It’s really no surprise that the Borst Family Dairy is the first recipient of the national Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) Excellence Award for animal care and antibiotic stewardship. After all, the AMPI member’s mission statement nearly mirrors that of the industry-leading farm animal welfare program.

“To be committed to caring for our animals and land with integrity and pride to serve wholesome dairy products to our consumers,” is more than words on paper for the Rochester, Minn., family. It’s the approach to animal care and sustainability that drives them.

Brothers Larry and Matt, and Matt’s sons Kevin and Kyle, are the third and fourth generations of the Borst family to put this mission into action. Together with their wives LuAnn, Julie, Lindsey and Heather, they prioritize cow care to help their dairy thrive.

This commitment earned Borst Family Dairy one of four inaugural FARM Excellence Awards. The Borsts were recognized during the joint annual meeting of the National Milk Producers Federation and Dairy Management Inc. in Las Vegas in November.

**Forward with FARM**

The national award is presented to those who “go above and beyond in their implementation of the FARM Program standards.” The Borsts easily fit the description as they continuously raise the bar for animal care.

The family milks 230 cows in a double-10 herringbone parlor, twice daily. Steers and replacement heifers are raised on the farm. The herd is fed from crops they grow on 1,100 acres.

The Borsts became early adopters of the FARM program in 2011. They fine-tuned animal care practices with each version of the program.

“All the FARM requirements are things you should want to do for your cows; required or not. Making your cows as comfortable and healthy as possible is just good business,” Lindsey, herd veterinarian and farm partner, said.

A key attraction to the program is access to templates for protocols, Lindsey’s husband Kevin said.
“Protocols help with consistency,” he said. “They can be especially helpful if you don’t do a particular treatment every day. It’s helpful to look back at the established plan.”

Becoming Food Armor certified has also benefitted Borst Family Dairy. The antibiotic stewardship education program equipped them with more knowledge and templates to build up their existing herd health plan.

“This actually made keeping up with FARM requirements a piece of cake because we already had above and beyond what was required in many areas,” Lindsey said.

The antibiotic stewardship protocol includes detailed record keeping. The Borsts use DairyComp dairy herd management software to monitor disease prevention and treatment efficacy. Only one person at the farm is authorized to make the decision to put a treated cow’s milk back into the tank.

“The herd health plan and treatment records are about as detailed as any I’ve seen,” said April VonRuden, AMPI’s FARM Program Director. “I think many in the industry can learn from the Borsts’ example.”

Cow care champions

The Borsts’ constant desire to learn and excel has propelled improvements at the dairy.

By monitoring their practices and incorporating new research and technologies, they have seen excellent results.

Among the notable improvements:

• **Sand bedding.** The dairy transitioned from mattresses to sand bedding in the free-stall barn in 2010. The move increased cow comfort and improved milk quality. The Borsts have since earned an AMPI Milk Quality Award for 12 consecutive years. Other cascading effects of the sand bedding include improved locomotion scores, reproductive efficiency and increased milk production. The bedding change also reduced the number of mastitis cases.

• **Calving pen cameras.** Round-the-clock monitoring has lowered the stillbirth rate from 7 percent in 2014 to 1 percent in 2021.

• **Concentration on calves.** “Calves are the future of our herd,” Lindsey said. “Investing time, energy and money into a calf will more than pay for itself when she enters the milking herd.”

  Instituting paired social housing hutches for calves is one practice that contributes to substantial changes in calf health and productivity. Prior to the change in 2014, less than 10 percent of calves were hitting their daily two-pound daily gain goal. Today, about 95 percent are meeting this goal. Calf mortality rates decreased from 7.7 to 1.9 percent.

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Believing animal care and environmental stewardship go hand in hand, the Borsts volunteered to become one of the first AMPI member farms to participate in the new FARM Environmental Stewardship evaluation this year.

“Looking forward, the dairy industry needs to be sustainable in all areas, including welfare wise, socially, financially and environmentally,” Lindsey said.

Whether it’s following FARM guidelines, volunteering for a new program or implementing the latest research, the Borsts are always seeking ways to better meet their mission and ensure a sustainable future. As Lindsey explains:

“We continuously think about what’s next for our farm, so we are, hopefully, never caught standing still.” DD

{ contributing writer Donna F. Abernathy }

SHARING THEIR STORY

Participating in the FARM program encouraged the Borsts to share their commitment to animal care with the community.

“Having a concrete animal care plan in place makes us comfortable sharing our farm with the public,” Lindsey Borst said.

Lindsey serves as the chief guide for the hour-long farm tours. Visitors are invited to “see for yourself how our animals are raised from birth to adulthood and how dairy products get from cow to store.”

In 2021, Borst Family Dairy tours partnered with an award-winning local restaurant to host family ice cream nights on the farm.

Social media allows the Borsts to share their story with thousands on their Facebook, Instagram and TikTok social media channels. They incorporate fun while taking on challenging topics, like cow and calf separation. The Borsts have found their TikTok videos featuring educational topics to be most popular. A recent heat abatement video has eclipsed 12,000 views.

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