

As published in



Producer Spotlight

Who: Dan DeRuyter

What: George DeRuyter & Sons Dairy

Where: Outlook, WA

Being on the “leading edge” of an industry can be exciting and rewarding. However, the leading edge also is the first to meet the future with all its unexpected challenges. So it is with George DeRuyter & Sons Dairy in Washington’s Yakima Valley.

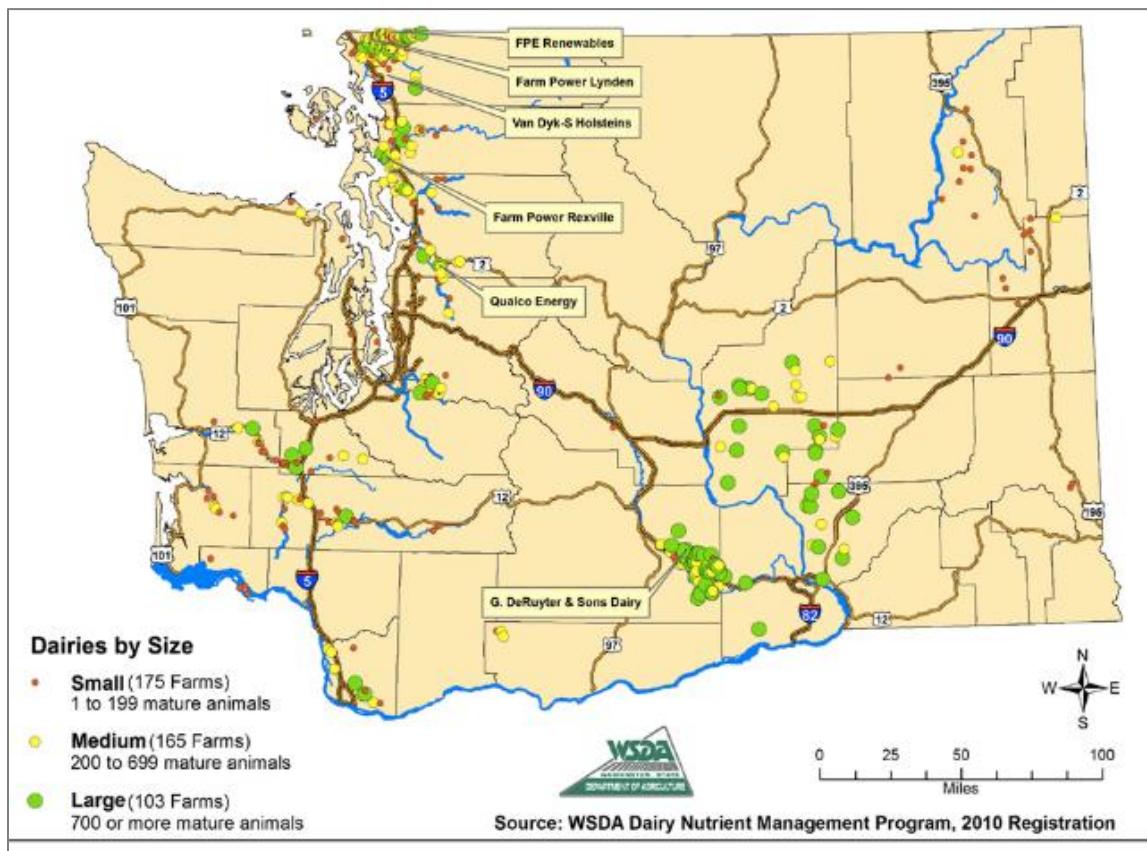
The DeRuyter family has been on the leading edge of the Yakima dairy industry since George DeRuyter relocated the family farm from southern California in 1972. Twenty years later, his son Dan helped establish a new dairy, milking about 1,300 cows. At the time, the Yakima Valley was home to only a few other comparable dairies. As managing partner, Dan led the growth of the family’s new Yakima Valley farm, expanding it to the current milking herd of about 5,200 Holsteins housed in free stall barns at two locations near the unincorporated community of Outlook.

Today the DeRuyters’ leading edge includes an extensive IVF (in vitro fertilization) program, which is the Pacific Northwest’s frontrunner in embryo production for commercial dairies.

The leading edge of Yakima Valley



In 2006, the DeRuyters were also on the leading edge when they installed the Yakima Valley's first – and so far only – anaerobic manure digester for combined heat and power generation. Methane from the manure fueled electrical generators, which returned power to the electric grid.



Lucrative at first, the economics of biogas cogeneration changed in 2012 with the decline of natural gas prices and the expiration of the farm's power purchase agreement.

"The power company cut the purchase rate of power we supplied," Dan says. "At the same time, they charged more for the power we bought."

Fortunately, the DeRuyters already had a better grip on costs they could control themselves. It was a risk, but in 2008, they acquired additional cropland to produce dairy feedstuffs. Cropping area increased to 7,000 acres, all irrigated to grow corn (high moisture and silage) and alfalfa.

"The drought affected crop yields this year," Dan says, "with some of our fields down 30 percent or more."

All feeding is by TMR (total mixed rations), which incorporate Diamond V products, including Original XPC™. Milking is three times per day in a double-40 parallel parlor and a double-28 parallel parlor. A new manure separation system is part of the farm's continually updated nutrient management plan. Altogether the DeRuyter farm employs about 90 employees with many cross-trained for both crop and dairy production.

Dan notes that keeping good employees is a challenge, especially given the Yakima Valley's seasonal fruit industry. Apple pickers, for example, can make up to \$25 per hour.

"It's a constant struggle to keep costs down," Dan says. "The Diamond V Dairy Advisors are good resources. Jon Wheeler and Jeramie Voss are always ready to help. The TMR Audit® is a great cost-control tool."



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