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1. Dairy Farmers of the Year: Koepkes Honored at World Dairy Expo

In Wisconsin dairy circles, the name Koepke has been synonymous with "innovative" and "cutting-edge" for decades. Koepke Farms Inc. includes brothers Alan, Jim and David Koepke; Jim's son, John; and their families. The Koepkes have been named the 2011 World Dairy Expo Dairymen of the Year.

The Koepkes milk 320 registered Holstein cows and farm 1,000 owned and rented acres a few miles north of Oconomowoc. They boast an official Dairy Herd Improvement rolling herd average of 31,563 pounds of milk, 1,168 pounds of fat and 942 pounds of protein. They have more than 100 cows with 200,000 pounds of lifetime milk production, including the famous Granny, who lived to age 20 and produced 458,609 pounds of milk, making her the world-record holder for lifetime milk production.



Koepke Farms Inc., Oconomowoc, includes from left: Alan, David and Jim Koepke, and Jim's son, John. Photo courtesy of Wisconsin Agriculturist.

Most of the Koepkes' cows are milked three times a day. One group is milked four times a day to optimize production and cow comfort. Their original double-three side-opening milking parlor built in the early 1970s was updated in 2002 with a double-10 herringbone parlor with rapid exit. A direct load to semi tankers also was installed.

Humble beginnings

Alan, Jim and David's parents, Ruth and Harvey, established the original dairy farm in 1936. Alan, the oldest, graduated in 1963 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in agricultural engineering.

"There was no room for me [on the farm] when I got home, but my parents let me farm with them," Al says. "My college adviser said coming back to the farm was the dumbest thing I could do. I spent the next 48 years proving him wrong."

Jim graduated from UW-Madison in 1967 with a degree in dairy science. By 1970, the Koepkes were farming 1,000 acres and milking 120 cows. "By this time, we were renting 500 acres of land, and we had an option to buy," Jim says.

"We did some 'what if' scenarios, and after doing a lot of calculating, the numbers stated that this extra land was not profitable. We decided to cut way back on the number of acres we were farming and boost our cow numbers," Al explains. The brothers began building the milking parlor and increased their herd size to 190 cows.

"We've done a lot of 'what if' scenarios over the years to figure out whether we're going to do something or not," Al emphasizes. "We want our numbers to give us guidance as to the best way to expand rather than having the banker tell us that what we are doing isn't working."

In 1974, the Koepkes became one of the first farms to feed a total mixed ration. A TMR allows them to minimize phosphorus in the rations, which in turn reduces phosphorus in the manure and avoids runoff.

After serving in the U.S. Air Force for four years, Dave returned home in 1975 and joined his older brothers.

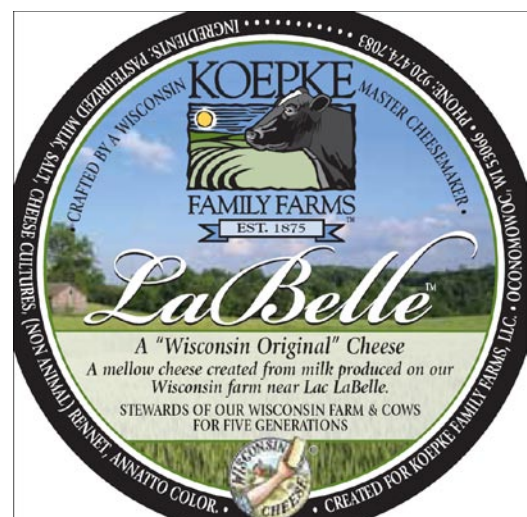
In 1985, the brothers crunched the numbers again to see if it would be more profitable to add more cows or milk three times a day. "We figured out it was more profitable to milk three times a day and add 40 more cows than to add 120 cows milked two times a day" Al says.

The Koepkes were pioneers in the no-till revolution that began in the 1980s. While serving on the Wisconsin Fertilizer Research Council, Jim saw research that documented there was no yield advantage to tillage unless it was corn after corn. They modified their corn planter and never looked back. Today, all of their land is no-tilled. They report improved soil quality, soil moisture and nutrient absorption by crops. Other conservation practices include contour strips, grass waterways, cover crops and a nutrient management plan with a seven-year crop rotation.

Next generation

In 1995, after graduating from Cornell University with a degree in animal science, Jim's son, John, joined his dad and uncles.

While the Koepkes work together to manage the farm, each has an area of expertise. John takes care of herd nutrition, feed purchasing, milk marketing and hiring, while Dave oversees herd health, cattle marketing, breeding and pedigrees. Al manages engineering and machinery maintenance. Jim handles crops, nutrient management and irrigation, while John's wife, Kim, takes care of the bookkeeping and business art design. They also have seven full-time and seven part-time employees; several have worked with the family for 20 years or more.



In 2003, the Koepkes began a research partnership with the UW Discovery Farms to collect long-term data on how no-till farming practices affect water quality and soil organic matter. "Over the years, we have partnered with both private industries and university programs to have research conducted on our farm," John explains. "The goal has always been to find knowledge that will help all farmers do a better job of caring for cows and land."

The Koepkes' latest venture is the development of La Belle cheese, an aged artisan cheese created with milk from their herd exclusively. It is handcrafted in small batches at Cedar Grove Cheese in Plain and sold at local farmers markets.

The Koepkes have won numerous awards over the years. In 1987, Al and Jim were both named Master Agriculturists by Wisconsin Agriculturist magazine. They are also involved in several organizations. John serves on the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection board of directors. Al, a founding leader of Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin, is still actively involved in the group. Dave is a director with AgSource cooperative, and Jim is a director/member-at-large with the Rock River Coalition.

The Koepkes attribute much of their success to their ability to work together and the support of their families.

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2. Westby Cooperative Creamery Breaks Ground for New Expansion

Westby Cooperative Creamery broke ground on Sept. 28 on a new distribution center and offices on Hwy. 14/61, just northwest of the namesake city of Westby, Wis. The new distribution center will total 10,000 sq. ft. feet of refrigerated warehouse space for manufactured dairy food products, while new offices will contain 6,000 sq. ft. of space for business operations. Completion is expected by January, 2012.

"This new distribution center is the result of continuous growth in our business over the past five years," said Pete Kondrup, general manager. "Our production and sales volumes have steadily increased for Westby Brand products, private label manufacturing, and food service and ingredients distribution. We are wall-to-wall within the physical confines of our current milk-receiving and dairy foods production facility on Main Street in Westby. Property and roadway limitations on Main Street, and the need for increased product manufacturing capacity, meant that a new Distribution Center was needed as a separate facility to better serve our customers."

"We explored every option, and could not make things work by adding on to our current creamery structures," continued Kondrup. "By locating finished product warehousing, customer shipments, and business offices to a new facility, we will be able to further improve production efficiencies and expand production within our Main Street plant. With growth comes jobs, and we expect to add several new positions at our production facility and new Distribution Center."

The Distribution Center will include 1,000 pallet spaces in five-high racking, said Mark Levendoski, board president.

“Our 100 year history as a cooperative of family dairy farms is rooted here in Westby. Our membership has been growing, just as our business has been growing, and together we will grow into our second century of producing the highest quality dairy food products from the milk supplied by our member-owners,” Levendoski said.

“This new distribution center is a significant capital investment in our business, and can occur now because we have built a solid financial foundation on a track record of growth,” Levendoski continued. “The location will be easily accessible for all vehicle traffic, and be highly visible within our community. We hope it will be another source of pride for our members and employees. And, the property has historically been associated with our cooperative as the Ekern family farm; former and longtime members of Westby Cooperative Creamery.”

Westby Cooperative Creamery is the only commercial producer of cottage cheeses in the state of Wisconsin, and also manufactures sour creams, dairy dips, yogurts, cream cheeses, hard cheeses, cheese curds, butter and organic dairy food products.



Photo by Dorothy Jasperson

On Sept. 28, the Board of Directors of Westby Cooperative Creamery broke ground on a new Distribution Center and Offices in Westby, Wis. Pictured left to right are: Pete Kondrup (General Manager), Loren Oldenburg (Board Vice President), Chuck Fremstad, Tom Schaub, Mark Levendoski (Board President), Kay Yanske (Board Secretary), Ralph Peterschein, and Ryan Dunnum.

3. USDA Releases New Small Scale U.S. Goat Operations Report

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently published a new report on “Small Scale U.S. Goat Operations,” offering an intriguing snapshot of the nation’s growing goat industry. In the report, small-scale goat operations were defined as operations with fewer than 500 goats. About 82 percent of all U.S. goat farms have fewer than 500 goats.

In the U.S., goats are important producers of meat, milk, fiber, and other products. However, goats are also raised or kept for a wider range of uses, such as brush control, livestock shows, packing, and as lively companions. About 4 of 10 small scale goat operations (42.4 percent) focus primarily on meat production. One of 10 operations (10 percent) focus primarily on dairy production. Only 1.5 percent of operations focus primarily on fiber production, and a surprising 46.1 percent indicate their primary production focus is “other,” i.e. goats used for brush control, pets, livestock shows, pack animals, or other uses.

An increasing interest in goat milk and goat milk products, as well as an increased interest in goat meat outside ethnic communities that traditionally consume goat milk, goat milk products, and goat meat, is encouraging for the goat industry, the report states. In addition, goat milk producers may find increased benefits by niche marketing specialized products such as low-bacterial-count milk, out-of- season milk, high protein milk and milk products, and by promoting the unique qualities of goat’s milk compared with cow’s milk.

The report states that the U.S. meat goat industry is growing rapidly, with inventories increasing from approximately 600,000 goats in 1992 to approximately 2.5 million goats in 2010. In the same period, meat goat imports increased from nearly 1,400 metric tonnes in 1990 to over 13,000 metric tonnes in 2010. The three main niche markets for goat meat in the United States are ethnic communities, health conscious consumers, and gourmet restaurants

In addition, more consumers are interested in supporting small operations and sustainable agricultural practices. Goats can be raised on smaller acreages and are easier to handle than most other livestock, making them attractive to small-scale producers.

To read the full report, visit:

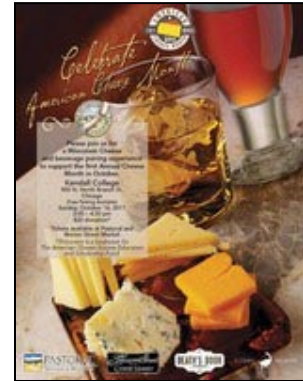
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/nahms/smallscale/downloads/Small-scale_goat.pdf



4. Upcoming Events

- **Oct. 16: Great Wisconsin Cheese and the Beverages That Love Them. Kendall College, Chicago, Illinois**

Celebrate the first ever national American Cheese Month with a Wisconsin artisan cheese and beverage pairing event from 3 to 4:30 p.m. at Kendall College, 900 N. Branch St. in Chicago. Hosted by Pastoral Artisan Cheese, Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, and Marion Street Cheese Market, festivities include a guided tasting featuring cocktails from Death's Door Spirits and Goose Island Brewery, and an array of Wisconsin artisan cheeses. Cost is \$20. Proceeds benefit the American Cheese Education Foundation. For tickets, visit <http://pastoralartisan.com/> or call 773-472-4781.



- **Oct. 21-22: Focus on Goats Conference**

Dairy goat producers, cheesemakers and industry leaders from across the nation will gather at the Annual Focus on Goats Conference Oct. 21-22 at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. The two-day conference features a wide array of speakers and educational seminars, as well as an Oct. 21 cheese tasting reception. To learn more and register visit: http://www.dbicusa.org/goats_milk.php

- **Nov. 4-5: Third Annual Wisconsin Original Cheese Festival. Madison, Wis.**

The November issue of Saveur Magazine named this event as one of its eight favorite events in the world for the month of November. You'll meet your favorite cheesemaker through more than a dozen different events, including creamery and farm tours, cheesemaker dinners, educational and tasting seminars, as well as the weekend's signature event, the Friday Night Meet the Cheesemaker Gala, where 35 Wisconsin cheesemakers gather to sample more than 150 artisan, farmstead and specialty cheeses. All tickets sold in advance. For tickets: www.wicheesefest.com.



- **Nov. 9-10-11: 6th Annual WMMB Expo. Stevens Point, Green Bay & Madison, Wis.**

If you're making or marketing Wisconsin cheese and other dairy products, you can't afford to miss the WMMB Expo, where you'll get a close-up look at the many WMMB programs to help grow your business. You'll learn how to tap into WMMB funds to support labeling, in-store demos, coupons, trade shows and advertising activities, as well as meet one-on-one with WMMB's regional marketing managers.

Find out about upcoming trade and consumer show and discover how to access detailed market information to help target your sales. Each expo begins with Registration at 9 a.m., includes a buffet lunch, and wraps up by 3:30 p.m. Dates and locations include:

- Nov.9: Ramada Stevens Point, 1501 North Point Drive, Stevens Point, Wis.
- Nov. 10: Tundra Lodge Resort, 865 Lombardi Ave., Green Bay, Wis.
- Nov. 11: Crowne Plaza, 4402 E. Washington Ave., Madison, Wis.

Register online by Friday, Oct. 14 at www.wmmb.com/expo. Questions? Contact Cathy Hart at chart@wmmb.org or Matt Mathison at mmathison@wmmb.org or call 800-373-9662.

5. The Last Word with Norm Mosen: Optimism in Agriculture



Every day we hear more doom and gloom regarding our economy, jobs, and the future. We need good news. Well, in Wisconsin there is good news. And it comes from agriculture.

Judging by the attendance at agriculture shows and events, one wouldn't guess that economic recovery is needed. It seems that every major agriculture show needs more room – for exhibitors and attendees. Two examples come from the WI Cheese Makers Association and World Dairy Expo. The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association's semi-annual International Cheese Technology Show will now be held in Milwaukee next year, as that is the only Wisconsin city with facilities that can handle the growing/exhibitor attendee list. And then last week, news articles reported that the World Dairy Expo is bursting at its seams and needs more space.

It seems to me that farmers, cheese makers, and exhibitors who participate in these shows all seem to have confidence and optimism about the future.

Two recent surveys of DBIC clients (manufacturers of cheese, butter, milk, ice cream, etc.) echo this optimism. An astonishing 100 percent of clients responding to these surveys state they are optimistic about their future in Wisconsin. Many dairy plants report that they expect to invest millions of dollars in facilities, equipment, and market development in the next five years, and hundreds of new dairy products and product lines are being considered. So we say that if those in agriculture are optimistic about the future, we think the rest of the country should be as well. The bottom line is that in Wisconsin, and in our country, agriculture drives our economy.

Which leads to a few thoughts about the people of agriculture and why we should feel reassured when they are optimistic. Farmers and those in agriculture work hard. They love their country, and they go the extra mile. In a recent speech, a high ranking federal official talked about the values of rural America. He pointed out that even though rural America makes up less than 20 percent of our population base, more than 40 percent of those serving in the armed forces come from rural America. Next time you attend a PDPW event, a dairy expo, or another meeting for agriculture, look around at those who stand up proud and strong when the gathering is preceded by either the Pledge of Allegiance or the Star Spangled banner. Take a moment to shake their hand and look them in the eye. We guarantee you will be reassured and feel a renewed level of confidence.

One last thought and wish: the annual harvest season is under way, and that means machines and farmers are working around the clock. Driving in the country at night, you will see the lights of these harvesting machines as farmers guide them through their fields under a harvest moon. In many ways, our nation depends on the harvest. For those involved in the harvest, the days are long with challenges and risk. We wish the best for a good harvest and for safety for all those involved.

The Dairy Business Innovation Center offers technical assistance to dairy producers and processors in developing value-added dairy products, business planning and market development. For more information, visit www.dbicusa.org or contact Jeanne Carpenter at 608-358-7837, email: jeanne@wordartisanllc.com.

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