

The Cream Always Rises



There is an almost evangelical following for the raw dairy products offered by Jersey Girls Milk Company, of Winnsboro, and demand just keeps on growing. Raw milk is milk straight from the cow and is left unpasteurized and unhomogenized. Proponents of raw milk, like Toey and Linda Courtney and their son, Brady, owners of Jersey Girls, believe that raw milk, and products made from it, are much healthier than regular milk while offering a boost to the immune system. Fans of raw milk—and there are many—say that the heat during the pasteurization process kills good microorganisms and also damages the milk’s natural proteins, vitamins and enzymes.

The Courtneys have been interested in dairying since Brady took to the industry in high school while raising and showing dairy cows in Joshua. Brady first started showing heifers, one thing led to another, and before you know it, his high school team won All-State and went on to show in Madison, Wisconsin. Brady decided then that what he wanted to do with his life was to be a dairyman.

Brady’s herd grew from there, and Toey said neither he nor Linda had to ever tell Brady when to go out and milk. Eventually the family had so much milk they were pouring it out. That’s when Toey said to himself, “This is nuts.” It was then, in 1992, that Toey and Linda got behind Brady’s dream and, together with another partner, they started a dairy.

As things happen sometimes, progress put a crimp in that first dairy, as the Courtneys lost their lease to make way for a new road. So they began to search for some property to move their herd, which had grown to about 100 cows. They first looked south, near Toey’s hometown of Waco, and also as far as Comanche. Then, Linda contacted an East Texas Realtor, Bill Allen, who ended up showing them eight different places, and the last property on the list, a dairy barn with 140 acres on FM 852 East, ended up being ideal for their conventional

small commercial dairy.

First, the Courtneys had to get the dairy barn back in working order, move their existing herd and buy some more cows. Initially, the setup was to only sell directly to their member milk cooperative, Lonestar Milk Producers Cooperative, for the commercially pasteurized market. However, over the past few years, the dairy industry as a whole has been struggling, and many small-to-mid-sized dairies have been going out of business. In large part, Toey says, that’s because “a pound of grain is now almost the same price as a pound of milk.” Basically, he says, it’s just a struggle for those in the dairy business just to stay afloat because more often than not, it’s costing more to produce the milk than it pays. Operating at a deficit for



Foreground, Lainy, left, and Hailyn Blackstone sport yum-yum smiles as they sample Jersey Girls Milk Company Yogurt for the first time. By the looks of it, the Courtney family, background, from left, Brady, Linda and Toey, have just entertained two more satisfied customers.

too long has forced many out of the business.

The Courtneys’ dairy herd is made up of Jersey cows because that breed produces milk that is much richer than that of Holsteins or other breeds. Jerseys were origi-

nally bred by the English to produce milk for cheesemaking, and their milk has a higher protein, fat and calcium content than does that from other types of cows. Because



One of the official Jersey girls sidles up to the water trough for a break and a cool drink during her morning of grazing. Jersey cows are recognized worldwide for producing the richest milk of all dairy breeds.

the Courtneys feed their cattle grass with only small amounts of grain, this, too, adds to the nutrition of the milk. Toey, explains it this way: “The Lord designed the cow to go across big patches of land and grass. Not to stand in place and eat huge amounts of grain. When you feed a meat animal or dairy animal lots of grain, the nutritionists have proven that it reduces or eliminates the essential amino acids.”

The way the Jersey Girl cows are fed, with not much grain and a more natural grass diet, has helped the farm somewhat on cost. But, they still needed to look for ways to diversify and become more competitive.

“We really got into the retail raw milk business out of the necessity for survival. But now that we are in it, we are enthusiastic because of the health benefits we have found and the enthusiasm of our customers,” Toey said.

Since 2008, Toey, Linda and Brady, along with daughter Lori, have been offering retail raw milk products.

“Our customers are the ones teaching us,” Linda said. “We are leaning about new raw dairy products from them.”

It would be remiss not to mention that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration warns that raw milk could contain a host of harmful pathogens, and the Centers for Disease Control agrees. Yet many are convinced that the healthful benefits of the substance outweigh any threat and advocate that raw milk can be produced hygienically, with

clean processes, healthy storage, testing and properly caring for dairy herds.

For example, several of the Courtneys’ customers claim remarkable relief from arthritis, as well as from stomach ailments. And in fact, since Toey has been drinking raw milk for a year, he says he’s seen improved dental health that was even noted by his dentist.

In any given day, regular customers come in droves to get their supply of raw milk. By Texas state law, raw milk cannot be sold anywhere other than the site of production. Because of this, and the scarcity of raw milk suppliers, many travel for long miles with coolers and ice chests to get their raw milk products from Jersey Girls. Linda says the dairy has 50 very regular customers. Some of those are what she calls “now-and-then’ers” and the others are “once-a-week’ers.”

And Brady, who is not long on words, sums up the dairy’s following pretty succinctly by saying, “I can’t think of anyone who has ever come to the dairy only once.”

In addition to whole milk, the Courtneys offer cream, which cus-

tomers should order in advance. Toey is perfecting the art of cheesemaking and produces an array of artisan cheeses like Cheddar, Muenster, Jack and Derby. And then there is Linda’s homemade yogurt, which comes in a variety of flavors including strawberry, peach, apricot, raspberry and others. Working with other local farmers, the dairy also serves as a place for a few organic farmers to sell vegetables, a cook to sell homemade jellies and jams and a goat herder to offer up soaps and lotions made with goat’s milk.

There are some expansion plans in Jersey Girls’ future, so that they will be able to diversify even more with their raw milk products. Eventually, they plan to offer butter, cottage cheese, some other soft cheeses and hopefully ice cream. Their hope is that through word-of-mouth and retention and growth of their loyal customer following, their dairy business will be able to ride out the current stresses facing the industry as a whole. If the old adage remains, that the cream always rises, Jersey Girls Dairy is surely guaranteed success.

Jersey Girls Milk Company is a member of Wood County Electric Cooperative, and is located at 5326 FM 852 East in Winnsboro. The dairy’s hours are from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and again from 3 p.m. until 5 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays. You can find the dairy online at www.jerseygirlsmilk.com and the telephone number is (903) 365-2449.



◀ WCEC Power Quality Technician Jay Murdock demonstrates what happens to a balloon, or anything else for that matter, that comes in contact with live power lines. Key Accounts Representative Tommy Brown narrates.

power line, they cause a dangerous arc of electricity that is pretty awesome to see.

After all of the “fireworks,” the children are encouraged to ask questions, and generally some pretty lively discussions follow. Importantly, the graphic illustrations help them to solidify in their minds the importance of staying away from power lines, substations and boxed transformers that many may find in or near their neighborhoods. They also learn to report downed power lines and to stay clear of them.

Safety training for cooperative employees has an effect in others ways, too. Because the lineman and tree-trimming positions have so much potential for risk associated with accidents, these employees also learn many lifesaving techniques. So all of the workers learn various first-aid techniques and how to help out in emergency situations.

Often, they even step into the breach when circumstances warrant. For example, serviceman Gary Wilcox recently took action when a woman at a restaurant began choking. Witnesses said she was turning blue and gasping. Because of all of Wilcox’s training, he knew how to administer the Heimlich maneuver to dislodge the choking hazard. The restaurant owner said that had Wilcox not been there, the situation might not have turned out so well.

Through educational programs and even through direct action, WCEC employees are serving to enhance safety throughout the region. And they will claim they are just doing their jobs, but that’s what everyday heroes always say.

Playing it Safe

Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) linemen know just what to do in any emergency event involving line repair, and they know how to do it safely. Because they participate in ongoing safety training each and every week, safe operations are second nature to them. The cooperative recognizes, though, that the average person is not as well trained to react intuitively around high-voltage power lines, and deaths occur annually because some people make the wrong moves like getting out of a car when surrounded by live power lines, or not locating underground lines before digging.

To help educate the public, WCEC sponsors safety demonstrations on request at schools and other venues. WCEC Key Accounts Representative Tommy Brown and Power Quality Technician Jay Murdock, a certified journeyman lineman, are the instructors for these displays. Basically, their classroom is a working replica of a single-phase power line that operates at 6,000 volts. Then, they put the juice to the line and make sparks fly with an arc of about 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

Using everyday items that kids know about and play with helps to make the message clear and powerful: When power lines are interfered with, bad things happen. To demonstrate, Brown and Murdock pull out various props one by one, and amid sparks and small fireballs, they show the wide-eyed audience what happens to items that come in contact with live lines. However, this is done in the most controlled way, with Murdock on the “pointy end of the stick,” so to speak.

Murdock is the front man who dons specialized lineman’s gloves and rubber sleeves that protect against 20,000 volts. He also wears clothes made from flame-retardant material, stands on a protection mat or “blanket,” and uses a special hot stick, protective to 100,000 volts, to place the items onto the hot lines.

The kids are always amazed to see what happens to a Mylar balloon or even a tree limb when contact with a live line takes place. Other items used in the demonstration include a kite, a metal ladder and even a hotdog. The one thing all of these items have in common is that when they touch a

Lessons in Leadership and Excellence

Lon Morris College in Jacksonville was the site of the 2009 East Texas Rural Electric Youth Seminar (ETREYS), where more than 120 high school students gathered to participate in workshops, seminars and peer-group activities focused on leadership development and team building. As part of the events, students heard from motivational speakers such as U.S. Army Lt. Col. Brian Birdwell, a survivor of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the Pentagon; Randy Snow, a gold medalist Paralympian and nationally recognized motivational speaker; and Keith Davis, former NFL championship player.

The student delegates that represented WCEC for 2009 were, (pictured, standing, from left) **CHAD CLEERE**, Grand Saline; **HOMERO FLORES**, Quitman; **MORGAN GIVNEY**, Talco; **MIKEL GOODSON**, Mineola; **CLAIRA GRAY**, Grand Saline; **BAILEY HUNT**, Yantis; **KATELYN JAMES**, Mount Vernon; **LINDA ROMAN**, Quitman; **LESLIE WHITE**, Quitman and **KAITLYN BROWN**, Quitman. Also pictured (kneeling, from left) are chaperones Danny Rodgers, Grand Saline and Lindsey Weems, Quitman. Youth Director Candace Rushing, Quitman, and chaperone Jan Rodgers are not pictured because they were already on-site at Lon Morris,

working hard to prepare for the arrival of the participants.

Special congratulations are in order for White who placed second out of all students in the scholarship test to win a \$750 scholarship, Hunt who was awarded a \$500 Cooperative Scholarship, and Cleere who was chosen by his peers to represent WCEC at the 2010 seminar as a Youth Director.

WCEC General Manager and CEO Debbie Robinson said of ETREYS, "I've seen firsthand the enormous value that this program has had in developing our local youth. In addition to the lifelong skills gained by attending the camp, many of the students earn college scholarships there. I'd encourage any eligible student to apply because any teen that participates is sure to have some aspect of their life enhanced."

WCEC annually offers this week-long all-expenses-paid trip to 10 sophomores and juniors who are attending high school in the WCEC service area. Participants are selected on the basis of overall excellence and involvement in extracurricular activities, including leadership positions, academic awards, etc. Those wishing to apply can get an ETREYS application through their counselor's office or by directly calling WCEC.



Power TIP

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A coat of fresh paint with an energy-efficient paint additive can boost more than curb appeal. Paint additives come in a powder, which you can stir into any paint to add insulating properties without changing the texture or color of the paint.

The powder contains tiny, nontoxic ceramic bits, which form a layer as the paint dries that reflects radiant and solar heat away from the surface.

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