

MN Agriculture: Kroll Farm, Organic Dairy



Day 14 of my "30 Days of MN Agriculture" is Kroll Farm from Long Prairie. The Krolls are a fifth generation farm and an organic dairy farm. In addition to dairy, they also plant garlic and produce maple syrup. I must say, they have a very interesting story!

Tell me a little about your farm and/or business?

We are a certified organic dairy farm with a small herd of 30 cows. We are the fifth generation of this family farm started by my husband's, Hans, great great grandfather in the late 1880's. Because we weren't interested in chasing money or numbers, we farmed simply and without fertilizers or chemicals starting around 2000. Our daughter, Jessica, suggested going organic since we were farming that way anyway, and so in 2005 we did just that. The paperwork isn't fun, but farming organically has helped us support two families with the 30 cow herd.

How long have you farmed or been in business?

My husband was raised on this dairy farm since childhood and then went off to college in 1972. He returned to the farm in 1982 and has been farming ever since.

Tell me a little about what you grown/raise/produce or service provided.

Besides organic milk, we grow organic garlic and produce pure maple syrup. This farm has been producing maple syrup for over 50 years. Most of the sap is collected from our own trees, but we also buy sap from a few local neighbors. Our average production is 500 gallons of syrup a year. Last year was a record breaker at 900 gallons.

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We got into garlic about 12 years ago when a friend gave us about 6 bulbs. We planted them and replanted them each year until last year we planted 6400 bulbs. It's amazing how exponentially quickly they multiply.

Where do you sell or provide services to? Who is your end consumer?

Our milk is sold to [Horizon Organic](#) and our syrup is sold locally. Our garlic is marketed locally and online and through the online market, [Local Harvest](#) out of Alexandria.

If there is one thing you could change about farming it would be . . .

Not having to milk the cows twice a day every day; on the organic side—less paperwork.

What is one interesting fact about your farm/crops/livestock/business you would like to share.

We leave our calves on the cows to nurse until they are weaned at 9 weeks old. Because of this, they are the biggest, happiest and healthiest calves we have ever seen. We never have to call the vet out for scours or anything. It is enjoyable to watch them play in the pasture together like kids. Most farmers pen each calf in a separate hut and feed them milk replacer. We like the natural side of things.

What is a most embarrassing moment you have had on the farm?

One day I was suppose to pick up the bales while my husband was baling. The tractor needed fuel so I filled up our diesel tractor-- with gas. When I got out on the field to pick up bales, it started to die. When I went to tell my husband, I realized I better take care of this myself and take the stress off of him. So I called our son-in-law and he came and drained the tank of fuel onto the ground and filled it back up with diesel. Luckily, nothing was damaged... and our marriage saved.

What do you love most about farming/business?

What we love most about farming is raising our children on a farm where they can learn from nature and play in the country; and seeing, living, and working in the beauty of God's creation every day.

What is one thing you wish consumers knew about what you do or your farm/business?

I would like consumers to know just how much better organic dairy and meat products are than

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conventional. It's not just that there are no chemical residues in them, but pastured animals produce up to 4x more vitamin E from always being outside and exposed to the sun. Therefore, there are more natural vitamins in these dairy products and meat; and the amount of omega-3 (good) fatty acids in these organic products are tremendously higher than conventional products because of the lower amounts of grain fed to the animals.

What is one thing no one knows about your farm/business/product that you would like to share?

We are putting up some used solar voltaic panels this winter and plan to add to them so we can possibly run our whole farm on our own electricity.

Who are your customers? Or what would you like to tell your customers?

We couldn't farm without you.

What makes Minnesota the place to farm/grow/raise/produce/service?

We can grow great apples here in Minnesota; better than those boring Red Delicious ones grown in Washington.

What is one thing about Minnesota that people from other areas do not know about or are missing because they don't live here?

We have a lot of water and a lot of fish. We can go fishing almost anywhere.

What is your favorite Minnesota location?

Our farm, of course!

What is one ag-related place in Minnesota that others need to know about. What is one non-ag related place in Minnesota that others need to know about and why?

[La Ferme](#) is a local restaurant in Alexandria owned and operated by chef Matthew Jensen. He buys and serves as much organic and locally grown and produced food as he can.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

My husband is a man who likes to farm the ground and fix equipment, but hates milking cows. Before our son-in-law started milking our cows last year, he said, "If you don't help milk the cows,

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I'm selling them." From the day I got married, his mom told me, "never milk a cow or you'll be milking them all the time." This was from someone who was told the same thing by her mother-in-law. At age 60, what did I have to lose—so I helped him milk the cows. Thank goodness it was only for a year and a half.