



Profiles of Successful Strategies for Small Farm Dairies

A project of the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program

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Ooms Dairy, Franklin County: Made the Move to Farming on Their Own

The Transition:

Randy and Elizabeth Ooms struck out on their own in 1992, leaving a partnership with Randy's family, and moved 60 dairy animals to Constable, N.Y. Their move fulfilled the couple's desire to farm on their own.

Until 1992, Randy and Elizabeth Ooms, now in their very early 40s, farmed in partnership with Randy's parents and two brothers in southeast New York. That year they moved 60 head of cattle, 30 of them milkers, to a tiestall facility in Constable.

That first year their milking string grew to 50 head. The couple also made many changes to their dairy. They added a freestall barn for dry cows and heifers. To improve cow comfort, the Ooms put in rubber mats, water troughs and tunnel ventilation. They also added automatic takeoffs to their milking units.

Mechanics, Management & Resources

When the Ooms began the transition to farming on their own, they had several goals:

- Improve production, herd health and genetics.
- Bring land into top production through tile drainage and a sound fertility program.
- Expand acreage to grow high-moisture cob corn and have excess forage to sell.
- Reduce debt.
- Replace equipment to accommodate all aspects of farm's crop program and to improve efficiencies.

Those lofty goals would put the Ooms on sound financial footing. The fact that the couple achieved all of them in 13 years says a lot about their ability to implement their transition plan. Being able to bring good cows and replacements with them to the new farm was a big help, the Ooms said.

Of course, they felt some uncertainty about their move. And they had to wrap up their partnership with Randy's family. The business relationship ended on a good note, and Randy's family is a resource for information. The Ooms see this as a sign of a successful transition.

A greater challenge came with changes in the farm lending community when banks merged and changed names, or in some cases got out of agricultural lending all together. For a family whose main financial concerns before the transition were could they pay all their bills and meet cash flow, changes in the lending community would be disconcerting. These days, the Ooms use an operating loan as required.

Today the Ooms milk 90 cows out of a herd of 180, with 90% registered Holsteins. Production is 28,700 pounds. The family has only one full-time employee and a part-time night milker. They do all of their own crop work, as well as some custom work.

The Ooms' son Joshua does all the chopping and son Justin does general fieldwork and milking when needed. Randy has herd responsibilities; Elizabeth keeps the computerized financial records.

When the Ooms prepared to make changes on their dairy, they consulted with agribusiness people and Extension educators.

The Future

The Ooms see opportunities ahead. They plan to get their milk production to 30,000 pounds. Other goals include getting debt per cow to less than \$2,000. To improve crop production, the Ooms want to tile drain all of their land. Currently, about 50% of the land is drained.

"There is always room to improve," the couple said. As the Ooms position their business for the next generation, they will certainly find ways to improve. Importantly, they say they're still "having fun."

Transition Tips

1. Communication is very important to successful transitions. The Ooms family talked frequently and openly about their planned move.
2. Keep your debt low.
3. Invest wisely in equipment. Focus on what will improve efficiency.
4. Follow your dreams.

The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program

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