



## “From Moo to You”- A Look at Vale Wood Farms

By Molly Gildea, Asst. Manager of Marketing & Communications

Bill Ittle of Vale Wood Farms joined the Pennsylvania DHIA Board of Directors in 1986 and became a Dairy One board member when Pennsylvania DHIA joined Dairy One in 2001. I had the opportunity to sit down with his daughter, Carissa, and chat about the 200 cows they milk, their milk and dairy processing, the farm store, and their milk delivery service. Vale Wood Farms has been delivering milk to their Cresson, PA community since 1933. Not only can you buy their milk at some local stores and on the farm, but they also deliver milk and other dairy products to several thousand homes each week.

While the Ittle family has been farming for 6 generations, Vale Wood Farms has been in operation as a business for 4 generations. “1933 was the year that my great grandpap decided to take milk into Cresson. He made our very first home delivery with horse and wagon,” recalls Carissa. And that is where the *Moo to You* story of Vale Wood Farms began. “We deliver milk to a couple thousand customers each week within an hour radius of the farm,” explains Carissa. “We’re committed to bringing a fresh, quality product to our customers, getting the milk from “moo to you” in about a day’s time.” In addition to processing their own milk, Vale Wood also processes milk from other small dairies in the area, further contributing to the sense of community found at Vale Wood Farms.

Like most dairy farms, Vale Wood has had to make some management changes to adjust to the current milk environment. “Do we have a magic bullet to solve the price down turn? We really don’t. We’re doing our best to tighten our belts and get through it like everyone else.” A big factor Carissa focuses on in her role as Business Development Manager is efficiency, especially when it comes to more costly aspects of the business, like feed and labor. Carissa explains that they always strive to make high quality forage, but Mother Nature often seems to determine the end result. One tool that helps to manage their feed is PCDART. “PCDART is really important in keeping track of all the herd dynamics, as well as things like income over feed costs, rations by groups, and other factors from a cost standpoint,” says Carissa. “It’s a really invaluable tool to me.” PCDART is also where data from MUN analyses is stored, which is another tool Carissa uses when it comes to managing feed. “We watch MUN closely to ensure our ration is balanced, but that’s also data that we share with our nutritionist,” Carissa explains.



PCDART is also used by Vale Wood employees. Vale Wood Farms employs about 40 people, a mixture of Ittle family members and non-family members. Carissa is responsible for helping her employees be more effective and efficient, and PCDART allows both her and her employees access to valuable herd information.

The Vale Wood team has discussed new technology such as herd monitoring systems to increase labor efficiency but will likely stick to their hands-on herd management for now. When asked what’s on her wish list as far as new technology, Carissa mentions herd monitoring systems. “The chatter around it seems to be increasing, and we’ll watch the price, but right now we have a really great team that does a phenomenal job with herd health and reproduction.”

Of course, one of the things that is most unique about Vale Wood is that they process and sell their own dairy products. This affects the way they manage their business and their cows in several ways. They are extra mindful of supply and demand. Their busiest time of year is the start of school moving into the fall. “While it would be great to have a bunch of baby calves in the spring, that’s not effective for our business,” Carissa explains. Using reproductive metrics from PCDART, Carissa and the rest of the herd management staff do their best to align their reproductive program with their busy season. “We’re not allows perfect,” Carissa points out, “but it’s certainly something we’re mindful of when it comes to reproduction.”



Quality is another important factor for Vale Wood Farms. “We’re so mindful that the milk we deliver to someone was inside a cow yesterday”, says Carissa. “SCC and other quality parameters we receive from DHIA testing are very important to us. Quality dairy products begin with high quality milk. Our milk has to taste good for people to want to buy it,” says Carissa. Carissa explains that there really is no middle man to intercept a complaint about their products. If someone is going to complain about the taste or shelf life a product made with milk from Vale Wood cows, they’re complaining directly to Vale Wood Farms. There is no middle man to take the fall. “We really have such a responsibility of creating demand for our milk in the market,” explained Carissa. “It’s a benefit and tremendous responsibility to manage your own destiny.”

When asked about what keeps her excited about her job, Carissa smiles. “We’ll be out to dinner in town and someone will stop and say they’ve had milk delivered for 3 generations and ‘Your grandpap was my milk man!’. I mean, that’s amazing,” she says. “To have that kind of support from your community is humbling.”

To learn more about Vale Wood Farms and their dairy delivery, visit [www.valewoodfarms.com](http://www.valewoodfarms.com). For more information about PCDART and other Dairy One Services, call 800-344-2697 or visit our website at [www.dairyone.com](http://www.dairyone.com).

