

Producer OF THE *Month*

JUNE 2021



Miller Farm



BRATTLEBORO FOOD CO-OP

Producer OF THE *Month*

by Jon Megas-Russell



The Miller family's dairy farming tradition began in southern Vermont in the 1800s. Then in 1916, Arthur Lyman Miller was seeking a larger plot of land and purchased 300 acres in Vernon. The family and their herd of Holstein cows migrated to Vernon and began to ramp up their farming capabilities. Since the farm's inception in 1887, they have always raised Holstein cows, making them one of the country's oldest registered herds. Now, in 2021, they raise over 300 total cows, including

young ones and a bull, and they milk close to 190 on a daily basis. The last cow they purchased was in the 1970s—they currently have a closed herd and handle all of their own breeding and birthing. Based on their satisfaction with the cream, fat, and milk content, Holsteins have been the cow of preference for this five-generation farm family. With a butterfat content of 3.5-4%, the Millers find it to be perfect for their own creamline milk production and for the milk they sell to Stonyfield Organic for use in yogurt. Most



days start for Peter and Arthur Miller around 3:45 a.m., with their first milking at 4 a.m. sharp. Their octogenarian father, Paul, still assists in milking and they love working closely with him on the farm. Milking occurs three times per day, with the later ones at noon, and 8 p.m., taking 2.5 hours per milking. Nevertheless, milking their cows is one of the many pleasures associated with Peter and Arthur's work on their farm. They have deep gratitude for their ability to tie their love for family, nature, and animals into their work on a daily basis.

The Miller family's Christian faith plays a large role in their farming. Every day they lean on it to support them through the ups and downs of running their own business. One great example is that every spring they plant close to \$20,000 in seed (grass and alfalfa) across almost 100 acres of land. Another 130 or



so acres will have corn planted at a later date. This April was a dry month and such conditions present complications with planting as the seed may not take root. They mulled whether or not to plant for many days due to the potential financial loss. Then one afternoon a double rainbow appeared. Peter and Art felt this beautiful and often rare sight was a sign from God to plant their seed and they did so the following day. Since then, the proper irrigation necessary for seeds to thrive has been delivered by nature. Furthermore, faith supports them through the life cycles on a farm, such as the witnessing and processing of birth and death. They behold this cycle with chickens, cows, dogs and even people. Their faith in God provides direction to them that some things are simply outside of their control.

Relying on faith helps to bring about decisions, issues, and many other facets of working this land in a more peaceful manner.

The Miller Farm is now operated by four families: Abigail and Brandon Bucossi, Peter and Angela Miller, Art and Judy Miller, and Keith and Tina Franklin. These families have a deep commitment to stewardship of their land, soil, and animals. In 2008 they identified that their vision and values for caring for their farm aligned more effectively with organic standards. Once they had completed the organic transition in 2009, they first sold their fluid milk to Organic Valley. One of the big changes for them during the organic transition was introducing more outdoor time for their cows, creating greater comfort and happiness. Another was the organic material they use

to supplement their soil was of a higher quality and allows their whole ecosystem to be healthier and the cows to have higher quality grazing. One of the other major benefits of producing organic milk is that the farm receives a higher price for their fluid milk. After a bit of time selling their milk to Organic Valley, they switched over to Stonyfield Organic and have been working closely with them since.

For years the Miller family had thrown around ideas of bottling their own milk for sale. As the pandemic took grip on our economy and revealed the warts of our national food system, they reignited their milk project. In the fall of 2020, they purchased a micro-pasteurizing bottling facility and started producing creamline milk. Their offerings include creamline whole

milk, creamline chocolate milk, and creamline maple milk, all in both 1.5-liter and 16-ounce bottles. Miller Farm milk is creamline and non-homogenized. This allows a natural separation where the cream rises to the top, the old-fashioned way. For a consistent whole milk, shake before use or spoon a little of the cream off for your favorite morning beverage. Their goal of launching this new business was to contribute to a stable local food system in the short and long term. Without a business plan or any true sense of how well it would do, they started out directly distributing to 15 local stores, with additional distributors coming on board to assist with more accounts. Miller Farm produces a large quantity of milk and is interested in seeing how big they can grow their own creamline business over time. Although their creamline is still a side business—the core of what they do is producing milk for Stonyfield Organic.

Collaboration and community are extremely important to Peter and Arthur. They have ongoing phone calls and in-person gatherings with farmers such as the folks at Strafford Creamery of Strafford, VT, and Echo Farm of Hinsdale, NH. These conversations allow them to grow knowledge of farming, share stories, and stay connected to families executing the same work. They also love buying, consuming, and promoting their friends' products. When not collaborating with fellow farmers, they loved hosting events (pre-pandemic) such as an annual autumn fest or a one-off fundraiser for their church. They have a wonderful relationship with the neighbors that surround their farm and even their big neighbors across the street, Vermont Yankee. Peter, Arthur, and all of the Millers have always enjoyed getting to know folks and supporting the community in



any way possible. Recently they have taken part in virtual farm tours and found great success with over one thousand people tuning in.

Farming is a profession that brings constant change, including the need to create efficiencies, adapt to weather conditions, and invest in infrastructure. Being both nimble and flexible have been key to operating a successful dairy over the years. With these themes in mind, it is hard for Peter and Arthur to know exactly what the future may hold, although recently they have been investing in key areas of the farm. One was in new comforts for their cows, such as fans to decrease the heat stress on them as well as purchasing bigger indoor stalls. They have experienced positive returns with regard to increased milk production, among other core indicators of their herd's happiness. Another investment was constructing a new barn to store seed and milk bottles. With the new creamline business ramping up they are also increasing investment in the number of staff. The last thing that

Peter mentioned during the interview was there are aspirations of growing new crops and producing unique value-added products. With all of this in mind, dairy farming is something that the Miller family loves deeply and hopes to continue for many generations to come.

Stop into the Co-op to try one of their delicious creamline milks or a Stonyfield yogurt.



We are excited to be gifting **THREE** 1.5 liter bottles of milk from Miller Farm; 1.5 liters of Chocolate, Maple, and Whole Milk — **FREE** of cost to one lucky person.

We are taking online entries only for this giveaway from June 1–10.

Read our online Producer of the Month article for the Miller Farm, click the link at the end of the article, and enter to win.