

Dairy Farming Today

Dairy farming is still similar in many ways to what it was over a hundred years ago. However, it has also gone through many changes. Milking machines and different ways of transporting milk, including large insulated tanks, affected the amount of milk that a farmer could produce. Many farmers stated to use pipelines to connect the milking machine directly to a holding tank. This led to larger herds of cows on many farms.

Dairy Farming a “Great Way of Life”

Life on a dairy farm in Alberta means long days filled with hard work, but Adrian Haeni loves both the challenges and the rewards. “I can’t imagine doing anything else,” says Haeni. “I love watching things grow. That’s the beauty of farming.” Haeni, his wife Vreni and their four boys live and work together on a large farm, one hour north of Calgary. They have Jersey cattle, and also grow barley and hay. In addition, they breed Canadian horses, some of which are now being used by the Calgary Police Service.

For the Haeni’s four sons – Michael, 16, Sam, 14, Jonas, 12 and Nils, 10 – doing their daily chores on the farm has taught them many skills and life lessons. From helping with the milking, cleaning out pens, **bedding the cattle** [preparing rest areas that are packed with straw or other bedding material] and doing work in the fields, every member of the family plays an important role.

“The boys are learning a lot about responsibility,” says their father. “We’re very proud of them. They are very involved in the whole operation of our farm.” All four boys take part in the local 4-H club, which is a program for young people that focuses on science and agriculture.

A typical day for Adrian and Vreni Haeni starts at 5:30 a.m., when they head down to the barn. After school and supper, the boys pitch in and help, and the day’s work typically ends around 8 p.m. “It takes a lot of work for us farmers to make sure we are keeping up to all the **regulations** [rules for animal care and milk production],” says Haeni, “but I’m glad because it benefits all of us.”

“It would be wonderful if more children could have the chance to learn what farming is all about. It’s a great way of life.”

Adapted with permission from *Calgary Stampede Aggie Days*.
 Calgary Herald: A special information supplement, 2010: p. 9.
http://ag.calgarystampede.com/upload/media_element/78/01/aggiedays_mar14.pdf



The Haeni family live on their dairy farm north of Calgary.

Photograph courtesy of the Haeni family.

Dairy Farming in the Peace Country Has Its Challenges

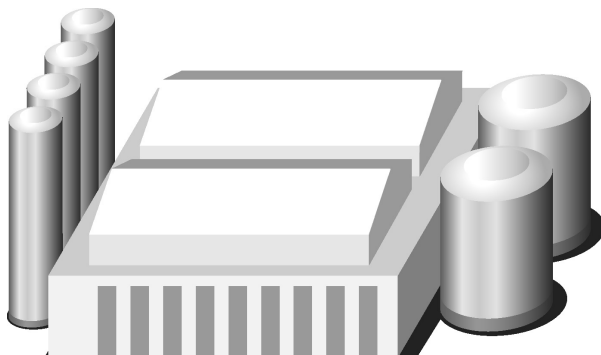
When Phillippe and Emma Lavoie came to the Peace country from a small town in Quebec in 1953 with their nine children and seven Holsteins, they couldn't know the **legacy** [traditions handed down from one period of time to another] they had started to build.

The couple had worked in the dairy industry back east and settled near the **hamlet** [small village] of St. Isidore in northwestern Alberta. Son Richard Lavoie said the family had been drawn west by an organization promoting agricultural opportunities."

The family's dairy and grain operation expanded too and by 1994, the family was seriously considering construction of a new dairy complex. "The existing site had capacity for only 200 cows per day," recalls Lavoie. "We had reached capacity."

A year later, a new 400 x 110 foot milking barn, seven kilometres from the original site, was underway. The new facility, with capacity for 500 cows a day, was completed by late 1995. "We did our first milking in the new facility in November, and were up to 250 cows per day that year," Lavoie says.

In 1999, the combination dairy and grain operation was separated, and the dairy operation is now known as *Entreprises Lavoie 1999*.



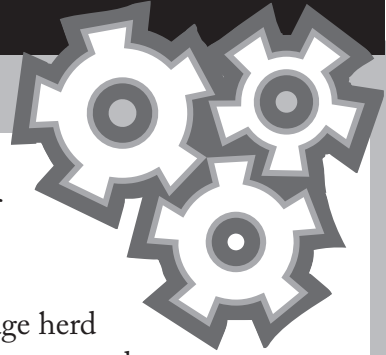
"A successful dairy producer has to maintain new technologies, such as computerized operations that include software programs to manage the herd," he says.

One of the challenges that dairy producers have is their distance to a **market**, a place where goods and services are bought and sold. "Our operation isn't close to the main area of Alberta dairy producers," says Lavoie. "We do a lot of **marketing**, or selling, of cows so if we were closer to market things would be a bit easier. But that's the way it is and we manage just fine."

On the positive side, the cost of land is an advantage in the Peace. But with the absence of irrigation systems in southern Alberta, Peace producers are much more weather dependent. "It's more of a challenge here when it's a dry year," Lavoie says. *Entreprises Lavoie* operates on a section of land and buys most of its feed. It works closely with the Lavoie grain company run by his brother.

Adapted with permission from Rebecca Dika, *Dairy Farming in the Peace Country Has Its Challenges*, September 13, 2010. AGCanada.com website at www.agcanada.com/Article.aspx?ID=25850

Using Family and Community Stories



Agriculture and dairy farming went through a number of changes from the 1960s onward. One of the biggest changes was the size of farms. This also meant that the number of family farms declined.

In 2010, Alberta had 613 dairy producers. Their farms had an average herd size of 100 cows. As of 2008, there were approximately 80 000 milk cows and dairy heifers in Alberta. Cow breeds included Holstein, Jersey, Ayrshire, Brown Swiss, and Guernsey. In 2010, these cows produced 653 million litres of milk which were transported to the 20 registered **processing plants**, or dairies, in Alberta. The dairies process raw milk into many different products.

What do these two family stories tell you about ways of life on dairy farms today?

What do you think the two biggest changes have been for dairy farming families since the late 1800s? Why do you think this?

1. _____

2. _____



Play the *Then and Now Interactive* on the *Moo2You* website at www.moo2you.ca/roots.html.

What other questions do you have about dairy farming in the past and present?
