

# DAIRY WINTER TRAVEL COURSE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

The students of the Dairy Winter Travel Course welcome you to our newsletter. Our undergrads enjoyed their travels and are excited to share their experiences and what they learned.

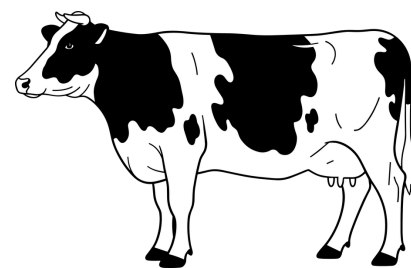


This year, the University of Connecticut had the honor of hosting the Dairy Winter Travel Course. The course was created to bring students from public universities across New England together to tour dairy farms in the region. The goal was to give students the chance to see a wide range of dairy operations and meet people working in the field.

The itinerary included everything from small family farms to large commercial operations, as well as milk processing plants and other parts of the dairy industry. In attendance this year were professors, graduate students, and undergraduates from the University of Connecticut, the University of Maine, the University of New

Hampshire, and the University of Vermont.

Students visited farms throughout Connecticut and even crossed the border into New York to experience what the dairy industry has to offer.



# DAIRY GOOD THINGS ONLY!

BY: TAHLIA WATSON

While this trip highlighted some of Connecticut's notable dairy farms and the amazing farmers behind them, it also showcased two co-ops and a farm store which sell local dairy products! Agri-Mark is a farmer owned co-op that owns the brands McCadam and Cabot. McCadam operates out of New York where they produce a variety of cheeses such as cheddar and muenster. Cabot is based out of Vermont with plants located throughout New England where they produce cheeses, butter, yogurt, and many other specialty dairy products. We toured the West Springfield plant that processes 3 million pounds of milk a day and specializes in butter and milk powder. A significant amount of milk from Connecticut farms goes to Cabot!



The Farmers Cow is a co-op of six family dairy farms in Connecticut that sells local milk and eggs across Southern New England and New York. They also operate two in-person locations in Connecticut, which offer delicious food and ice cream.



Oakridge dairy is the largest farm in Connecticut located in Ellington. Milking primarily Holsteins with some Jerseys this farm produces 25,000 gallons of milk a day. This farm has a self-serve store filled with Oakridge products while also running a home delivery service that provides local dairy products and other goods each week! This trip shined a light on how local most dairy products are and how important it is to support local brands and farms such as The Farmers Cow, Cabot, and Oakridge!

# MOOING FOR THE HOME TEAM

OLIVER PRZECH

One of the stops on our tour was a little close to home – in fact, it *was* home! Students from across New England got to tour our very own Kellogg Dairy Center here at UConn. Built in 1991 and funded by a bequest from Frances Osborne Kellogg, a woman industrialist and dairy farmer from Derby, CT, this barn houses about 85 lactating cows and a dozen calves at any given time. In 2018, the barn was remodeled and retrofitted for two DeLaval Classic robots, transitioning us into a Voluntary Milking System. This allows our cows – both Holsteins and Jerseys – to be milked however many times they want, whenever they want! This not only helps free up time for workers to focus on other tasks, it improves milk production and reduces cow stress as well. In addition to our full-time day shift workers, we also have 10 student workers, who work nights 7 days a week, 365 days a year (after all, cows don't observe holidays). They can even live in one of two dorm-style rooms in the barn! This program is perfect for helping students who want to work in the dairy industry to be prepared for life after UConn.



All of the students from this program would like to extend a big thank you to Mary Margaret Smith, Executive Program Director of Dairy and Livestock Units here at UConn, as well as all of our wonderful barn staff! Additionally, a special thank you to Dr. Safran and all of the Animal Science department employees for working so hard to make this trip a success!



Throughout this trip, UConn students were able to explore how other farms operate. One major difference was the robot system. Unlike us, many farms chose to go with a Lely Astronaut robotic milking system. By being exposed to multiple systems, students gained a better understanding for the pros and cons of each. Additionally, each farm employs a slightly different nutrition plan, tailored specifically for their herd. Getting to see such a breadth of nutrition management styles gave students a much broader picture about the way the industry operates. We were able to gain valuable insight about mastitis management, calf protocols, and the little tidbits that make each farm unique. Throughout all of these tours, one common theme showed up: though this job, this industry is difficult to be successful in, it is a truly rewarding and fulfilling way to live.

# WHAT'S NEXT?

BY LUKE LIGHTBOWN

As I approach my senior year at UConn, I find myself asking the same question many students do: What's next? It's a thought that follows people every day, shaping next steps and our futures. During the Dairy Winter Travel Course, that question shifted for me. Instead of thinking about my own next steps, I found myself wondering about the future of the dairy farmers we met.

Every farm had its own version of "what's next." With dairy prices falling and large operations becoming more common, many farmers face uncertainty. Some are working year to year or even day to day without a clear picture of what the future holds. Planning for the next generation is difficult when the industry is constantly changing.

This trip showed me that while the future of dairy farming is uncertain, the resilience, entrepreneurship, and dedication of these farmers continue to push the industry forward.

Laurelbrook Farm highlighted the strength of a fourth-generation dairy committed to long-term planning. With roughly 1,600 cows, the farm is guided by Cricket Jacquier, who emphasized the importance of building with the future in mind. He spoke about designing

barns so parts can be reused, and ensuring that opportunities empower the next generation rather than becoming burdens. Laurelbrook's approach shows how thoughtful planning can help a farm stay resilient across generations.



At Tollgate Holsteins, run by Jim Davenport, we saw the dedication behind a small family farm known for exceptional milk quality. The farm milks about 70 Holsteins and Ayrshires, maintaining an impressively low somatic cell count of 38,000 cells/mL of milk. As first-generation farmers renting land protected under land conservation, the Davenports have built a strong foundation. Although their children have careers outside of dairy, the farm has shaped their work ethic, and they return every Christmas to give the year-round workers a well-earned break. Tollgate shows that "what's next" doesn't always mean taking over the farm, but it can also mean supporting its legacy in meaningful ways.

# WHAT'S NEXT?

BY LUKE LIGHTBOWN

Fairholm Farm showcased the power of diversification in today's dairy industry. Led by Erica Hermonot, the farm emphasizes involving multiple generations and educating consumers who often misunderstand farm operations. Fairholm has expanded far beyond traditional dairy, with robotic milking, a CSA program, a retail shop, farm camps, and a wide range of livestock including Angus, Wagyu, pork, poultry, and about 400 milking Holsteins. Their ability to adapt and diversify has created stability and opened new opportunities for the future.



Canaan View Dairy is a farm now operated by three partners who stepped in after the next generation chose not to continue the family business. The farm runs as a robotic dairy and manages 150 acres of hay and 300 acres of corn, supporting a mostly grain-fed herd of about 300 Holsteins. They raise some calves, mostly for show, and make purchasing decisions based on longevity and profitability.

Ethan Arsenault, a DelVal graduate and AGR alumnus, is part of the team there. Canaan View represents a growing trend in the dairy world. When family succession isn't possible, new people with passion and commitment step in to keep the operation alive.



The farms we visited reminded us that the dairy industry is built on hard work and commitment. Every farmer we met showed a level of dedication that often goes unnoticed and underappreciated by humanity. Their days begin before sunrise, their challenges shift with the market, and forces beyond their control shape their future. Yet they continue. The dairy industry moves forward because of people like them, and seeing their determination firsthand was a reminder that the products we consume each day come from their labor. Even when people take these products for granted and go about their day without a second thought, dairy farmers continue to work and supply humanity with the products it needs to keep society fueled.