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Dairy industry boosts economy

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VERIBEST — Ezequiel “Ike” Tapia has seen the dairy business evolve from a few head he started milking by hand on his father’s dairy in Mexico to the 3,500 head that are milked mechanically at Tapia Dairy No. 3, two miles north of here.

The second milking time of two 10-hour shifts just finished as we entered the shed Tuesday afternoon. Eighty cows are milked at one time.

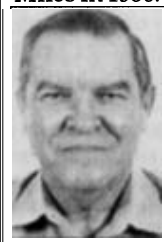
Ernie Tapia, 31, is president of Tapia Dairy. He said the truckloads of milk leaving the dairy at Veribest, 12 miles east of San Angelo, are sold to Dairy Farmers of America Co-Op, which takes care of processing and distribution. The milk is tested before loading and is tested several times during processing to ensure safety.

On a tour, Tapia pointed to a patch of small grain being irrigated. He said water is recycled three times from washing the barn between milkings to finally being used to irrigate the crops.

The average dairy farm uses about 44 gallons of water per cow each day, compared with an average 125 gallons of daily water usage per person in the United States.

“There are 27 employees at this dairy, including my family,” Ike Tapia said. Locally produced corn is cut for fodder and fed the Holstein dairy cows along with grain sorghum, Tapia said, while pointing to a commodity barn.

Ike first worked on a dairy farm in Arizona when he left Mexico as a teenager. Later, he entered the dairy business on his own in New Mexico before buying the C.H. Ray Dairy Farm near Miles in 1986. There are no cows currently being milked at



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Tapia Dairy No. 1 or No. 2, but the two locations are feeding facilities for young heifers that will be future milk cows.

According to the Texas Association of Dairymen, approximately 800 dairy farmers in the state produce more than 656 million gallons of milk per year.

The industry not only benefits Texas consumers but also provides a tremendous boost to local and state economies.

“Monies received for milk benefits the people of San Angelo five times through economic impact,” Tapia said. “About 65 percent of our income goes

for feed, 13 percent for labor, and the rest is spent on equipment and other things.”

At least eight dairies in the San Angelo area not only produce milk but support the local economy by employing people and seeking services of veterinarians, equipment dealers, feed manufacturers and dealers, dieticians, banks and retail services.

In a recent study conducted by Tarleton State University at Stephenville, Erath County is the highest milk-producing county in Texas. Employment accounting for 31 percent in the Erath dairy business breaks down to 1,980 on the county’s dairy farms and an additional 3,932 jobs linked to the dairy industry. The Erath County dairy industry also creates 5,014 jobs in other counties.

According to the study, the Erath County dairy industry produces \$123 million in income, about 18 percent of the total personal income in the county.

Erath dairies generated nearly \$1 million in county taxes paid by dairy farmers. In addition, \$9.4 million in taxes was paid directly and indirectly from the presence of the dairy industry in Erath County.

Milk production in the 23 major states during November totaled 14 billion pounds, up 1.4 percent from a year ago, according to the latest survey by the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Production per cow in the 23 major states averaged 1,657 pounds.

The number of milk cows on farms in the 23 major states was 8.47 million head, 99,000 head more than a year before, according to the NASS report.

Dairy Farmers of America Inc. is a milk marketing cooperative with more than 18,000 members representing more than 10,000 dairy farms in 48 states.

DFA’s mission is to deliver value to its members through its core business of marketing members’ milk, paying a competitive price and providing leadership in the industry.

The DFA, headquartered in Kansas City, Mo., was formed in 1998 through the merger of four dairy cooperatives: Associated Milk Producers, Inc.; Mid-America Dairymen, Inc.; Milk Marketing, Inc.; and Western Dairymen Cooperative, Inc.

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