



DGA campus model envisions 15 to 20 mid-sized grazing dairies within a 20-mile radius, combining the efficiencies of a 3,000 to 4,000-cow dairy with independently owned farms.

## Grass Fed Dairy Has Big Potential

Billions of dollars in imports from grass-fed dairies in Ireland, New Zealand and Australia are up for grabs, according to Joe Tomandl. He's a Wisconsin dairyman and the Dairy Grazing Alliance (DGA) executive director.

"We're looking at a \$6.9 billion market for grass-fed dairy products by 2031," says

Tomandl. "A single Irish dairy brand sells a billion dollars' worth of butter in the U.S. today. It's time to build out our grass-fed dairy sector."

The DGA consists of dairy farmers, technical support organizations, government agencies, financing institutions and others. It's focused on scaling up not only the viability

of production systems, but also financing, market development, farm profitability, research, policy and advocacy for dairy grazing.

Tomandl started the Dairy Grazing Apprentice program in 2010 to jumpstart the next generation of managed grazing dairies. Since then, it's provided more than 750,000 hours of training to aspiring dairy farmers in 16 states. The DGA was started to boost that sector from cow to consumer. It now houses the apprentice program.

"We launched the alliance last year to scale up managed grazing dairy to meet the consumer demand," says Tomandl. "We have to hit production, but also efficiency of scale."

Conventional dairies have scaled up rapidly in recent years, increasingly with thousands of cows per farm. Dairy processors often refuse to pick up less than truckload volumes.

"When we looked at managed grazing, we could never see how to scale up as well," says Tomandl. "We have to figure out how to do it, which is what the alliance is doing."

Tomandl's own managed grazing dairy is a template for DGA's Dairy Grazing Development Campus. He and his wife, Christy, started their first dairy farm in 1998,

grazing 35 cows on an 80-acre farm. Today, they manage three grass-fed dairies with 175 to 200 head each, all on nearby farms.

"We aren't 550 cows under one dairy, but we can still put together a semi load of milk every other day," says Tomandl. "As an industry, we need to look at 150 to 200-cow dairies. They can be independently owned, but ship to the same pool."

The DGA campus would take that template to the next level, envisioning 15 to 20 mid-sized grazing dairies within a 20-mile radius. This model combines the efficiencies of a 3,000 to 4,000-cow dairy with independently owned farms.

While it's unclear if it'll ever be developed, the template has been proven. DGA is moving forward to promote it and explore its market potential.

"There's no simple solution where, if the market wants it, it just happens," says Tomandl. "We need to get the efficiencies in place and line up all the pieces in the supply chain."

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Lange could round up 95% of any livestock in his helicopter in a fraction of the time the cowboys would take.

## Chopper Cattle Chasing Is Still A Good Business

Aubrey Lange has chased cattle, captured wildlife, hunted predators and wild hogs, and much more, all from the seat of a helicopter. None of it was as dangerous or challenging as being a medevac "Dustoff" pilot in Vietnam. After two tours in Vietnam, he returned home to Texas. A suggestion from

a friend got him back in the pilot's seat.

"They suggested using a helicopter to round up cattle," says Lange.

Lange's cattle punching was described in multiple articles in his early years, including in FARM SHOW (Vol. 3, No. 5). From the start, the business was good for him and his

customers. He maintains that helicopter cattle punching is easier on the cattle than with cowboys on horseback and more effective.

While the noise and downdraft are often enough to get the cattle moving, Lange equipped his helicopter with a siren and loudspeaker. He points out that it's almost impossible for cattle to hide from a helicopter. As a result, he could guarantee rounding up 95% of any livestock in a fraction of the time the cowboys would take.

Starting out, he charged \$145 per hour for a roundup. In one job, he covered 12,000 acres and brought in 900 head in 5 1/2 hrs. Compare that with the number of cowboys and days they would have needed for the job. It's easy to see why Lange stayed busy.

In a 1980 article, he described it this way: "Let's say you put out 500 cows, and the cowboys bring in 475. A lot of people with good cowboys would charge those other 25 head off to death loss and be satisfied. I can go in and bring out 495 in two or three hours, and most likely spot the remains of those who did die."

When Lange wasn't chasing cattle, he

was rounding up sheep and goats, making wildlife counts, and spotting forest and grassland fires. Lange and his wife and partner, J. Ann, also added pipeline services to the wildlife and livestock work. In 1994, he was trained to use a netgun for exotic animal retrieval.

More than 40 years later, Lange Helicopters is still chasing cattle, as well as sheep, goats, horses and buffalo. They work with ranches from Texas to Arizona.

Robinson R22 helicopters have been a mainstay of the business. He purchased his first one in 1981 and accumulated 21,000 hours operating it and newer R22s over the next 40-plus years.

The Langes recently turned over the business to their son Kyle, a helicopter pilot himself since 2001. "Now it's up to him to see where he takes the business," says Lange.

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## She's Making Wine With Unusual Fruits

Dakota Sun Winery of Williston, N.D., aims to introduce wine drinkers to fresh and innovative flavors. "The Winery started over a decade ago with founders Bruce and Merleen Gussiaas," says current owner Devin Quick. "They experimented with wine on their little farmstead, eventually evolving into a business. Bruce has perfected many recipes, and his wine has won several awards, including the Jefferson Cup, the Indianapolis International Wine Competition, the San Francisco Wine Competition and more."

"I stopped in one day for a tasting," says Quick. "I thought the wines were great and asked so many questions about the wine-making process that Bruce and Merleen admitted they were looking to retire and sell the business. It was a no-brainer for me, and the rest is history."

The Winery has earned a reputation for experimenting with unusual fruits and flavor profiles. Quick shares that there isn't much difference between making wine with various fruits compared to grapes. "Making wine is both a science and an art.

You're trying to balance flavor with acidity, body and alcohol content." She shares that winemakers adjust these factors based on their chosen fruit. "Crabapple, for example, is very acidic and makes your mouth pucker. That's good for winemaking, but it's low in sugar, so I need to add more at the beginning to make a wine with 10% to 11% alcohol content."

Haskap is the winery's most popular variety, though aronia and rhubarb-raspberry come close. "It's funny because most of our customers have never heard of haskap (also called honeyberry or blue honeysuckle), but when they taste it, it brings out a trio of flavors in their mouth with the perfect acidity," Quick says.

"Aronia, also called chokeberry, grows everywhere in North Dakota, though few people have tried it. It's popular in windbreaks. People love it in our wine. Aronia is a superfruit, very high in antioxidants."

Rhubarb remains popular, partly because of nostalgia. "Many people recall eating a straight rhubarb stalk, maybe dipped in sugar, and they share stories of their grandma's

making rhubarb pies and jellies. Lots of good memories for folks," says Quick.

Taking ownership of an established winery comes with challenges. "Many people thought we'd shut down entirely, but I just moved locations from Carrington to Williston," Quick says. "And branding and marketing remain a struggle. The wine speaks for itself once you taste it; it's delightful. But if you don't know we exist, you don't know to grab a bottle."

Quick challenges readers to expand their wine palates by experimenting with unique varieties.

"If the 1976 Judgment of Paris taught us anything, it's that what you don't know might surprise you," she says. The Judgement set up French and California wines in a blind tasting, with French as the historic favorite. The judges shocked the wine world by choosing all California varieties, putting Napa Valley wines on the map.

"Who says the same can't happen for North Dakota?" Quick says. "Give Dakota Sun Winery a try."

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