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Lost Lake Farm field day will explore grass-based dairying, on-farm cheese production – Aug. 14, Jewell

JEWELL, Iowa — Starting any kind of farm is fraught with financial challenges and uncertainty, but some kinds of farms – dairies among them – are especially difficult to start and operate profitably.

Kevin and Ranae Dietzel, of Lost Lake Farm LLC, are beginning grass-based dairy farmers who devised a unique solution to that dilemma: They built an on-farm cheesery to turn their milk into artisanal cheese. This lets them operate the farm with low capital needs while turning their milk into a high-value product.

“Lost Lake Farm offers a novel approach to profitable and sustainable farming in central Iowa,” Kevin says.

He and Ranae will share their experience with starting a new business at a Practical Farmers of Iowa field day they are hosting on **Monday, Aug. 14, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., near Jewell** (2366 295th St., a few miles northwest of town). The event – “Grass-Based Dairy Farming and Value-Added Cheese Production” – is free to attend and will feature a potluck lunch following the field day. Lost Lake Farm will provide meat and cheese; guests are asked to bring a side dish to share.

Please RSVP for the meal to Debra Boekholder, debra@practicalfarmers.org or (515) 232-5661, by Thursday, Aug. 10. The field day is sponsored by Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District, Iowa Farmers Union, Town and Country Insurance, Welter Seed and Honey Co. and Wheatsfield Co-op.

The field day will start with a tour of the cheesery and milking facilities, which were built in 2016. Kevin and Ranae will discuss the challenges of starting a new business – from designing and building facilities, to navigating regulations, to developing marketing and growth strategies, to managing scarce time and resources.

During a pasture walk, Kevin will discuss his cattle genetics and breeding philosophy. Guests will learn about stocking density, pasture residue and rest periods; see the Dietzels’ water and fence set-up; and talk about nutritional management for a grass-fed system. Kevin and Ranae will also discuss how biodynamic production practices influence the flavor of their cheeses.

“The field day will focus mostly on the farm side of the operation: cows, forages and grazing management in a grass-fed system,” Kevin says. “Guests should leave with an increased understanding of one farm’s approach to grazing management, cow nutrition, dairy cow genetic selection and starting a farm with relatively little infrastructure or equipment.”

Lost Lake Farm LLC is a small grass-fed cow dairy that produces artisanal cheese in an on-farm cheesery. Kevin and Ranae, along with their two children, manage a herd of 18 milk cows. The cows are a mix of breeds, but are bred to Normande, a French breed known to produce milk that makes quality cheese. The farm includes 80 acres of pasture and hay. Cattle are rotated through the pastures twice daily, and the Dietzels hire someone to make their hay.

Directions from Jewell: From U.S. 69, turn west onto 330th Street. Go 4.2 miles and turn right (north) on County Road 38 / Neely Avenue. In 3.5 miles, turn right (east) on 295th Street and go 1.3 miles; the farm is on the south side of the road.

Practical Farmers' 2017 field days are supported by several sustaining and major sponsors, including: Ag Ventures Alliance; Albert Lea Seed; Center for Rural Affairs; Fertrell; Gandy Cover Crop Seeders; Grain Millers, Inc.; Iowa Beef Center; Iowa Environmental Council; Iowa State University Department of Agronomy; Iowa Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE); ISU Extension and Outreach; La Crosse Forage and Turf Seed; Lemken; Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture; MOSA Organic Certification; Natural Resources Defense Council; Organic Valley / Organic Prairie; Riverside Feeds, LLC; The Scoular Company; Trees Forever; Unilever; University of Iowa College of Public Health (I-CASH); Upper Iowa Audubon Society; USDA: Natural Resources Conservation Service; Wallace Chair for Sustainable Agriculture; and Welter Seed & Honey Co.

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