

Kilgus Farmstead Dairy

In the two years the Kilguses have been bottling milk from their herd of Registered Jersey cows, they have worked diligently to increase demand for Kilgus Farmstead milk by promoting its benefits to



consumers. The payoff is finding their products in specialty markets and grocery stores across central Illinois and greater Chicago and on the menu at leading restaurants. Kilgus Farmstead's non-homogenized milk can now be found locally and in several supermarket chains, including County Market, Cub Foods, IGA and Whole Foods.

Another payoff for Kilgus Farmstead milk was being named best milk in *Chicago* magazine's Best of Chicago contest in 2010.

The farm in Fairbury, Ill., is operated by Paul and Carmen Kilgus and their children, Justin, Trent and Carla, and Paul's nephew, Matt, and his wife, Jenna, and their children, Kamber and Collin. The farm was established by Paul's parents, Duane and Arlene, in the late 1950s and has always milked dairy cattle. The bottling enterprise was established to give Justin and Trent opportunity to join the family business.

The herd of 100 cows is enrolled on REAP and has a lactation average of 16,519 lbs. milk, 763 lbs. fat and 602 lbs. protein. With the herd appraisal in December 2010, the farm is home to 25 Excellent and 64 Very Good cows and has an appraisal average of 86.7%.

Kilgus Farmstead bottles about 12,000 gallons of milk a month in a processing plant that is situated 50 feet from the milking parlor. The plant has a processing room, walk-in cooler, laboratory, wash room, storage room, country store and two offices. Milk is bottled in ultraviolet plastic rather than clear plastic to prevent the breakdown of vitamins and minerals and extend

shelf life. Products include whole milk, 2% milk, skim milk, chocolate milk, heavy cream and half and half. Kilgus Farmstead also produces soft serve ice cream and yogurt.

The consumer experience has been well considered at the farm store. Customers can see milk being bottled through a big picture window in the farm store and watch cows graze their way through green pasture in the spring, summer and fall. The facilities are clean and attractive. Customers can enjoy a rich, creamy ice cream cone from the store and pick up specialty products from other local farmers, including Ropp Jersey Cheese.

“Customer relations is a very important part of our business,” said Paul. “We strive to put a face with our product. We give farm tours, demonstrate products in the store, speak at local functions and bring groups of school kids to the farm every chance we get.”

“We also take time to listen to what our customers have to say about our product.”

Kilgus Farmstead has been an All-Jersey producer-distributor since it began bottling milk in June 2009.

“The nutritional research done by NAJ helped us identify our product not only for being unique, but for being top dog in terms of quality and nutrition,” said Paul. “This helps us show consumers that it is better than any other milk on the shelf.”

Judges have also deemed Kilgus Farmstead milk superior. At the Illinois State Fair this past summer, the dairy’s whole milk, 2% milk, heavy cream and half and half earned blue ribbons.

The Kilguses also have a thriving business for Jersey beef, which is so popular there often is a waiting list for purchase. They also raise milk-fed pork and sell kosher goat meat to some of Chicago’s most exclusive restaurants.

