

(ANC)

THE AMERICAN DAIRY INDUSTRY SEEMS TO BE DYING, AND SMALL FARMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE BEING FORCED TO CUT COSTS OR SHUTDOWN COMPLETELY. N-C-C'S BRIAN FORD REPORTS HOW THE CURRENT SATE OF THE INDUSTRY IS EFFECTING TWO UPSTATE NEW YORK FARMERS.

[TAKE :NAT SOUND

NAME:COWS

DURATION:0'03"]

(Cows Mooing)

(BRIAN)

35-YEAR-OLD MIKE MIEDEMA IS THE OWNER OF PEACEFUL VALLEY DAIRY FARM IN WESTTOWN, NEW YORK.

HE HAS BEEN FARMING FOR THE LAST 15 YEARS AND CURRENTLY MILKS 90 COWS.

FOR MIKE, BEING A FARMER ISN'T JUST A CAREER, IT'S A LIFESTYLE.

HE AND HIS FAMILY LIVE IN A HOUSE IN FRONT OF THE BARNYARD WHERE HE WORKS FOR UP TO 15 HOURS A DAY, EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR.

HE RUNS THE FARM MOSTLY BY HIMSELF, EXCEPT FOR THE HELP OF ONE WORKER WHO DOES THE NIGHTTIME MILKING.

MIEDEMA JOKES ABOUT HAVING NO LIFE WITH A TYPICAL DAY STARTING AT STARTING AT 5 IN THE MORNING.

[TAKE SOT

NAME:Mike Miedema

DURATION:0'24"]

(" wake up Go to the barn, milk, I feed all the cows , bed them all up, clean the barn then I go off an do anything else- if I gotta clean other pens or in the summertime obviously were in the field- theres always something to do and then at 3 go back to the barn, start over again and usually about by 7/7:30 I've had about enough.")

(BRIAN)

MIEDEMA WAS DRAWN TO FARMING AFTER TESTING OUT OTHER JOBS AND REALIZING COWS ARE EASIER TO WORK WITH THAN PEOPLE.

HE LOVES THE ANIMALS, AND SAYS HE TREATS THEM WITH CARE AND RESPECT. AND ALTHOUGH IT REQUIRES A LOT OF WORK, MIEDEMA SAYS HIS FAVORITE THING ABOUT FARMING IS THE LIFESTYLE.

BUT THE DAIRY INDUSTRY IS CHANGING; DWINDLING MILK PRICES HAVE CAUSED MIEDEMA'S MARGINS TO GET TIGHTER AND TIGHTER.

[TAKE SOT

NAME:Mike Miedema

DURATION:0'21"]

(" It used to run in a cycle, three years of lower milk prices, then you get 1 decent year then you get a good year then it goes back the other way. Now it seems like it's all down – it's almost like the cycles don't exist no more. It's getting harder and harder to stay in business.")

(BRIAN)

AND MIEDEMA ISN'T ALONE, MANY FARMERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE STRUGGLING AS CONSUMERS ARE MOVING AWAY FROM DAIRY AND STARTING TO PREFER PLANT-BASED ALTERNATIVES.

SINCE THE MILK PRICE IS REGULATED BY THE GOVERNMENT, LOWER CONSUMPTION MEANS LOWER PRICES

DAIRY FARMS ARE BEING FORCED TO SELL THEIR COW'S MILK FOR LESS THAN WHAT IT COSTS TO PRODUCE.

THE PRICE OF MILK WAS SO LOW THAT EARLIER THIS YEAR IT WAS REPORTED THAT SOME FARMERS RECEIVED MILK CHECKS WITH SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE NUMBERS PRINTED ON THEM.

ACCORDING TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, THERE WERE NEARLY 650 THOUSAND DAIRY FARMS IN THE U-S IN 1970, BUT THAT NUMBER HAS

SHRUNK TO JUST 40 THOUSAND AT THE END OF 2017.

MIEDEMA THINKS IT'S SAD THAT THE INDUSTRY HAS REACHED THIS POINT AND HE HATES SEEING GOOD FARMERS GIVING UP.

DEAN VELLENGA IS A FORMER DAIRY FARMER WHO GREW UP ON A FARM ABOUT FOUR MILES DOWN THE ROAD FROM PEACEFUL VALLEY DAIRY.

THE 37-YEAR-OLD LOVES THE WAY HE WAS RAISED AND BEGAN FARMING ON HIS OWN OVER 12 YEARS AGO IN HOPES OF GIVING HIS NOW FOUR CHILDREN A SIMILAR UPBRINGING TO HIMSELF.

[TAKE SOT

NAME:Dean Vellenga

DURATION:0'07"]

(" I mean some of my best memories as growing up was being on the farm and I always wanted to have that kind of lifestyle for my kids.")

(BRIAN)

VELLENGA OPERATED HIS OWN FARM JUST HALF A MILE FROM PEACEFUL VALLEY DAIRY UNTIL THE END OF THIS SUMMER WHEN HE DECIDED TO SELL HIS COWS AND SHUT DOWN.

BEFORE HE SOLD OUT, HIS DAYS BEGAN AT 4:30 IN THE MORNING WHEN HE WOULD GO MILK HIS 74 COWS.

VELLENGA REALLY VALUES FAMILY TIME, SO ONCE HE WAS DONE WITH HIS MORNING TASKS, HE WAS ABLE TO GO HOME AND EAT BREAKFAST WITH HIS KIDS BEFORE THEY WENT TO SCHOOL.

HE WOULD THEN GO BACK THE FARM TO DO WHATEVER CHORES NEEDED TO BE DONE BEFORE HE HAD TO MILK THE COWS ONCE MORE AND THEN COMPLETE THE REST OF HIS DAILY TASKS TO BE HOME IN TIME FOR DINNER.

HE CONSIDERS FARMING A LABOR OF LOVE, AND IT'S SOMETHING HE DOES LOVE, BUT IT GOT TO A POINT WHERE THE MONEY HE WAS MAKING WASN'T WORTH THE AMOUNT OF EFFORT HE WAS PUTTING IN.

[TAKE SOT

NAME:Dean Vellenga

DURATION:0'04"]

(" We have to milk more cows to make the same amount of money on the same milk prices we were 30 years ago.")

(BRIAN)

VELLENGA IS NOW WORKING FOR A PAVING COMPANY.

AND ALTHOUGH HE LIKES HAVING MORE TIME OFF AT HIS NEW JOB, HE WISHES HE COULD STILL SEE HIS KIDS DURING THE DAY.

HE MISSES FARMING TREMENDOUSLY-- BUT TO HIM THE DECISION TO SELL WAS JUSTIFIED.

[TAKE SOT

NAME:Dean Vellenga

DURATION:0'05"]

(" The future for me was so dim- It was like get out now before it gets worse.")

(BRIAN)

BOTH MIEDEMA AND VELLENGA ARE OR WERE MEMBERS OF DAIRY FARMERS OF AMERICA.

DFA IS A MILK MARKETING COOPERATIVE, WHICH MEANS THEY HAVE FARMER MEMBERS AROUND THE COUNTRY WHOSE MILK IS PICKED UP AND THEN SOLD BY THEM.

THEY ALSO OFFER A VARIETY OF FARM SERVICES TO HELP MEMBER FARMERS WITH THINGS LIKE LOWERING PRODUCTION COSTS AND RISK MANAGEMENT ALONG WITH OTHERS.

DFA COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER NICHOLE OWENS SAYS THERE'S NO DENYING THIS IS A STRESSFUL TIME FOR DAIRY FARMERS.

[TAKE SOT

NAME:Nichole Owens

DURATION:0'12"]

(" We've seen a sustained low milk price for the past four years or more but really the crux of it all is the dairy industry is changing.")

(BRIAN)

OWENS ACKNOWLEDGES THAT MILK CONSUMPTION IS DECLINING, BUT BELIEVES DAIRY WILL ALWAYS HAVE A ROLE IN HOUSEHOLDS.

SHE PREDICTS THAT THE DEMAND FOR DAIRY PROTEINS WILL INCREASE AS TIME GOES ON, WHICH WOULD BE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR DAIRY FARMERS IN THE FUTURE.

BUT UNTIL FARMERS START MAKING MORE MONEY, IT'S LIKELY THAT MORE AND MORE FARMS WILL BE FORCED TO SHUT DOWN.

I'M BRIAN FORD, N-C-C NEWS.

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