

THE DAIRY FARM AIN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

Club members visited a “milk factory” near Atlantic, IA. Some might still call it a dairy farm, and this is stated in the official name ‘Milk Unlimited Dairy Farms, L.P.’, but it is nothing like dairy farms of our youth. Part owners and farm managers Kelly and Christy Cunningham explained how they care for and manage a 2800 cow Holstein dairy herd on a 500 ac. Farm established in 1998. With about 26 additional employees they milk and feed cows around the clock 24 hrs a day. Each cow is milked three times a day. There are always a couple of tanker trucks parked beside the parlor to receive the milk, which is transported to Des Moines. 300 cows per hour are milked in their modern automated parlor. The amount of milk and the time it took to receive it is measured for each cow, which wears an ID necklace and ear tag. Kelly described how the cows are kept in large loafing shed where they are fed and can move around and rest. Many of the cows sleep on large waterbeds, others on sawdust beds. Christy noted it is much more important to keep the cows cool than to be concerned about the cold of winter. Large fans and water sprinklers are used for cooling in the open sided sheds. Kelly, who has a doctorate degree in animal nutrition from Purdue University, explained that the feed for the cows is very high quality. Each cow is feed daily about 100 lb. of a mix of alfalfa hay, corn, corn silage, proteins, vitamins, and minerals matched to the milk production level. The corn is grown on the farm, but alfalfa is imported from outside Iowa. There are no hormones or antibiotics added to the feed. The daily output of the dairy is about 180,000 lb. of milk. Kelly noted the dairy has about 12 million dollars gross income each year, which includes calf and milk sales.