



## **June Dairy Month with John Mitchell Expanding: Farm and Family**

John Mitchell of Winnebago, IL was very eager to share his story after a morning of birthing calves and breeding cows. This is a typical day on the Mitchell Farm, which is located just outside of Winnebago.

One thing you might find interesting while walking through the barns of Mitchell Farm is that all of their 500 head of cattle are female. Now, we know that the 320 they milk are girls. But, it's interesting to discover that every bovine creature on the farm is female. The bull calves are sold soon after birth and are raised for beef and since they use an artificial insemination breeding system, there is no need for a bull.



John and Katie Mitchell with one of their cows.

The Mitchells have a bright future ahead of them. They recently finished the process of building a new free-stall barn. These types of barns are used to house the cows while they are not being milked. It creates a nice warm, dry place for the cows to stay comfortable in. The barn that was raised at the Mitchell farm holds 370 milking cows and will also house up to 50 of the cows who are close to calving. That's a total of 420 stalls altogether.

Besides the new barn, the Mitchells have already added a new manure pit and new manure transfer system to their farm. Expanding an already running farm is tough, but it is worth it and the Mitchells realize that. The Mitchells will be one of the first farms in Illinois to bed their cattle with separated manure solids.

“Basically the manure will run through a separator that will take all of the water out and then drop into a press that will squeeze the fiber out of the manure, and then we will turn around and bed them with it,” said Mitchell “The end product looks like corn silage, but of course it’s brown. So, when the system is completed it will be fairly revolutionary.”

Taking strides towards expansion causes a lot of controversy. It makes some think that the idea of a family farm is being lost. This is not the case for the Mitchell family. “We’re not just a ‘Mega Dairy’. We do have employees. Many of them are local people that, because we are a larger scale farm, are able to stay in the area and work in agriculture,” said Mitchell “But, they are a part of the community too. Our economic benefits extend well beyond ourselves and we are excited to be a growing part of the future of Agriculture!” (Published June 3, 2015)

#### Updated

Since this article was published, Mitchell dairy farm is now milking about 420 cows with a total of 900 head which includes all the young stock. (Updated July 13, 2020 by Chloe Gustafson, WBFB 2020 intern)