

MISSOURI NEWS SCENE

Heins family dairy goes user-friendly

By JERILYN JOHNSON

MOST dairy producers wouldn't dare build new facilities and expand cow numbers in times of an industry downturn. Paul Heins is the exception. In fact, the savvy dairyman found that 2009-10 has been the opportune time.

A modern building with state-of-the-art milking parlor, milk storage tanks and office, plus three 40-by-461-foot freestall buildings now sit atop a parcel of land on Heins Family Farms near Higginsville. The facilities are well-planned, with extra energy, safety and labor efficiencies built in.

"We've been through World War III in the last 18 months in the dairy industry," admits Paul Heins, general manager of Heins Family Farms. "But my family felt confident in our financial road map and opportunities."

With excess dairy replacement heifers on the market, the Heinses were able to buy heifers at lower prices from reputable producers in Missouri and nearby states last year. They began milking in the new facility last October and were milking 400 cows by spring. Their goal is 665 cows producing a semiloading of milk, or 6,000 gallons per day by year-end. The Heinses market their milk to the Dairy Farmers of America cooperative.

Their old milking facility was built around an old silo and hay barn that supported the trading of mules in World War I. "My parents bought the first 160 acres in 1951, and gradually started building dairy and hog facilities through the 1960s and '70s," Paul explains. The '80s and '90s saw more construction and remodeling for Paul and his wife, Cindy, until the facility finally became outdated, inefficient and worn out.

Their top goal was to make the new facility user-friendly for both cows and people. "If we take good care of the cows, they take good care of us. If the facility is people-friendly, the workday goes better," Paul says. The dairy presently has 10 full-time employees, and the Heinses note that attitudes are improved with a clean and organized work environment.

The dairy site was selected to ensure that it would be neighbor- and environment-friendly. Surrounded by fields of corn, soybeans and alfalfa, the site respects neighbors by offering a half-mile buffer to surrounding homes. A waste flush and lagoon system, plus a sand and manure settling area, help control odor and nutrient runoff.

Good stewardship of the environ-

Key Points

- Higginsville farm builds new dairy and expands cow numbers.
- Bargain replacement heifers were bought during the industry downturn.
- New facility goal is to be extra cow- and people-friendly.



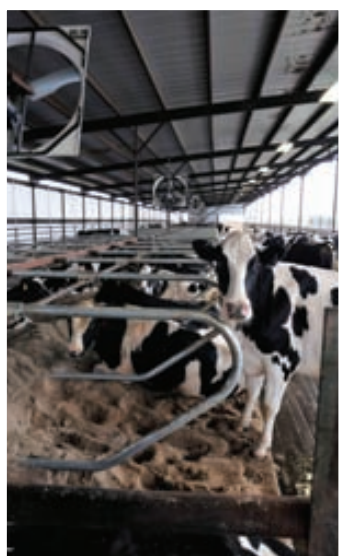
AERIAL VIEW: Heins Family Farms' new dairy facility includes the main building (far left) with its state-of-the-art milking parlor and office. To the right are three 40-by-461-foot freestall barns. Calf huts, flush tanks, grain bins and feed storage areas are located conveniently nearby.



DAIRY PRIDE: Heins Family Farms team members include (from left) Paul, general manager; Cindy, record keeper; and their children: Benji, mechanic, technology director and row-crop assistant; Sarah, part-time milker; and Chris, dairy herd manager.



100 CPH: Milking is done in the dairy's double-10 Westfalia-Surge parallel stalls. The sequencing gates position each cow in the correct spot for milking. One milker can milk 100 cows per hour in this efficient facility.



COW SPA: Each freestall barn can hold up to 200 dairy cows. After milking, the cows return to the loafing area and are fed their total mixed ration. Sand bedding is used in the stalls for the cows' comfort. Behind the cows is a grooved concrete alley that is cleaned six times a day with a flush system of recycled lagoon water.

ment is a part of the Heins family's core values, and they work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to protect their water and soil.

"The many hours of planning, engineering, inspections, and red tape while building our new dairy facility, at times, seemed overwhelming, but

NRCS staff helped us with the completion of our Environmental Quality Incentives Program projects and our Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan," Paul says.

The Heins family has earned a reputation as business people first and dairy producers second. "Paul has been

very frugal and patient as he built the dairy," says Barry Steevens, University of Missouri Extension dairy specialist. "As the new dairy facility was being planned, Paul spent a lot of time visiting other dairies and picking up ideas. He recognized there was no room for error once the cows came."