

WESTVALE-VIEW DAIRY & MOO-VILLE CREAMERY

"If it's not better, why bother!"

Give a man enough tractor time and that leads to thinking time - and you'll never know what he might come up with. While working the fields around his Nashville, Michigan dairy, Doug Westendorp noticed the amount of traffic on nearby state highway 66 that runs from south to north all the way through Michigan. It occurred to him that it was an ideal location for a farm store of some sort and the idea for what has become Moo-Ville Creamery took root.

The farm's adjacent location to the well-traveled route set the stage for what has become an expanding family business for the Westendorps. In a peaceful rural location next to the farm, the original MOO-ville location, which opened in 2005, offers homemade ice cream & dairy products, a gift shop, drive-thru, farm tours - both escorted and self-guided. In the busy summer season, they have a petting farm and play area as well as an outdoor eating area, and the family is continually improving the property. They now have three other retail locations throughout west-central Michigan and they sell their products in 140 other coffee shops and grocery stores and over 50 ice cream shops.

That's a pretty impressive dairy product 'empire' that really began back in 1992 when Doug and Louisa Westendorp, who both

grew up on dairy farms, moved their young family to the current property. And when we say young family, we mean young - with six kids under the age of six! One 'single' - Carlyle; one set of twins - Eric and Troy; and one set of triplets - Levi, Tina and Brittany - made up the pack of kids that grew up with the Holstein herd at Westvale-View Dairy.

As the kids got older and all seemed to have some interest in the herd, the farm or working in the family business in some capacity, Doug and Louisa realized the business would have to expand in order to allow that to happen. They didn't want to increase the herd size and they thought they would need to milk thousands of cows to support everyone, so they built the creamery in order to give all the kids a chance to find a role. And it worked! All the siblings are currently involved in the family enterprise in various positions: Carlyle is the crop and farm manager; Eric loves his job as the herd



manager; Troy is the ice cream/creamery manager; Levi is the milk/creamery manager; Tina manages the four retail stores; and, Brittany organizes the tours. Doug and Louisa still oversee the entire operation, but they also can find the time to cuddle up to their 17 grandchildren.

Originally, the family milked 80-90 cows in a double-8 parlor until they expanded and built a new six-row barn with four Lely A4 robots in 2012 (which they upgraded to A5 units in 2020). The entirely Holstein herd now consists of 230 milking cows and 250 heifers. Their impressive rolling herd average is 32,500M 4.1F% 3.1%P.

All of that milk is utilized to make their Moo-Ville products - milk, ice cream, yogurt, cheese and butter. Currently, they





process 18,000 gallons of milk a week, and around 4,000 gallons of ice cream weekly in summertime (the busy season for ice cream!). The company sold 155,000 gallons of ice cream last year.

The unique twist to their Holstein herd and their on-farm processing is that all their milk is A2A2. That A2 beta casein can make milk more digestible for those that have some distress when ingesting dairy products. Doug Westendorp thought it would be a good niche market to pursue and may get people who thought they were lactose intolerant back to drinking milk. "We've had a ton of people say that they can now drink our milk and enjoy our ice cream after years of avoiding dairy products," says Levi Westendorp.

The Holstein herd is now 100% A2A2 cows, but it was a long, tough process to get there. They had been breeding A2 bulls for seven years before that, and had tested the entire herd for A2 status. They sold off the A1 cows as they calved in and replaced them with A2 cows. Eric and Levi admit that they had to sell some really good cows for the change over and that was the hardest part, but by spring of 2020, they were fully A2A2.

A walk through the Westvale-View herd finds cows that are well-balanced and milky with great udders and a calm temperament. That should be no surprise as that's what the breeding goals are - balanced cows that milk well and score

Good Plus or Very Good in their first lactations and move up to Very Good or Excellent scored cows as they mature. "We aren't necessarily looking for the highest type or GTPI animal, but we're looking to make a balanced cow that has a will to milk with solid type and index numbers," notes Levi. "We look at cow families a lot more than we used to for bulls. If we don't like the family, we don't use them even if they are one of the higher GTPI or type families."

"We don't have one certain cow that put us on the map, but everybody's favorite cow was an Excellent Blitz that produced over 400,000 pounds of milk lifetime. We've had good luck with the Outside Wish, Cookiecutter Halo (especially the Habitan branch) and the Kings-Ransom Cleavage families. Those families fit our profile - cows with good type and numbers to go with an extreme will to milk," elaborates Levi. "We don't aim to make the highest GTPI bull mother or Madison show winner, but we like to have really good barn cows with some numbers. We just try to breed cows that make it fun to go to the barn."

Those criteria hold true when they are looking to add females to the herd. "Obviously, they have to be A2, which can be difficult when buying new animals. Then we look for cow families we like and big milk records. If they don't milk, we will generally pass even if we like

everything else, and then lastly, they have to pass the eye test," according to Levi.

The milk cows stay in the barn, while all the other barns with dry cows and young stock have access to pasture. While they have built new barns for the cows, they remodeled the old milking barn to house the breeding age heifers.

In addition to the herd and the creamery and retail shops, the family also farms 1000 acres, usually consisting of 200 acres of alfalfa, 350 acres of corn, 300 acres of beans and 150 acres of wheat. The cows are fed a ration of corn silage, haylage, ground dry corn, and a robot-fed pellet. All the feed for the cows is grown on the farm other than the pellets. They emphasize the production of high-quality forage and crops, and in 2020 they were named the BMR corn silage champion at World Dairy Expo.

Producing quality products is the mission of the Westendorp family and their Moo-Ville operation whether it's foodstuff for the cows or dairy products to be sold on their shelves and loaded into their five delivery trucks. 'If it's not better, why bother' neatly sums up their drive to make the best. In 2021, their Moo-Ville chocolate ice cream took first place overall in the chocolate category at the North American Ice Cream Association Conference - beating out 125 other

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LEVI WESTENDORP





Moo-Ville offers a full lineup of products at four different locations throughout Michigan and their brand can be found in over 140 coffee shops and 50 ice cream parlors. Their chocolate ice cream also took home 1st place honors in 2021 from the North American Ice Cream Association Conference.

entries. That blue ribbon was their first step to being named a grandmaster ice cream maker, a goal that they no doubt will achieve.

Yet, to this day, the family makes sure that they run the business and not have the business run them. Their creamery and retail locations are closed every Sunday so that the Westendorps and their employees can attend church and enjoy

a relaxing day of rest with their families. Sunday is the biggest day for ice cream sales in the US, yet that is one area that they refuse to yield.

The family is an enthusiastic advocate for agriculture, for the dairy industry and for the Holstein cow. A stop at the farm will always find one or more Westendorps willing to explain their processing of dairy products, expound on the value of

reaching out to a non-agriculture-based public, or happy to take a stroll through the barns to talk pedigrees and genetics. If you're traveling near Grand Rapids or Lansing this summer, do yourself a favor and stop in to appreciate a family business based on their love of the dairy farm and their pursuit of constant improvement!

By Kathleen O'Keefe