

FARMLIVING

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

People who want to eat fresh food and lighter, simpler meals should consider spring rolls. Originally from eastern and southeastern Asia, they have been adapted to western culture. | Page 18



The Sunnyside Dairy farm near Martensville, Sask., has branched out and added a creamery to the operation. It took about one year to obtain a permit from the province to operate the creamery. |

Dairy capitalizes on farm-fresh trend

On the Farm: A Saskatchewan couple allows customers to buy fresh milk from a vending machine on their farm

MARTENSVILLE, Sask. — Monday wasn't the explosive product launch Bas Froese-Kooijenga was hoping for.

A hose carrying milk from the dairy to the creamery burst mere hours before customers showed up at Sunnyside Dairy to sample farm-fresh milk from the farm's newly installed vending machine.

The windows on the dairy instantaneously turned white and so did Bas when he entered the building to assess the problem.

Lesson learned — two clamps are better than one.

The problem was solved by the time customers began arriving at 10 a.m. on April 15, and then a more desirable explosion occurred.

Patrons couldn't wait to sample the farm-fresh milk on the dairy located 25 kilometres north of Saskatoon. It is the second dairy farm in Canada to offer such a dispensary.

Customers paid \$2.50 for a litre of milk dispensed from a state-of-the-art machine that came from Sweden.

Some filled their own jars, jugs, bottles or pails, while others picked up one-litre mason jars from the dairy.

Martha Froese-Kooijenga said the early returns on the milk dispenser suggest it was a profitable addition to the farm's already thriving retail business.

"We were blown away yesterday because Mondays are usually the slowest day of the week and wow, we were all just running all day because of the milk," she said.

Some customers couldn't wait to drink the full-fat pasteurized milk, taking a long swig before putting the lid on the jar and heading back

ON THE FARM



MARTHA AND BAS FROESE-KOOIJENGA
Martensville, Sask.

to their vehicles.

"We just never realized that milk was such a big deal to people, to go back to farm milk," said Martha.

"They miss the cream rising to the top."

She grew up on the Martensville farm with her parents and 11 siblings. It was a dairy until she was about 10 and then turned into a mixed operation.

It became a dairy again in 1997 when Martha and her husband, Bas, returned to the property and bought 12 Holstein milking cows.

She met Bas a few years earlier on a blind date at the Travelodge Hotel in Saskatoon.

Martha had a Canada Post mail route at the time and Bas, who grew up in Holland, was working at the dairy barn at the University of Saskatchewan.

Eventually, the couple decided they wanted to start their own dairy and moved back to the family farm. The property was in a state of disrepair because Martha's elderly parents were physically unable to maintain it.

The barn had almost toppled over, so they had to repair it and expand the building. They also expanded the herd.



Sunnyside Dairy believes it is only the second dairy in Canada to offer a milk dispensary. Customers can buy fresh, pasteurized, full-fat milk from a vending machine for \$2.50 a litre.

The dairy is now home to 30 milking cows and another 30 calves. They also usually have 20 to 40 hogs raised from weanlings.

"We made it work and paid off the farm," said Bas.

It was Martha's idea to add a retail component to the farm, which is located along Highway 12 about 20 minutes from Saskatoon.

The Farmyard Market store sells a variety of home-grown, home-made foods.

There is beef from the Holstein steers that are raised on pasture grass in the summer and hay in the winter. There is pork from the hogs that are raised in large pens and fed grain, hay, garden scraps and milk.

Some of the bedrooms in the old farmhouse have been converted into a kitchen that produces butter crust pies, perogies, soups, cabbage rolls and other scratch-made goods for the store.

They also source products such as eggs, chicken, honey, organic grains and beeswax from other local farmers.

This is the fifth year of the store, which started in the milk house of the barn and is now located in a



Martha and Bas Froese-Kooijenga have been taken aback by the consumer interest in the pasteurized milk dispensing machine on their farm near Martensville, Sask.

converted garage bay.

Business has grown steadily through word-of-mouth advertising.

Martha said they get some traffic from Saskatoon but a lot of it comes from surrounding communities such as Warman, Martensville, Dalmeny, Hepburn and Shellbrook.

First Nations customers from nearby reserves tend to like some of the more adventuresome products like cow tongues and hearts.

On a busy day they might get 30 or 40 carloads of customers but that was before the milk dispenser was installed.

"There seems to be a movement," said Martha.

"People want local food. They want to know where their food is coming from."

The couple employ five part-time and one full-time staff. They also get some help from their 23-year-old daughter, Ellen, who is a Saskatoon musician.

A retired engineer from the Original Bothwell Cheese plant in the

village of New Bothwell, Man., helped the couple get the creamery up and running.

"He got it all automated and fancy," said Bas, who is used to the manual labour approach to running a dairy.

"We've got control panels... whoa... touch the screen."

Bas is already thinking about what's next. He anticipates more products coming out of the creamery, starting with cream and cottage cheese.

The couple thinks it is time to hire a cheesemaker and more staff to help out around the growing business.

In the meantime, they will continue selling locally produced food and gearing up for the Milk-and-Cookie Day grand opening of the milk dispensary planned for June 1 and their annual Perogyfest in July.

Guess what?

The festival features local music. Go figure.