

# Hudson Valley co-op formed

By MARK ADAMS

Hudson Valley Fresh is a non-profit cooperative venture launched in March 2005 with the objective of securing a premium price for agricultural producers in New York's Hudson Valley.

Sam Simon, a dairy farmer in Pleasant Valley, N.Y., put the project together with \$500 contributions from prospective members plus a good deal of his own seed capital. The first, and so far the only, branded product is fluid milk. In order to provide a superior product that consumers would buy at a premium price, the members decided to apply a high quality standard, use certain production techniques, and to emphasize the local aspect.

At the time the project was launched, milk prices were sinking to the \$13 per CWT level, and the members figured they needed \$18 to survive. Also, the number of dairy farms in Dutchess County had dwindled to 27 from 250 as recently as 1970, and many local leaders, from legislators to tourism boosters, saw the need to keep farms intact, so the Hudson Valley Fresh plan was welcomed.

The members decided to test all cows twice a day, and to go beyond federal standards for total bacteria count - less than 5,000 per raw milk sample, and somatic cell count - less than 200,000. Cows with an infected quarter would be taken out of production and treated off-line for a week. No rBST would be used, even though a statement on the milk label acknowledges that rBST is not detrimental to animals or humans. Pasteurization would be HTST - 164 degrees for 20 seconds, which is supposed to preserve the milk's flavor.

Hudson Valley Fresh whole milk would be shipped as is, rather than stripped and reconstituted to meet the bare minimum of butterfat standards. And finally, the milk would be bottled and shipped within a few days of milking. Simon takes some extra steps with his 44 milkers, feeding hay four times a day, because the roughage, he says,



**FROM LEFT, KAREN DAVENPORT, Kristen Davenport, Laura Davenport and Jim Davenport at their Tollgate Farm in Mexico, N.Y. The Davenports have been supplying milk to Hudson Valley Fresh since February 2007.**

makes for better milk, and raising his calves on milk for their first four months.

Currently, 10 dairies are participating in the Hudson Valley Fresh program. Through a deal with Agrimark, each farmer's milk is picked up in segregated tankers, and the portion that is needed for Hudson Valley Fresh is delivered to the separate bottling facility at Ronnybrook Farms in Columbia County, just over the Dutchess County line. Any milk not needed for that day's projected HVF production is sold as regular high-quality milk. A typical store that sells a half-gallon of regular whole milk for \$2.09 gets \$2.99 for Hudson Valley Fresh. The Adams Fairacre Farm store in Poughkeepsie sells about 350 half gallons of HVF per week. The members initially receive the normal price for their milk and get an extra payment from the cooperative when vendors pay their bills. Some of this extra money is spent on advertising.

Jim Davenport has been farming 650 acres in Ancramdale since 1993 (and

before that in Connecticut) - with 140 acres in corn and grass hay. He joined HVF last year, and was a good fit, as he is one of six recipients of the National Dairy Quality Platinum award from the National Mastitis Council.

Jim has also received the Dairy Herd Improvement award for 20 years straight. With his wife Karen, who is also a vo-ag teacher/department head, daughters Laura and Kristen (the dairy princess) and a full-time helper, Jim runs an impeccable operation, producing 78 pounds of milk per cow daily. Udders are kept clean and dry, pre-dipped and individually towed off. Cows showing any hint of a problem are kept off-line while being treated.

For a detailed discussion of Jim's sanitation regimen, see the Jan. 10, 2008, issue of Hoard's Dairyman.

Hudson Valley Fresh is currently looking to expand its distribution into the New York City metropolitan area, so it can use all the milk produced by its members and hopefully add new member farms.