

Hart Dairy 1908-2024....The End of an Era

In 1908, John William "Willie" Hart began milking a few cows on this farm land that we stand on today that lies along the Illinois river in Prairie Grove, AR. This land was passed down for generations during the 1800's and 1900's. In the beginning, Willie sold the cream and fed the milk to the hogs. He milked in a loft barn with 6 stalls. He had no idea this farm would bring him and his family through the Great Depression and remain in existence for the next 116 years.

In 1921, Willie had a son, Everett Hart who was the next to take over the dairy operations. As a young man, Everett was drafted into the army for 3 ½ years. While he was away, his wife, Dorothy and sister, Thelda kept the farm going. Once he came back from his service, he built a new dairy barn with 6 stalls and a front milk room. The milk was stored and kept cool in large milk cans. In 1955, you could make more money if you produced Grade A milk, so Everett built a new milk barn with a pipe line and a 200 gallon bulk tank to meet the requirements. He milked this way until 1968. During his time operating the dairy, he purchased the farm from his mother, known as "Ma" Hart, for \$30,000.

Everett had a son in 1949, John Robert Hart. John married Carolyn Sue Umber son in June of 1968 at which time he began milking cows, but he increased the number of milk cows from 38 to 80. In 1979, John Robert and Carolyn built a Double 6 Herringbone milk barn which served up to 140 milk cows at one point He bought the farm from his father for \$200,000. John Robert's goal for his farm was to have a super clean and dry environment This took lot of effort You could not find a cleaner dairy than this anywhere in Arkansas. Hart Dairy was the first organic dairy farm in Arkansas and remained organic for several years. In the past few years some hired help came on board to help with the milking, Bobby and Roy Doss and others, yet John Robert and Carolyn have remained 100% involved with the day to day operations until now.

This dairy, small but successful, has supported multiple families over the years. John Robert and Carolyn raised 2 children on this farm who learned a strong work ethic from them both, and even though they didn't get everything they wanted, they always had everything they needed. This is a bittersweet time for the Hart family, as John Robert has called an end to the dairy operations as of May 15, 2024. As the black and white spots go away, there will be brown or black cows to take the place of the Holsteins. Still in his Big Smith overalls, John Robert plans to raise beef cattle for the rest of his time here on this fine little piece of land where the Illinois River bends, and as always, with Carolyn Sue by his side.

John Robert says he never would have made it if it weren't for the help of loving parents and a wonderful wife. Today, I am reminded of the importance of family, heritage, and valuing where I came from. As this family gathers here today, ultimately this is a time to reflect on your own history. Never forget where you came from and remember to thank those who came before you while you still can. life is short. make the best of every day. Let's celebrate the successes today and appreciate the ending of an era as it is an opening for a new one.