



Jimmy Eggert grew up on the family farm, Oxhill Organics, learning all about regenerative and organic farming practices and the importance of healthy food. Now, after just finishing high school, he has set up his own farm and business, Hastings Riverlands Milk, where he is producing high quality milk and yoghurt, and as he grows is looking to add cream and cheese to his offerings.

Can you tell us about your background and how you got into regenerative dairy farming?

I grew up in Redbank, at the family farm Oxhill Organics, so my passion for farming and organics was instilled in me from a young age. The farm at Redbank milks around 200 cows, and supplies milk to Norco Organic. It has been certified organic since 2003, and over time we have seen firsthand the improvements in animal health, soil quality and the quality of the milk and eggs we produce. It is because of this strong regenerative background and the wealth of knowledge that my family has gifted me, that I became interested in regenerative dairy farming, and letting people know where good food comes from.

What inspired you to follow in the family footsteps and pursue a career in farming?

When I was figuring out what I'd like to do with my life after school,

I only thought about a couple things; it needed to be something that was unique, and it needed to be something that would have an impact. Farming fulfilled this for me, as I had the opportunity to make a unique product that I could be proud of, and use it to teach people about the importance of knowing where their food comes from, how the animals are treated, and the impact farming has on the environment.

Can you describe your approach to regenerative dairy farming and what sets it apart from more traditional farming methods?

Regenerative and organic farming all comes back to the soil. If the soil is healthy, the grass is healthy, the cows will be healthy, and the milk will be healthy. Conventional dairy farming uses fertilisers that are chemically broken down rather than biologically. This process releases excess hydrogen into the soil, making it more

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imbalanced and acidic, until the grass can't grow without readily available nutrients that are constantly being added. In contrast, we make our own compost, which adds carbon to the soil, feeding the microbes which break down nutrients for the plants to take up. In this way, nutrients are recirculated through the farm, building the health of the soil, and producing a better product for the consumer.

Can you tell us a bit about your cows and what a normal day is like for them and yourself on the farm?

The cows at my farm have been brought up from my parents' farm, where they were raised on certified organic grain, milk and grass. Their names are Molly, Pong, Lisa, Rosie, Jetty, T-Shell,

Flood, Mel, Rhi, Oxhill and Sym. The cows live stress free, they are only milked once a day, and walk to the dairy at their own pace. Aside from the milking, where they are in the dairy for around 10 minutes, they are free to eat silage, grass, lie down and drink water. After milking, they walk back down to the paddock at their own leisure. They always have access to shade, water and fresh grass. As for me, I have to deal with a bit more stress. At school, I only had to get my assignments in on time, and get myself up at 7 to make it there before the bell. Running a business is like doing 10 assignments at once, except they're all on vastly different topics and are all due at the same time. Instead, I wake up at 5am each morning, go get the cows and get ready for milking.

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The milk goes straight into the pasteuriser from the machines via a hose, which I then disconnect to wash the machines. After the cows are milked, I begin pasteurising. I heat the milk to 65.1 degrees for 10 minutes, and then cool it down to about 18 degrees before bottling it and putting it in the cool room. I use this time to organise my day and do some odd jobs, like getting the dairy ready for the next day, labelling bottles, and washing glass bottles. I make sure to write down all my orders for the day, and the next few days, so I know if I have too much, or not enough milk. By the time I've bottled and washed the pasteuriser it's 9:30. I then do my deliveries to either Wauchope, Redbank, Port Macquarie, Laurie-ton, Lake Cathie, Comboyne and Lorne.

Your family would have seen some pretty big changes over the many years they have been in the farming industry. Can you talk about the role that technology and innovation play in your farming practices?

Technology plays a big role in my organisation. My phone is my biggest tool that I use to take orders, write notes, order

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equipment and send invoices. Keeping track of everything I need to do would be near impossible without it. It is also a tool that I use to communicate with people, through social media and emails. The dairy, however, is old news. It is the walk-through type that you would see being used in the 40s and 50s. It has been refurbished with new milking machines, lines, electrical, and plumbing. The factory is now where the old vat room used to be, and in it is the pasteuriser. The pasteuriser is one of the most useful pieces of technology to me, as I can use it to make cheese and yoghurt as well as milk. However, growing up all I drank was raw milk, straight from the cow. Raw milk is the best, creamiest, tastiest milk you can get, being in its most unprocessed form. It seems odd to me that despite advances in technology in the dairy

industry, such as stainless steel equipment, appropriate wash chemicals, regular testing protocols, and optimal refrigeration, that pasteurisation is still necessary. I hope this changes in the near future, and everyone can enjoy raw milk just as much as I do.

Starting your own business can be quite daunting, and you are still quite young. What have been some of the most memorable experiences or challenges you've faced while starting up?

I have faced quite a few challenges in my first couple of weeks, all of which I have learned from. In my first week of production, I lost all my milk down the drain because I forgot to close the pasteuriser tap. Another time, I left a batch of yoghurt out overnight, and a lot of it curdled. From these mistakes, I learnt that forgetting even the smallest things can be quite expensive and time consuming. I have had to learn the hard way to slow down, think and check things off in my head before continuing what I'm doing. It seems to me that every day I forget one small thing that ends up costing me time and money. However, for the one small inconvenience, I remember twenty or so other things, and that is no easy feat and something I can be proud of. My first time making feta cheese it turned out beautiful, despite being a long and meticulous process. I made it with my own milk and with my own hands, cooked

it, drained it and cut the pieces individually. Making the highest quality product is important to me because I believe my customers deserve access to the healthiest food, just like I did growing up.

What has the community's response been like to your product so far?

I'm lucky to live in such a wonderful and supportive community, that I've had a great response to my milk so far. It's good to see a lot of people that are willing to support local farmers, and are conscious about the impact farming has on the environment, be it positive or negative. The Hastings Co-op took my milk on as soon as it got going, and their support has been really instrumental in growing my business. I know they love to support local businesses, as do their customers. I have had similar responses from other shops, such as Wild Culture, Whole Health Store, and Forgiving Foods. It's good to meet people that have the same passion as I do for providing quality food to the local community.

What plans or ideas do you have for Hastings Riverlands Milk heading into the future?

Going forward, I'm looking to grow my business to twenty cows. I'm also going to make cream, and maybe cheese. With the added volume, I will need to make sure that my system of bottling and delivering milk is more efficient, so I could be looking at getting a bottling machine, and I'm in the process of getting a cold room box for my Ute. I want to continue to develop a good relationship with my customers, and open the farm up to show them what I do here. Quality comes first for me, so I need to be comfortable with the amount of milk that I'm producing and the quality of my products, before I introduce

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like to get in touch or have any queries about the milk. My main goal when I started was to get the milk spread right across the region and I think I have achieved that. Readers can find the milk at Wauchope, Sovereign and Timbertown IGAs, Wild Culture, Kenny Littles, Organics Mattr, Whole Health Store in Lake

more cows.

Where can readers find your milk or get in touch?

My number is 0435 097 861 if anyone would

Cathie, Forgiving Foods in Laurieton, Sohip Organics at Lorne, and Grazed and Grown Farm in Comboyne. If you fancy trying my milk in a coffee, the Udder Cow Cafe, Bardi's Cafe, and Coffee on High use my milk. Of course, you can buy direct from me to pick up from Oxhill Organics at Redbank, where you can get organic meat, milk and eggs in one go. Just call or text my Mum on 0423 222 998 to arrange a time to pick up some fresh organic food. Milk and yoghurt in bulk is also available direct from the farm in 5L jerry cans and buckets, and 10L buckets.

Thanks Jimmy.

