

The Borba Family

Dairy Family Spotlight

» On a dairy a few miles south of Bakersfield, a machine that looks like a cross between a tractor and a steamroller glides slowly up and down the shaded lanes of a large dairy barn. Twice a day, while cows are away in the milking parlor, the machine appears and vacuums up manure from the lanes. The manure is removed to a nearby field where it is soon to be incorporated, enriching the soil with organic nutrients to fertilize the next crop of corn.

It's just one of the many innovative and sustainable environmental management techniques third-generation dairy farmer George Borba Jr. employs to ensure that his dairy is as environmentally sensitive as possible.

"We're a lot more environmentally aware these days," Borba says. "We have a lot more knowledge, more tools, and we're using them. And we're learning all the time."

Borba relocated his dairy to Kern County in 2003—a big move for his family, which had been dairying in the Chino area east of Los Angeles since the 1920s. Faced with increasing urban encroachment, it was a logical move for a family steeped in dairying tradition but also thinking about the future.

"It was kind of hard to make the move after being in Chino so long, but we were thinking of the future, a future for our kids," Borba says.

The Borba dairy was the first in California to undergo the highest level of environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (or CEQA), known as an Environmental Impact Report. The dictionary-thick report assesses every environmental aspect of the dairy and includes detailed engineering and management plans to minimize potential impacts to local air and water quality.

Even today, Borba continues to look for ways to improve environmental management on the dairy. He has even personally paid for studies to determine the best ways to further reduce emissions. He hopes it's a way to guarantee his children a chance to continue in a family tradition that began when his grandfather Pete emigrated from the Azores in 1918 with just a sixth-grade education and a burning desire for a better life. Family legend has it that Pete crossed the country in a cattle car with 6 cents and five loaves of bread. He found a job milking cows in California, and within a few years started his own dairy.

"It's a great family life," Borba says. "Your children are there with you on the ranch, and you can teach them a work ethic, and responsibility. It's our heritage."

