Three Dairy Grazier Families Form Edelweiss Co-op to Manufacture Grass-Based Cheese

Monticello, WI—Edelweiss Grazier Cooperative was formed here recently by three dairy grazer families who purchased the cheese plant of Edelweiss Creamery to craft specialty, grass-based cheese from their rotationally-grazed dairy herds.

Bill and Roz Gausman, Bert and Trish Paris and Dan and Shelly Truttmann will own the facility, while Bruce Workman of Edelweiss Creamery will make the cheese using the equipment owned by Edelweiss Creamery. Edelweiss Creamery is owned by Workman, Shirley Knox and Jeff Wideman. Production of Edelweiss Creamery's current products will not be affected and, although the new cooperative leaders would not specify which products they would be making, they will not be in competition with those manufactured by Edelweiss Creamery.

The co-op has already been sold. "Everything we make this year is sold," Workman said. "It's pretty awesome when you are starting a new project and you haven't even turned a pound of cheese out of it yet."

Truttmann said one of their goals is to bring more farmers into the cooperative. He said the move allows families to take control of their own destiny.

"This is the next logical step rather than just relying on commodity markets and the price we can receive from the market at large," Truttmann said.

"If (the farmer) has the type of operation that allows for grazing or any farmer that is currently grazing, needs to look at how their milk is being used," Robson said. "If they are not involved in some way of utilizing that grass-based milk to develop a value added product they certainly need to look at that and possibly change the market for their milk."

Robson believes the grass-based cheese is a wonderful niche product. It will be in step with organics. It will have all the benefits you get with organic, without all the expense."

The co-op is shooting for an eight-month grazing season. The milk will be co-mingled during the winter. Paris hopes about 70 percent of the milk will be sold as grass-fed, with the other 30 percent to be co-mingled.

"When they approached me I was a little hesitant because there was a lot of sweat equity in this facility. But when you think about it, it's a great marriage and I look forward to a lot of years here," Workman said.

Wideman grew up on a farm and thought he knew a lot about farming. "These guys are doing things in a very interesting way. And it makes a lot of sense when it comes to the added value of the product and the health benefits in general. It's a great idea and we like to be in front of great ideas."

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Studies have also found that grass-fed cows produce higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which are believed to be beneficial to the heart and body (for more information, please see Milk From Cows Raised Entirely On Pasture a H (after Levels of Beneficial Fats: Study, on page 11 of our March 10th issue). Yet, the cooperative believes flavor may be their biggest selling tool.