

ADAMSCOWS DAIRY  
Rick and Michelle Adams  
Laton, Ca

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Hello, my name is Michelle Adams I want to tell you a story about our family farm. I feel it is important for you to identify with dairy owners and their families on a personal level in order to have a clear picture of the real faces of the dairy industry today.

In 2009, my father in law sold out and left the dairy business. When those cows were sold and loaded on a trailer, it was heart wrenching to watch them go. They weren't just money making machines, but really members of our family, which we had taken care of for generations. Out of that misery my husband Rick and I started Adamscows Dairy, a small 85 cow 3rd generation dairy farm. When Rick and I started the dairy over, we were milking 12 cows in July of 2009. We are currently milking closer to 100 cows with plans to grow back to 160.

In 2009 the dairy outlook was bleak and many dairymen could not believe we would venture into starting over with 12 cows. However, my husband's life has been this farm from the time he was born and it has been his destiny to be a dairyman.

I have been married to Rick for 16 years now, 10 of which he worked for his dad and 6 years since we started over, making all of our own decisions, including which bills we couldn't afford to pay. It has not been easy, in fact, there have been times for me personally that the depression and bad feelings were more than I could bare. I'm very fortunate to have an income outside of the dairy. I have been a teacher for 19 years and love my job and the income and benefits it provides for my family. It is because of my steady income that we are still in the dairy business. The milk check just isn't enough to pay all the dairy bills on a regular basis. I would say at least 10 months of a 12 month fiscal year, my salary supplements the dairy's needs financially. It seems to be a regular event to temporarily dip into my off-farm salary to make ends meet. Rick does not draw a salary, and too often there just isn't enough money to go around.

Our herd hasn't grown over time as it should have because we have had to beef cows in order to pay astronomical energy, fuel and feed bills. It is devastating to call my husband and say, "You need to see who can go to the sale", because we just don't have the money to pay the basic bills to keep the power on and buy fuel to irrigate our crops to keep them from burning up in the field.

There are many days in the last few years that I will say to my husband, "if you told me tomorrow you were selling the cows, I'd be all over it." I guess I'm a stronger person than I realize because, sometimes I think the stress to make ends meet is more than I can handle, but somehow I get thru it. Rick always seems to know when I need a smile and a hug. I know he doesn't like hearing my wish to sell out, in fact I know it probably strikes his heart like a piercing knife every time I have said it. He still manages to be the best dairyman he can be and walks out the door to the farm that has his sweat and blood in the soil and the cows.

My husband is amazingly kind hearted. When I drive out to see him working, he always has a smile on his face. You see, he loves being a dairy farmer, it's just what he does every day, day in and day out. His hours are 24 in a day. He milks and feeds the cows every day and farms 115 acres to make sure we have the feed to feed them. He's one of the most dedicated people to the cows he loves, he works 7 days a week, 365 days a year and he is still smiling. I often wonder how a person can be so happy when each month is a struggle to survive. He can always find the good even on the worst day.

We have one employee who has been with us over 20 years who is also instrumental in the survival of our dairy farm. The real story though, is that of our three children who work in almost every capacity of our farming operation. Our son Lantz, now nearly 16, milks cows, does mechanical repairs, drives silage trucks takes care of the baby calves and heifers and feeds every weekend. Our daughter Kolbi, nearly 14 also milks cows and works on the farm in various jobs. Recently she disked 20 acres all by herself. Her dad smiling again at the great life adventures our farm allows our kids to have. Kolbi has an uncanny

knowledge of the herd and can nearly identify each cow by their markings and who each cow's moms are, she really is amazing. Our daughter Rikki, 10, is a great assistant in the barn, bringing in cows to be milked, washing out the poop in the parlor helping feed calves and other tasks given to her.

As for me, besides teaching fulltime, coaching volleyball at my school and coaching high school basketball, I swath all of our feed and drive the silage trucks. I ear tag and vaccinate our baby calves, I'm also an extra set of hands when Rick needs me for something....and I have the burden of facing and paying the bills even when there isn't enough money to cover them. That is clearly the worst job on the dairy, a job that should be easy, but ultimately consumes me with frustration, desperation and pain.

Here is the big question-Why is our milk worth less than other producers in the United States of America and what can be done about it? Frankly, it is unjust and unethical for other dairymen in this great free country to have a higher milk price than the dairymen in California. I've been told the average price over the last few years could have been a \$1.00 per hundred weight higher. I can't help but get excited about how much that would improve the bottom line of our dairy. We are a small dairy that <sup>has</sup> everything tied up in the farm and we absolutely have no savings. Everything we make is invested back into the farm, and that is a huge risk.

It would be an amazing feeling if we could count on the milk check covering the bills 4 out of 5 years instead of only 1 out of 5 years. Rick isn't getting any younger and our kids are growing up before our eyes. Some day we will reach the point that Rick can't work like he does. We need to get fairly compensated for our milk, it just might enable us to pay all of our bills and hire someone to help take some of the load off of Rick. At this point it is only a dream to be somewhat profitable, to pay the bills that come in every month, and to be able to rest easy knowing all is good at AdamsCows Dairy. Things aren't good. We are a loving supportive family that works every day to carry on a family tradition. Our plan was and still is for Rick to milk the cows himself for a few years until we were milking enough cows to justify hiring a

milker/calf feeder. At the current milk pricing system through CDFA there is no way we will ever reach that point yet.

Today is Veterans Day, a day I hold very dear to my heart. It honors people like myself, a Veteran who proudly served in the United States Army. It honors their sacrifice, so willing and determined to protect this great country from foreign and domestic issues. How ironic that I testify today regarding a domestic issue, sharing the sacrifice and determination my family gives each day to survive in the face of economic hardship to maintain a dairy that is not paid a fair price for the milk we produce. It should not be a burden we have to bare. I will continue to pray and hope that someday, things will be better.

Thank you for hearing my family dairy farm story.

Respectfully,  
Michelle Adams