

OUTSTANDING DAIRY FARM SUSTAINABILITY

Homestead Dairy

Plymouth, Indiana



Dairy farm growth fueled by diverse sustainability efforts

From humble beginnings with nine cows in 1945 to a sweeping, modern dairy farm today, members of the Houin family have been dedicated stewards of their land and cows for seven decades.

Over the years, Homestead Dairy's herd has consistently expanded, leading to its current size of 2,400 cows. Bringing on four next-generation families is what encourages a spirit of continuous improvement among patriarch Floyd Houin, his wife, Deb, and family members Joel Gawronski, Brian Houin, Matt Houin and Ryan Rogers.

The farm's growth is fueled by a comprehensive set of sustainable practices, from resource conservation to community outreach showcasing the farm's dedication to environmental, social and economic sustainability. Homestead Dairy's outstanding animal care includes participation in Dairy Farmers of America's Gold Standard Program, which incorporates the animal care module of the National Milk Producers Federation's National Dairy Farmers Assuring Responsible Management Program (FARM). The dairy uses data from radio frequency identification (RFID) sensors to monitor herd health, and it recently transitioned to group housing for calves.

As part of their growth plan, the family set out to generate a new revenue stream by building a methane digester two years ago. On track for a five-year return on investment, the digester produces 800 kilowatts of energy each day, which is sold back to the power company for use in the electrical grid. The farm accepts food waste from several local manufacturers for the digester, helping other businesses decrease their carbon footprint.

The methane digester creates biosolids that are recycled into natural bedding, eliminating the farm's reliance on sand bedding, which once required deliveries of 15 dump truckloads of sand each week. Future plans for the digester include generating enough electricity for the farm to power itself without relying on the electrical grid.

Homestead Dairy focuses on diversity in sustainability solutions, using a wide variety of technologies and management techniques, including:

- Converting to 100 percent renewable bedding materials for cow barns
- Creating 800 kilowatts of energy per day from cow manure
- Minimizing truck traffic and diesel fuel needs with liquid manure fertilizer and a drag hose
- Increasing growth efficiencies of young calves by converting to automatic calf feeders
- Communicating the farm's dedication to sustainability by hosting farm tours and being an active member of the local community