



Shuler Dairy focuses on cow comfort with a compost-bedded pack barn and hybrid tunnel ventilation system.



The Michigan Sugar plant processes 4,200 tons of beets a year.

Photos provided by Harold House.

Progressive Dairy Operators tour farms in Michigan and Indiana

Progressive Dairyman Editor **Karen Lee**

In late August, members of Progressive Dairy Operators (PDO) departed across the Great Lakes to tour farms in Michigan and Indiana. The tour was so popular, PDO offered the trip again in October. Most of the locations listed below were on both tours, while some were only on one of the trips offered.

- Aquila Farms LLC, Bad Axe, Michigan – John Verhaar's family home farm with 2,200 Holstein, Swedish Red and Montbéliarde cross cows.

- Aurora Farms, Fairgrove, Michigan – Receiving fresh cows from Aquila Farms, Johnny Verhaar (son of John) and his wife, Maria, milk 750 cows at this site using 12 robots and two employees.

- Bos Dairy LLC, Fair Oaks, Indiana – Tony Bos milks 3,300 cows in a 72-stall rotary parlour. These cows are housed in a cross-ventilated barn with deep-bedded digester solids in the stalls. In addition, six groups of 120 cows each are milked by 12 robots in a 12-row cross-ventilated barn with waterbeds in the stalls.

- Homestead Dairy, Plymouth, Indiana – The Houin family recently built a 400,000-square-foot, cross tunnel-ventilated barn with 24 milking robots. They also have a parlor-based dairy and milk more than 5,000 cows. In addition, the farm has three group-housing calf barns with automated feeders and an anaerobic digester for processing manure.

- WK Kellogg Biological Station, Hickory Corners, Michigan – This



In August, around 100 people filled two coach buses to tour farms in Michigan and Indiana. The group is pictured here outside the MOO-ville Creamery in Nashville, Michigan.



A 72-stall rotary parlour at Vanderploeg Friesians' 3,500-cow dairy in Ithaca, Michigan.

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pasture-based Michigan State University dairy research station has 85 cows rotated twice daily through irrigated pastures. The herd is milked with two robots. In winter, the herd is housed in a six-row, perimeter-fed freestall barn with dual-chamber waterbeds. Research is conducted on managing pasture growth and feeding rates for maximum milk production from grazing.

- **Roto Z Dairy, Snover, Michigan** – This 3,500-cow dairy built by Jake Zwemmer features a 15-row, sand-bedded freestall barn and 100-stall external rotary parlour.

- **Z-Fresh Dairy, Elkton, Michigan** – The Zwemmer family's dry cow and calving facility with a double-12 parlour.

- **Shuler Dairy, Baroda, Michigan** – Located in a heavy tourist area, Bill Shuler focuses on cow comfort with a compost-bedded pack barn, hybrid tunnel ventilation system and two milking robots. The Shulers are hoping to develop a nice market for retail fluid milk and ice cream.

- **Vanderploeg Friesians, Ithaca, Michigan** – Klaas and Mares Vanderploeg combine love of horses and cows at this 3,500-cow dairy equipped with a 72-stall rotary parlour and separate parallel parlour for fresh cows. Sand bedding is used and recycled on-site.

- **Westvale-Vu Dairy, Nashville, Michigan** – This family dairy milks 200 Holsteins with four robots. Milk gravity flows downhill from the dairy to the on-farm creamery, where it is bottled and used to make ice cream, cheese, yogurt smoothies and butter under the MOO-ville Creamery logo.

Non-farm stops included:

- **Michigan Sugar processing plant, Croswell, Michigan** – This sugar beet plant employs 190 people for about 220 days per year processing 4,200 tons of beets into 500 tons of sugar per day.

- **Mensch Manufacturing, Hastings, Michigan** – A manufacturer of bucket and trailer sand and bedding slingers, sand stall grooming equipment, feed pushers and vacuum tankers for sand-laden manure.

- **Fair Oaks Farms, Fair Oaks, Indiana** – The tourist experience at this set of farms built for visitors included the Dairy Adventure, the cheese and yogurt factory, the birthing barn and the bus tour of the barns, the 72-stall rotary parlor and the digester, followed by lunch in the Farm House restaurant. 🐾



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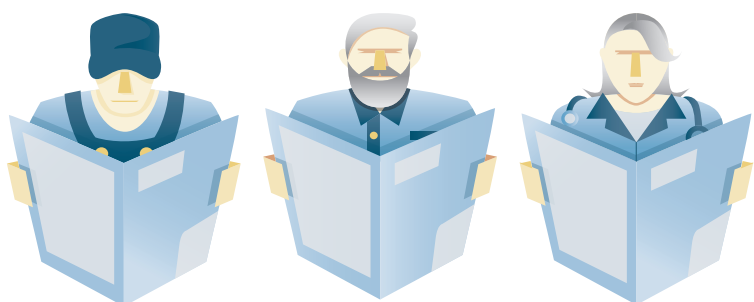
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