

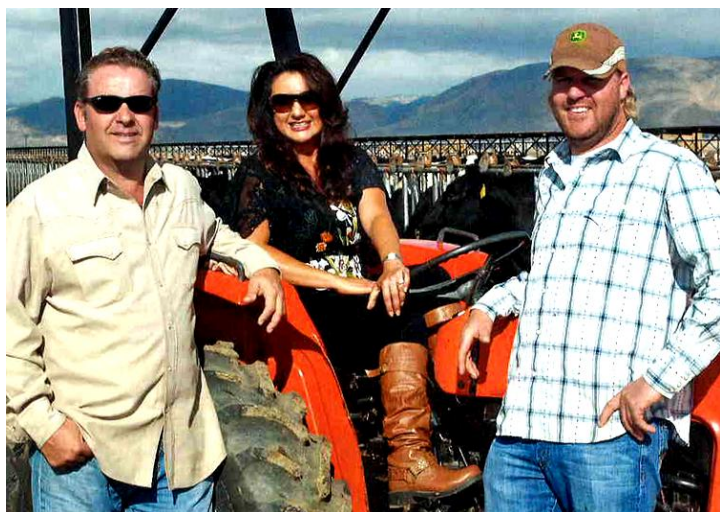
As published in



**Who:** Symon Attema & Marinus Dijkstra

**What:** Cottonwood Dairy

**Where:** San Jacinto, CA



**Symon Attema (left), Eileen Attema, and Marinus Dijkstra at Cottonwood Dairy, San Jacinto, CA.**

Commercial dairy production got its start in the San Jacinto Valley in the late 1800s, then blossomed in the early 1900s with the rest of southern California. Much has changed since then, such that SoCal's most innovative dairies now combine milk production with other "natural" business opportunities.

Such opportunities exist at both ends of the cow for Symon Attema, senior partner, and Marinus Dijkstra, managing partner, at [Cottonwood Dairy](#). At the front end, they benefit from the experience of Symon's wife, Eileen, who is a feed businesswoman. At the back end, the partners recently launched Cottonwood Compost, which recycles and markets dairy manure as a composted fertilizer, organic soil amendment, and water conservation aid.

## **Producer Spotlight**

# **“Cleared for take off” in SoCal’s dairy business**



“To grow in the dairy business in this area today,” Marinius says, “you’ve got to be able to do well for the cows and generate other income. When they’re well cared for, dairy cows are wonderful converters of raw materials into valuable products – first milk and then manure – which opens up all sorts of opportunities.”

Neither Symon nor Marinius grew up on a dairy farm. As young men, they came separately to the U.S. from the Netherlands to pursue higher education. Symon went on to become an airline pilot while Marinius started a career in construction, then moved into dairy management. When Symon retired from commercial flying, he and his wife Eileen settled in Riverside County, where the hay business and feed store were located. Then the opportunity to buy a 900-cow dairy came along. They invested and recruited Marinius as partner and farm manager.

Since 2012, Cottonwood Dairy has grown to a milking herd of 1,600 Holsteins and a total cow inventory of 1,900, which includes a specialty operation producing Waygu-Holstein beef calves sold as day-olds. Dairy calves are contract-reared and returned as heifers.

Cottonwood cow housing is in open lots with shade. “Creature comforts” added by Marinius include a custom misting system above the feed bunks to keep cows cool during feeding. Milking takes place in a double 20 parallel parlor. Marinius continues to experiment with 2X and 3X milking because the optimal routine depends on many variables. Currently, the dairy employs 16 workers.

All feed is total mixed rations, which have benefited from TMR Audits® performed by Dr. Kevin Leahy and others from Diamond V. Also, Regional Sales Manager Rick Gintner and others assist with dairy records analysis.

The Cottonwood website notes that dairy rations include “fresh corn silage” specially grown and bagged and “shipped direct to our cows for the highest milk production and quality.” In addition, Marinius says, the recycling talents of Cottonwood cows have helped local producers dispose of runt potatoes and orange peels as well as other “opportunity” co-product feedstuffs. Diamond V products in the TMR help optimize rumen function across all types of feedstuffs.

“Learning never stops in the dairy business,” Marinius says, “especially in this part of California where you must innovate to sustain your business. Our enterprise is a ‘work in progress’ – Cottonwood Dairy supplies quality milk and Cottonwood Compost provides ‘eco-green’ recycling of waste products.”

As Symon and Marinius seek to expand dairy operations and compost operations, they hope to develop a model that can spread the innovative thinking behind Cottonwood Dairy.



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