

## Steve Strickler – dairy 2

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

"Be a good neighbor." That advice and other words of wisdom from his father have helped this Kansas dairyman be a positive force in his community and the dairy industry. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Steve Strickler is owner of Strickler Holstein Farm near Iola. He follows in the footsteps of his father, a longtime leader in the dairy industry.

Steve grew up on the farm which milked 120 cows at the time. Steve studied dairy science and technical journalism at K-State. After graduation, he worked for a dairy cooperative in Wisconsin and then for a national magazine, Hoard's Dairyman, which took him coast to coast in the U.S. and beyond. He enjoyed the work but the thought of the family dairy farm drew him back home.

"The calling of the farm was too much," Steve said. In 1979, he returned to the farm and eventually took over the operation from his father. Now Steve has three kids and four grandchildren of his own.

Steve's siblings are also in the Iola community. Brother Tom is a banker and brother Doug does the cropping operation, while Steve has expanded the dairy. They credit their father, Ivan Strickler, with leadership and inspiration.

"My dad was a real visionary," Steve said. The first commercial cow embryo was implanted in 1976. The Stricklers started using that breeding technology in the same year.

As artificial insemination became more common as a way to improve quality and production in dairy herds, bulls were kept at breeding services or stud farms. The Stricklers' genetic line was very popular. "In 1985, we sold more bulls to bull studs than any other registered Holstein breeder," Steve said.

The farm continued to expand. In 1999, the Stricklers purchased the Alta Genetics Natural Bull Sales program, which expanded their business from coast to coast. Today the Stricklers milk some 400 Holsteins. By the way, they pronounce the name of the breed Hol-stine because that is the way it was originally pronounced in Europe.

Farmer-owned milk marketing cooperatives represent a way for many dairy farmers to work together and share the costs of handling, hauling, processing and marketing milk.

"Dad was a huge believer in cooperatives," Steve said. "He and others started a dairy co-op named Mid-America Dairyman." Ivan Strickler eventually was elected Mid-Am President and served 13 years. Mid-America Dairyman grew through the years. In 1996, leaders from Mid-America Dairyman and other regional cooperatives met to discuss strategies for dealing with changes in the industry. In 1998, they came together to form Dairy Farmers of America or DFA, the nation's largest dairy cooperative.

One of the current members of the Board of Directors of DFA is Steve Strickler. "I'm quite proud of DFA," Steve said. He's also proud of his father's vision.

“He was so prophetic,” Steve said. “He would say that the biggest challenge to the dairy industry is in educating the consuming public. With each generation becoming even more removed from the farm, many consumers have no idea where their food comes from,” he said.

For decades, the community of Iola had conducted an annual farm-city day to build relationships between urban and rural cousins. “About five years ago, that event almost died,” Steve said. He hated to see it lapse as a vehicle for urban-rural communication, so the Stricklers decided to host it at their farm every year. It is an opportunity to showcase to the public how farmers are using technology and achieving sustainability to conserve resources for the future.

The Strickler Holstein Farm is located near the rural community of Iola, population 5,454 people. Now, that’s rural. Steve wants his neighbors to understand the importance of the production of milk and other farm products.

“Be a good neighbor.” That advice from pioneering dairyman Ivan Strickler has served his son Steve well, along with his other sons Tom and Doug. We commend the Strickler family for making a difference by leading the dairy industry and cooperative businesses. It’s the neighborly thing to do.

And there’s more. Another Kansan serves on the Board of Directors of the Dairy Farmers of America, and we’ll learn about him next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.