NEW RELEASE

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DAP Funds Spur Innovation on a Castile, NY Farm

Silver Meadow Farms, LLC, a 200-milking-cow dairy in the town of Castile, near Silver Lake, used Dairy Acceleration Program funds to evaluate feasibility of robotic milking machines and to update their environmental management plan.

Dairy Acceleration Program is designed to enhance profitability and environmental stewardship of New York dairy farms. Funding for eligible projects may be used for organization of financial records and benchmarking, creation of strategic business plans, design of new or remodeled production facilities, development or updates of Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs) and design of Best Management Practices (BMPs) identified in the farm CNMP.

Through DAP, the farm family moved forward with plans to build a new insulated barn with two robots to milk 120 cows and hired an engineer to design a new manure pit. They also updated paperwork and added short term storage, to bring the farm to a CAFO compliant standard.

“It was money well spent. It spurred us to pour money into the business,” said Russell Klein, who farms with his parents Michele and Stanley Klein. “It was a bigger project than anything I had done. We took the time to work on the budget and the layout. It helped us make better decisions.”

For a neighboring farm, a DAP project showed that a project shouldn’t move forward, Michele said. “It saved their life savings,” Stanley said.

Because a lake is located across the road from the farm, and a YMCA camp is in close proximity, the farm family is familiar with and has an open-door policy with neighbors and vacationers. They’ve always taken their commitment to protect the environment and to engage in the community seriously.

“We had been a top tier environmental farm for a long time even though we didn’t have the cow numbers,” Stanley said. “The proximity of where we are dictates how we farm. Visitors are totally amazed with the robotics. They get the flavor of the family farm and they see new technology. They learn we analyze everything. It’s not haphazard.” He said the farm participates in the FARM animal care program, are nine consecutive year quality winners with their Upstate Milk Niagara Cooperative and have been a Supermilk recipient “forever.”
The farm family initially learned about DAP in 2014 through Extension. At that time they were planning to build a new facility, and were evaluating how to handle manure in the new facility, and how to manage the flow of animals from the old to new facilities.

“We were tossing around the idea. Funding allowed us to continue to look at it more in depth, including budgeting and engineering a manure storage,” Russell said. Russell is a SUNY Morrisville and Cornell University graduate, who returned to the farm in 2006, and initially worked as an employee, before becoming a partner in 2009.

At that time Russell said, “We were pushed to the max and production had flattened out,” so the family knew they had to make changes to remain viable for the next generation.

“We were bringing the next generation in. It’s what he wanted to do. We have the land base and low debt. It’s the right thing to do. It gives us flexibility,” Stanley said. “We could have easily retired.”

Russell was exposed to robotic milkers during college. He traveled to Canada with DeLeval in 2013 to see more. “They were no longer experimental. We had some concern about labor. We have good long-term labor, but the minimum wage is increasing. We thought that it’s a better way to milk cows. Cows adapt very well. We asked what do we seriously have to think about to do this?”

DAP funds allowed them to “push the financial issue” with a cost analysis with PRO-DAIRY’s Betsey Howland. “Once we decided we could do that, then we turned to the engineering a manure storage,” Russell said.

The new barn and storage were completed in 2015. “There have been lots of lessons, no regrets and constant learning,” Russell said. And, he said, the cows seem to enjoy the new milking robots and choose to be milked three to four times a day. “They don’t like to come back to the old barn to freshen.”

“Planning is cost effective,” Stanley said. “It would be more costly without the support. It’s a very easy application process.”

To apply for DAP funding, visit: prodairy.cals.cornell.edu/dairy-acceleration or contact Caroline Potter, PRO-DAIRY, by phone at (315)683-9268 or email at dap@cornell.edu. Basic program eligibility: Must be a dairy cattle farm shipping milk (heifer farms may apply for CNMP and BMP funds); Must have complete financial records for business planning; Must have a current CNMP if applying for funds to design BMPs; Preference is given to farms with under 300 cows (must be under 300 mature cows for CNMP funds).

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