

The Hilarides Family

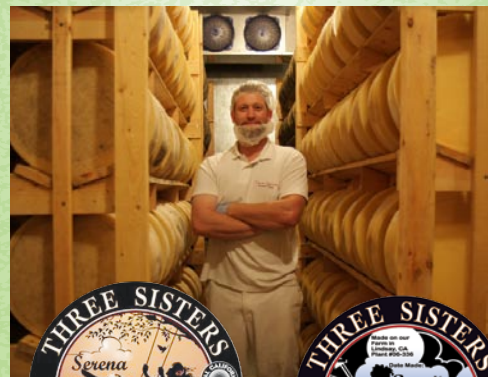
Dairy Family Spotlight

» The Hilarides Dairy, located just northwest of Lindsay in Tulare County, is one of the largest Jersey cow herds in California. The Hilarides family milks 9,000 cows, primarily Jerseys, which produce milk that is especially suitable for making cheese. An additional 9,000 support stock—dairy heifers, calves and dry cows—are part of the operation. The Hilarides family also raises about 4,000 beef steers. Rob Hilarides and his son-in-law Anthony Simoes manage day-to-day operations of the dairy. In addition to the dairy, the family operates an on-site farmstead gourmet cheese manufacturing facility. Marisa Simoes, daughter of Rob and Jeannie, manages the cheese operation and markets her prize-winning Three Sisters “Serena” and “Serenita” cheeses in specialty markets around the world.

Environmental sustainability has been a hallmark of the Hilarides family dairy from day one. The now-defunct Lindsay Olive Growers cooperative once operated a series of brine treatment ponds where the milking facility and cheese operation stand today. When the olive operation was sold, the City of Lindsay inherited the site, which was essentially a 160-acre bowl that captured rainwater runoff, exacerbating infiltration of salt to local groundwater. Remediation costs were \$10 million—something the city could not afford. The Hilarides family was able to provide a viable alternative by filling in the former brine ponds with compacted soil, “capping” them with concrete and clay, creating the footprint of the milking facility. Rain no longer can infiltrate the brine pond, and the threat to groundwater has been greatly reduced.

Another sustainable feature of this dairy is its biogas digester, a covered lagoon which captures biogas from manure to generate renewable “green” energy that is used to supply the dairy’s electricity needs.

The Hilarides family has a long history in the dairy business. Rob’s grandparents, Bob and Maaike, both Dutch immigrants, first operated a dairy in the Long Beach area in 1930. Rob’s parents, Frank and Lois, operated dairies in Cerritos and Ontario. Rob and Jeannie moved to Tulare County in 1980 to raise their family; they operated a milk-hauling business and heifer ranch prior to opening the new dairy in 2003.



David Schultz is cheesemaker for Three Sisters Farmstead Cheese. The company’s award-winning Serena and Serenita cheeses are handmade and aged in a small facility located at the dairy, using milk from the Hilarides’ Jersey cows. Tours are available by appointment. You can learn more by visiting their website at www.threesisterscheese.com.