

Dairy & Livestock

Feed mill fills organic bill

By MARK MOORE

IT'S a flurry of activity at Frank's Organic Feed and Supply. Located in a feed mill that's stood at 121 West Candise St. in Jefferson since 1910, you'll find Kirsten Jurcek filling orders, checking inventory, helping customers load feed and even preparing lunch.

The business of supplying the growing number of organic producers in southeastern Wisconsin is on the rise.

"The perception of organic agricul-

Key Points

- Organic feed and supply store in Jefferson opened two years ago.
- Customer base has grown by word of mouth.
- Producers drive from near and far for organic supplies.

ture is changing," Jurcek says. "These are farmers developing a profitable niche market."

Jurcek grew up on a 290-acre farm near Jefferson, attended University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and worked for 15 years in environmental sciences. She moved back to the area and transitioned her home farm to organic production.

The only problem? "Driving more than 150 miles one-way for certified organic supplies," she says.

At about that same time, the descendants of the original owner of Frank's Feed and Supply, who still owned the building, contacted Jurcek and planted



JOE CARNES and Kirsten Jurcek opened Frank's Organic Feed and Supply in Jefferson in August 2004. The store is one of only a handful of organic supply stores in Wisconsin.

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the seed of opening a feed and supply store. In August 2004, Frank's Organic Feed and Supply opened its doors. "The only thing we changed was adding 'organic' to the sign. Frank's has been around since 1910."

The heart of the business is organic livestock feed and supplies for dairy, poultry, beef, hogs and horses. But for Jurcek and partner Joe Carnes, Frank's is much more than a storefront. It serves a vital role as a networking center for organic producers. "Take those two," says Carnes, pointing toward Mike Gehl and John Pfinder. "Until one hour ago, they had never met. Now, John's learning more about Mike's transition to organic production."

Pfinder and his father, Frank, stopped in to talk with Jurcek and Carnes about making the switch to organic. Gehl milks 40 cows north of Hartford. He transitioned to organic production in 2000 and received certification in 2002. He's been a customer of Frank's Organic ever since its doors opened. "It's a lot closer than my previous supplier," Gehl says.

Carnes, who was a dairy nutritionist for seven years, partnered with Jurcek in November 2004. But their friendship goes back much further. "We grew up about a half-mile from each other," Carnes says. "We were president and vice president of our FFA chapter."

So when Jurcek gave Carnes a call to ask him if he'd be interested in becoming a partner, Carnes was intrigued.

"Our goal is to provide on-farm services for our existing customers, and expand the base of our business by visiting more farms in the area and letting them know who we are," Carnes says.

Winter seminars

Seminars at the store address issues faced by organic producers and provide information to those interested in organic agriculture.

The existing customer base has grown by word of mouth and by the tireless work of Jurcek. "There's no one that's more passionate about organic farming," Carnes says. In fact, customers Bob and Chris Fielder learned about Frank's from Jurcek's booth at the Jefferson County Fair. "We've been customers since she opened the store," Bob explains. "We had been driving to Iowa for our seed corn."

When you walk into Frank's, you also get a feel of a feed and seed store from years past. It's a center of activity and a place to meet new people.

"It's the same situation we grew up with, socializing in a supply store," Carnes says. "And for organic producers, having this outlet for information is important."

Moore writes from Nashotah.

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