

**Who:** Arjen Geijsel

**What:** Southland Dairy

**Where:** Dublin, TX

Central Texas is home to Southland Dairy, which is located in the extreme weather zone between the very humid East Texas dairy market and the relatively dry Texas Panhandle dairy market.

Opened in 2008, Southland milks 2,500 cows twice per day under the management of Arjen Geijsel. Arjen, who has lived in Central Texas since 1999, is very familiar with both the challenges and the opportunities of this type of dairy environment.

Central Texas summers can be brutal with temperatures ranging from 90°F to 100°F from late June through September. The combination of sweltering heat and high humidity can cause many challenges, including heat stress and low pregnancy rates. The result can be a significant drop in production.

But the challenges of Central Texas are not limited to the hot summer months; they also occur in the winter when occasional freezing rain, ice, and snow can drive up a dairy's somatic cell counts. When this happens, production and profitability again decline.

## Limiting variation in Central Texas



These seasonal extremes have contributed to high variability in dairy production and profitability in many Central Texas dairies. In order to reduce variability, Southland developed and constructed a new cross-ventilated barn in August 2014. The barn was designed specifically for the extreme conditions in this part of Texas and included key modifications to reduce their effects.

For example, typical cross-vent barns utilize evaporative pads, which use water to cool the air pulled through the units. While this system can significantly lower the temperature inside the barn, it requires a significant amount of space and the pads require routine cleaning and maintenance resulting in more expense.

Instead of the typical cross-vent design, the barn at Southland has low ceilings and an open south wall where air is pulled through by fans on the other side. The open-walled barn requires fewer fans to move the air. The barn also utilizes misters over the feed lanes, which can be turned on in the summer months to help cool the cows.



**Arjen Geijsel of Southland Dairy in cross-ventilation barn designed for extremes of Central Texas weather.**

Some cross-vent barns require the feed wagons to exit the barn in order to turn around. However, the Southland barn has a single door that serves as both an entrance and an exit. Inside, there is plenty space at the end of the feed lanes for the tractors with mixer wagons to turn around while still inside the barn.

Arjen says, "It's all about keeping the cows, the equipment, and the work force out of the elements." He adds that keeping out of the Central Texas elements improves the work environment and reduces wear on equipment.

Over the course of a year using the new cross-vent barn, variation in both milk production and pregnancy rates at Southland decreased significantly from previous years. For example, Arjen noted, the pregnancy rate in November and September were basically the same. Throughout the year, milk production per cow per day varied only around 4 pounds.

Arjen has also noticed that his pen sizes and intakes have been more consistent since using the new barn and that they "just have more predictable numbers all the way through."

Southland Dairy is very concerned about the environment provided for their employees as well as their cows. Asked what Southland does particularly well, Arjen replied, "Take care of our people." Southland provides benefits such as paid vacation and holidays as well as extra pay for working on holidays. The dairy also provides health insurance and a comfortable break room for the employees.

Keeping with Southland's goal to reduce variation and improve profitability, the dairy's feeding program includes growing as much of their own forage as they can to help mitigate its largest expense, which is feed cost. Diamond V Original XPC™ is incorporated in their TMRs.

Arjen says he likes the research behind Diamond V products and the consistency in performance associated with their use. With feed cost being their biggest expense, the feed efficiency Southland gets with Diamond V is very important.



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