

OUTSTANDING DAIRY FARM SUSTAINABILITY

Rickreall Dairy

Rickreall, Oregon



Farming by the golden rule reaps a wealth of positive results

Louie Kazemier has managed Rickreall Dairy since 1991 and sums up his commitment to sustainability as a constant effort to do the right thing. In Rickreall, Ore., residents know him for the steps he takes to be a good neighbor.

"We are ultra-sensitive to the public," Kazemier said of his 3,500-cow farm. "We only irrigate certain fields, certain times of the day, because of wind direction and concerns with odor. And we have an open-door policy, where anybody who wants to see the dairy can come in."

In fact, it's the relationships he built that drive the farm's continuous improvement.

For example, when solids were building up in the manure lagoon, Louie initiated trade with a seed farmer to provide fertilizer in exchange for feed. He also collaborated with a local food processor to use their waste water for irrigation.

Careful attention to Rickreall Dairy's resources started with his father-in-law, Gus Wybenga, a third-generation dairy farmer who redesigned the farm when he purchased it in 1990. Wybenga configured the operation with conservation in mind. Kazemier refined the system to ensure tap water is recycled at least three times before it's used for irrigation. That's just one instance.

He also reduced his energy use by hundreds of thousands of kilowatts per year by upgrading his barn lighting and parlor laundry systems through work with Energy Trust of Oregon and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This whole-system approach relies on Kazemier's constant attention to what matters – which turns out to be everything.

And at least one measure would be the envy of any business: his employees' loyalty.

"People don't quit very quickly here," Kazemier said, "and I take a lot of pride in that, because agriculture is a tough business, and my guys, they know that I've got their backs if they put one-hundred percent into this job."

Most of the dairy's 25 employees have been there for more than 20 years.

- Kazemier started a camp for families with special needs children, and he travels to Uganda to help build irrigation and infrastructure.
- The trade partnership between Rickreall Dairy and the grass seed farm is valued at \$90,000.
- Upgraded lighting fixtures realized economic returns of approximately \$37 per day, and a new storage pond captures rainfall and stores up to 17 million gallons of water.