Cellar Potatoes

were valuable currency for Central Wis. farm families.

C5



## 'At a pinch point'

Nowhere in the U.S. has the growth of the dairy goat industry been more evident than in northeast Fond du Lac county and southern Calumet county, an area known as the "Dairy goat capital of the U.S." Securing that reputation is Chilton Dairy and Drumlin Dairy located just 7 miles apart in the town of Brotherton. Both dairies supply LaClare Family Creamery, a national leader in the goat cheese industry. COURTESY OF LACLARE FAMILY CREAMERY

## Goat milk shortage spurs merger of state's largest dairy goat farms

Colleen Kottke Wisconsin State Farmer

Two of the state's largest dairy goat herds have joined forces to keep LaClare Family Creamery supplied with fresh goat milk to bolster its cheesemaking needs. • Jim Ostrom, a partner in the premier goat cheese operation located outside the small outpost of Pipe, Wis., along Lake Winnebago's eastern shore, says the merger between Chilton Dairy and Drumlin Dairy was forged in January 2022. • "It's a true merger between three goat-related business," said Ostrom. "It was really driven by LaClare due to a goat milk supply crisis on the horizon in the U.S. (Rising) commodity prices are just consuming the goat milk cost of production."

See MILK, Page 2A

## Sharing roads safely with farm vehicles

**Dan Hansen**

Correspondent

GREENLEAF — After several months of having rural roads mostly to themselves, drivers of cars and trucks are now regularly sharing these roads with a variety of farm implements.

At nearly any time of day or evening, motorists may encounter tractors pulling large manure tankers, tillage equipment, planters and other implements of husbandry or agricultural commercial vehicles.

In order to help create an awareness of the potential hazards for farmers and motorists during these situations, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation and Brickstead Dairy, recently conducted safety demonstrations — on a portion of a rural Brown County road that was closed to other traffic — featuring typical scenarios

See ROADS, Page 3A



### The great butter & cheese fire of 1991

Over 20M lbs. of government commodities lost in Madison warehouse inferno

D4



### May is Beef Month

Time to celebrate Wisconsin's 14,000 beef farmers

D1 & D6

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# Milk

Continued from Page 1A

## Teaming up to meet demand

Over the years, LaClare has experienced steady growth in cheese sales, necessitating the need to procure more milk. Greg Hedrich, plant manager for LaClare, told the Wisconsin State Farmer in 2015 that his family's company had been "struggling to find enough milk" and many customers were being limited on the volume of product that could be supplied.

That scenario was rectified in May of 2016 when the Chilton Dairy goat farm, owned by Milk Source LLC and located just 10 miles away in neighboring Calumet County, became a major supplier of milk to LaClare. Since then, American's appetite for goat cheese – especially Chevre, a soft goat cheese – has been growing by leaps and bounds.

The runaway demand for this versatile goat cheese was the impetus behind the \$10 million expansion in 2019. The creamery, established in 1979 by Larry and Clara Hedrich, essentially doubled its operational footprint with the 28,000-square-foot addition. The expansion was made possible by a collaboration between the Hedrich family and Kaukauna-based Milk Source, bringing the resources for the creamery's expansion and future capital investment.

Today LaClare is considered a national leader in Chevre cheese production.

## Dairy goat capital

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's latest Census of Agriculture, dairy goat herds expanded faster than any other major livestock group over the past decade. Ostrom estimates the goat milk category has been increasing 12 to 15 percent annually.

Nowhere in the U.S. has that growth been more evident than in northeast Fond du Lac county and southern Calumet county, an area known as the "Dairy goat capital of the U.S." Securing that reputation is Chilton Dairy and Drumlin Dairy – located just 7 miles apart in the town of Brotherton.

Drumlin Dairy, a venture of Holsum Dairy, began its milking goat operation in March 2017. The two operations



**A milk truck loads goat milk at Chilton Dairy in southern Calumet County for delivery to LaClare Family Creamery for processing at the facility located near Pipe in northeastern Fond du Lac County.** RAY MUELLER/ WISCONSIN STATE FARMER FILE PHOTO

house over 20 percent of the state's dairy goats, according to state data compiled by WisContext.

In the past decade, when Wisconsin's dairy goat herd topped out at around 26,000 goats in 2002, that number has nearly tripled. According recent data from the USDA, Wisconsin leads the nation in its inventory of dairy goats at 74,000 head, with runner up California trailing at 39,000.

## More milk please

Ostrom says the merger with Drumlin Dairy makes sense, especially with escalating commodity prices eating deeply into profit margins. Up until now, he says the goat cheese industry has been unable to pass along enough price increases to its customers to help boost payment increases to their producers.

"It's just at a pinch point," Ostrom said, "which concerns me over the supply of goat milk."

In collaborating with Drumlin Dairy about the industry, production and animal husbandry, Ostrom says they saw a lot of synergies between the two operations and many benefits to be gained by working together.

While Ostrom visualizes LaClare as a little fledgling business trying to compete with multi-national cheese corporations with operations across the world, he says the distinction between LaClare and the industry giants is its reputation for award-winning flavor profiles and high quality cheese made using high quality, fresh milk.

"Although we're buying a lot of high quality milk from local farmers, we consider ourselves to be vertically integrated," Ostrom said. "When you're in competition with a \$40-50 billion company, you have to have some strategic advantages. They have scale and distribution but we've got integration and our quality is so much better. That differentiates us."

Big players in the industry include Montchevre (Saputo), Vermont Creamery (Land O' Lakes, Savencia and Laura Chanel).

Chilton Dairy and Drumlin Dairy also share the same genetic goals for their respective herds.

"For years we've been milking Nubian, Alpine and Saanen goats. But lately we're focusing growing our numbers of the Saanens (a Swiss breed of domestic goat)," he said. "We're trying to get our genetics out of Europe as they're generations ahead of us."

Ostrom says Kevin Wellejus, DVM serves as the general manager overseeing both farms.

"His degree in Veterinary Science is serving us very well," he said.

## More than cheese

What also separates LaClare from its competitors is the commitment held by the Hedrich family and Ostrom in sharing their agricultural heritage with the public. With that mission in mind, Ostrom helped to spearhead the agri-tourism expansion that educates visitors on

the contribution of goats to the state's dairy industry.

Upon arrival, visitors are treated to more than world-class cheese. They are immediately drawn to the goat climbing silo, a century-old wooden silo from Ostrom's mother's farm in Watertown, which sits in a courtyard flanked by a garden center featuring historical, antique industrial displays, an expanded garden center filled with hanging baskets, planters, bedding and vegetable plants, and animal displays along a crushed granite walking path.

Visitors are welcome to tour an educational center inside the creamery, and afterwards stop at the cafe for lunch. LaClare's calendar is filled with educational and family-friendly activities throughout the year.

"We have over 100,000 visitors each year and that number is growing quickly," Ostrom said. "It's really turned into a low-key, terrific place to visit."

While the merger between Chilton Dairy, Drumlin Dairy and LaClare Creamery has helped to ease the creamery's growing pains for now, Ostrom says the business expects to see continued growth in the coming years.

"We will be looking for more milk from other producers," Ostrom said, adding that the company has bumped up its pay price for producers and expects to do it again in the future. "We're excited about the growth, but we are acutely aware of the challenges that (rising) feed costs have brought to the table."



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