

OUTSTANDING DAIRY FARM SUSTAINABILITY

Oregon Dairy Farm Lititz, Pennsylvania



Farm-to-fork experience put on display by dairy

There aren't many places where you can buy milk just yards away from the cows that made it. Oregon Dairy Farm, nestled in the low hills of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, is such a place. Since 1952, the Hurst family has grown their 450-cow operation into a display of the farm-to-fork experience. Its ice cream parlor, grocery store and award-winning restaurant are at the heart of community life. Oregon Dairy also is stewarding the earth for the next generation with its methane digester and large-scale compost work. The Hursts are not just good hosts, they're good neighbors.

On warm days, kids play on the farm's playground next to a sign that explains its sustainable practices, which include composting food waste along with cow manure to produce a rich source of nutrients sold to gardeners, running solar panels on the grocery store's roof to provide 10 percent of the store's electricity needs, and an anaerobic digester that helps them capture methane gas from manure to make electricity and heat for hot water.

"We have an obligation to care for the land, air and water," says George Hurst, second-generation Oregon Dairy farmer. He works with his son Chad and his daughter and son-in-law Maria and Tim Forry to run the farm. "I like the approach the next generation has as they see the importance of sustainability."

Their commitment to sustainable farm practices has grown since touring the nearby Chesapeake Bay 20 years ago, where they saw firsthand how fishing was affected by poor water quality. Now, anyone who tours their farm can see what they've done to keep local waters clean. They practice no-till farming, improving soil conditions and reducing sediment runoff into creeks and streams. Native trees and perennials also are placed near the stream to reduce runoff and provide habitat for pollinators. The trees and perennials also cool the water for aquatic life.

The Hurst family and Oregon Dairy share their practices with a large audience – more than 15,000 visitors a year take tours to learn and experience where their food comes from.

Keeping Chesapeake Bay clean:

- The Hursts installed stream bank fencing as a preventive measure to avoid erosion and runoff, protecting the quality of water and aquatic life.
- The community is encouraged to learn about this effort during Family Farm Days events throughout the year.
- The Family Farm Days events welcome more than 15,000 visitors a year to the farm.