

Calf barns:

**The decision-making adventures
of bringing calves inside**



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Heidi Fischer

Fischer-Clark Dairy, Inc.



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Fischer-Clark Dairy, Inc.

- **1972:** Mike & Sue Fischer started with 12 acres and 8 cows in a tiestall
- **1972-1996:** Steadily grew to 80 cows
- **1996:** Built original double-8 parlor – retrofitted in old barn
 - Mike's sister and brother-in-law were partners in the farm until his passing



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Fischer-Clark Dairy, Inc.

- **2003:** Purchased outside animals for the last time to move to 300 cows
 - Grown internally since
- **2012:** Jon & Heidi joined the operation
 - Jon has been farming since high school, became part of farm ownership in 2012
 - Heidi joined the operation full-time in 2014



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The farm today: Milking cows

- **Double-16 parlor built in 2016**
 - Will expand to double-20 in fall 2018
- **Milking 780 cows 3x**
 - Plus dry cows
- **Tunnel-ventilated, sand-bedded freestall**
- **Transition & hospital barn**



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The farm today: Land & employees

- **Very efficient footprint**
- **New manure handling system**
- **Farm 2,100 acres**
- **6 family member employees**
- **12 non-family employees**



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The farm today: Calves

- Calf barn houses calves birth to approx. 70 days
- Currently building new heifer barn for calves 70 days to 5 months
- Heifer barn for heifers from 5 months to 200 days pregnant



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A look back on our calves

- Sue managed calves and had 1 part-time employee
- Hutches outside
- **2003 expansion:** Built 2-row calf barn with individual pens for birth to 60 days
 - 69 pens with 6 newborn hutches
- **Straw bedding**
- **Fed UV-pasteurized milk & texturized starter**
 - UV pasteurizer installed in 2012, milk replacer prior to installation
- **2014:** Heidi took over full-time calf management



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The move to a new barn

- **2017:** Completed construction of 4-row calf barn
 - Barn is 70' wide x 155' long
 - 10' 10" on low end of barn, reaching 22' 3 1/16"
 - Single slope roof
 - Raised walkway between rows
 - Natural ventilation with 6 ceiling fans
 - 3 sets of curtains
 - 2 temperature controlled and 1 manual
- **128 pens with 8 newborn hutches**
- **Managed by Heidi plus 1 full-time and 1 half-time employee**



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Colostrum & milk feeding

- **Colostrum: 4 qt at birth and 2 qt at 12 h**
- **Stair-step pasteurized milk feeding program**
 - D 1-12: 2 qt 2x
 - D 13-18: 3 qt 2x
 - D 19-43: 4 qt 2x
 - D 44-50: 2 qt 2x
 - Wean at day 51



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Starter

- **Braden bottles for 12 days**
- **Dog pan until weaning**
- **Bucket post-weaning**
- **Keep in barn on grain until d 60/70** (depending on calf)



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Success on our farm

- **Attribute calf performance success to building design**
- **First-lactation milk production**
 - Nov 2014: 91 lb
 - May 2018: 100 lb
- **Cull aggressively; quality over quantity**
- **Previously looked at pneumonia treatments**
 - Only had 1 since moving to new barn
- **Organization and communication**



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Kristan Opelt

River Crest Dairy, LLC



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River Crest Dairy, LLC

- Trent and Kristan Opelt are both 3rd generation farmers
- **2015:** Trent's farm and Kristan's family's farm merge to form current operation



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The farm today: Milking cows

- Double-8 parlor
- **Milking 215 cows 2x**
 - With dry cows (250)



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The farm today: Land & employees

- **Operation is run by Kristan, Trent, and Trent's parents, Pete and Jeanne**
- **Farm 800 acres for dairy**
 - Traditional crops; Italian ryegrass this year
- **Utilize a custom chopper**
- **All family labor except for 2 milkers**



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The farm today: Calves

- **Raise all own calves and heifers**
 - Warming room to birth hutches for 4 days to autofeeder pens
- **2 autofeeder pens hold 20 to 30 calves**
- **70 weaned calves on pack**
- **Long straw bedding in winter, sawdust in summer**
 - Good drainage, keeps pens cleaner longer



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A look back on our calves

- Calves were housed in a retrofitted tie stall barn
- Lots of overcrowding; labor intensive; respiratory issues
- April 2016: Lindsay (sister-in-law and small animal vet tech) became calf manager full-time
 - Brought consistency, but still poor environment



The move to a new barn

- **2017:** Built new naturally ventilated calf barn
- **50' x 230' monoslope barn**
- **Labor efficiency and respiratory health improved**
- **Too many healthy calves**
 - Overcrowding still
- **Still tweaking**



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Colostrum, milk feeding and starter

- **Colostrum: 4 qt 1st feeding**
- **Conservative milk feeding to encourage grain intake**
 - D 4-25: 7.5 L 2x ramp up to 11L
 - D 26-49: 11L 2x
 - D 50-65: Ramp down to 0
- **BSF Calf Starter**



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Success on our farm

- **Watch first lactation heifer calving body condition and milk**
- **Healthier and solid-framed calves**
- **Heifers show heat at 9 months**
- **Watch for scours and respiratory issues**



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Stacy Sosinsky

Ocooch Dairy



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Ocooch Dairy

- **1978:** Jim Mlsna bought a herd of registered Holsteins from New York
 - By the fall, he was milking 40 cows
- **1981:** First addition to tie stall to milk 75 cows, at the time
- **1996:** Tie stall barn renovated and walk-through flat barn parlor installed
 - Milking 200 cows at the time



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Ocooch Dairy

- **1999:** First modern tin roof freestall barn built with 200 stalls
- **2008:** DeLaval Double-12 parallel parlor installed
 - Milking 550 cows at the time



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The farm today: Milking cows

- Double-12 parlor
- Milking 850 cows 3x
- Tunnel-ventilated freestall barns



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The farm today: Land & employees

- **25 full- and part-time team members, including 6 family members**
 - Jim, Jacqui, Stacy, Peter, Tony and Thomas
- **Farm 1,000 acres for dairy**
- **Utilize a custom chopper**
- **Community outreach**
 - Destination Dairy, Family Day on the Farm, Dairy Breakfast, Learn to Hunt



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The farm today: Calves

- **Birth hutches inside first 14 days**
 - Bottle-fed
- **6 autofeeder pens**
 - Hold 15 to 18 calves
- **Stacy and 4 part-time employees (10-30hrs/week)**



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A look back on our calves

- **Outside hutches**
- **Pasteurized milk fed 3x a day**
 - Stair-stepped weaning until 11 weeks
- **Space constraints; Crypto; Labor intensive**
- **Tube feeding/trauma**
- **20% starter**



The move to a new barn

- **2017:** New cross-ventilated calf barn
- **Barn is 57' x 262'**
- **Pens are 25' x 49'**
- **All in and all out pens**
- **Diligent pen cleaning**
- **Crypto gone, a lot less scours, still some respiratory**
- **Still learning with autofeeders and ventilation**



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Colostrum, milk feeding and starter

- **Colostrum program completely revamped**
 - Only mom's milk and bottle-fed 4 qt within 2h
- **Conservative milk feeding to encourage grain intake**
 - D 15-42: 6L ramped up to 10L
 - D 43-60: Ramp down from 10L to 3L



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Success on our farm

- **Decreased respiratory issues**
- **Increased labor efficiency**
- **Genomic testing**
 - Goal setting and benchmarking
- **Overall healthy calves that are fun to raise!**



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Beyond these doors lies the
future of this farm.
It is through a culture defined by
teamwork, respect, and positive attitudes
that we are able to create an
environment where our calves can *thrive*.
Not every day is easy, but every day is
marked by its own *adventure*
and an opportunity for
growth, gratitude, and kindness.



Cal

