

Duchess Dairy

Two long-time Virginia farm families that have benefitted from the revitalized markets for All-Jersey milk are the Huffard and Blankenship/Slemp families. Producer-distributor Duchess Dairy is a partnership between the families, who have been milking cows for four generations and bottling milk from their two herds of Registered Jerseys since December 2010.



Duchess Dairy is operated in Rural Retreat by brothers James (Jim) and John Huffard of Huffard Dairy Farms and Joey Blankenship and his uncle, Danny Slemp, of Sugar Grove Jerseys. The bottling plant allowed for vertical expansion of the business and gave the partners' families opportunity to establish a career in the family business.

The purchase of the dairy also allowed the families to capitalize on another trend among consumers—buying local is big and buying fresh is big.

“We understand that consumers are more concerned than ever about the origin, quality and safety of their food supply,” said Jim Huffard. “Many want to know where and how their milk is produced and where our cows spent the afternoon. In our case, they can drive by the farm and see the cows on pasture and know that the milk produced by them today will be on the store shelves tomorrow.”

The Duchess Dairy plant is located about five miles from Huffard Dairy in Crockett and 20 miles from Sugar Grove Jerseys in Sugar Grove. Duchess Dairy bottles whole milk, reduced fat milk (2%), chocolate milk and strawberry milk. Cream and butter are produced at the plant as well.

Each week, Duchess Dairy uses a day's worth of milk from the herds for bottling and sells the balance to a milk cooperative. Products are sold in convenience stores and grocery

stores across southern Virginia, including the major chains Food City, Food Country and Food Lion.

The dairy's decision to become an All-Jersey producer-distributor from the start was a natural one, as the Huffard family has a long heritage with Registered Jerseys and National All-Jersey (NAJ) Inc. Jim Huffard is the current vice president of NAJ and a past president of the AJCA. His father helped to establish All-Jersey markets in the southeast in the 1960s.

“We have always understood the value of All-Jersey and wanted to use the new Queen of Quality seal to distinguish our product,” Jim noted. “The label is very attractive and adds a unique quality to our product. NAJ has also helped us do a comparative analysis on our product and launch our website.”

The analysis, which shows reduced fat Duchess Dairy milk has 13% more protein and 17% more calcium, has been an effective merchandising tool to draw customers to the product.

The 375-cow Jersey herd at Huffard Dairy Farm has a 2010 lactation average of 20,740 lbs. milk, 937 lbs. fat and 726 lbs. protein. Sugar Grove Jerseys has a lactation average of 17,132 lbs. milk, 795 lbs. fat and 612 lbs. protein on 39 cows. The Slemph herd of 14 cows has a lactation average of 18,829 lbs. milk, 871 lbs. fat and 668 lbs. protein. All three herds are enrolled on REAP and rank among the top 25% in the nation for JPI.

