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For more information:
Josh Thomas
Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council
503.317.5007 | JThomas@odncouncil.org

Sarah Taydas
Darigold
206.286.6802 | sarah.taydas@darigold.com

Oregon Dairy Farm Receives National Sustainability Award
Rickreall Dairy Lauded for Farming with Innovation and Heart

At the Chicago History Museum last night, Rickreall Dairy became the first Oregon farm to receive the national Outstanding Dairy Farm Sustainability Award. Rickreall was one of only three dairy farms selected nationwide, and the only one west of the Mississippi River.

For the past six years, the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy has recognized dairy farms, businesses and partnerships whose practices improve the well-being of people, animals and the planet. Rickreall Dairy was selected for innovative partnerships with neighboring businesses, energy and water conservation, employee retention, good animal care, and contributions to local and global communities.

“Rickreall Dairy has built a reputation as a good neighbor while caring for their land, their cows, and their employees. Their story is an inspiration to others, and we are thrilled to recognize them with a U.S. Dairy Sustainability Award,” said Chad Frahm, senior vice president, Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy.

Located 15 minutes outside of Salem, Oregon, Rickreall Dairy is home to 3,500 Holstein cows, has 1,100 farmed acres, and employs 25 people. The farm produces milk for Darigold, as a member of the farmer-owned cooperative. The farm is owned and operated by Louie Kazemier, who along with his father-in-law, moved the dairy from California to Oregon in 1990. Louie and his wife Lori carry on Lori’s family legacy as the third generation to dairy.

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“Our producer-owners are deeply committed to long-term sustainability – it’s in their genes, and Rickreall Dairy is a shining example,” said Stan Ryan, Darigold president and CEO. “We’re proud of the high standards that Louie’s family and employees maintain to produce quality milk with a commitment to sustainability. For nearly 100 years, Darigold producers have been providing quality milk, stewarding the land and contributing to their communities.”

Rickreall Dairy operates the longest running and most popular dairy farm tour program in the state, welcoming thousands of students, teachers and parents annually. Called Dairy Education for Kids, it gives hands-on experience with dairy production and an understanding of where food comes from. Louie also started a camp for families with special needs children and travels to Uganda on humanitarian aid missions to share his farming expertise and build infrastructure. He has helped build a medical center, orphanage and church in the small town of Wakiso.

“We’re proud to have Louie represent Oregon on the national stage as a model for sustainability,” said Pete Kent, Executive Director of the Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council. “Rickreall really demonstrates how dairies of all sizes care for their cows, employees, natural resources and communities.”

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About Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council: The Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council (ODNC) works on behalf of all dairy farm families and dairy processors throughout the state of Oregon. Building trust and demand for Oregon dairy products and support for those who make them is accomplished through efforts and involvement in schools, health and wellness, communications and industry development. The ODNC’s origins trace back to as early as 1918, when the Oregon Dairy Council was created to advance the benefits of dairy nutrition. The Oregon Dairy Products Commission was later created by the Oregon Legislature as a commodity commission in 1943.

About Darigold: Headquartered in Seattle, Darigold, Inc. is the marketing and processing subsidiary of Northwest Dairy Association (NDA), which is owned by nearly 500 dairy farm families. NDA members ship approximately 8.4 billion pounds of milk annually from farms in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. Darigold, Inc. produces a full line of dairy-based products for retail, foodservice, commodity and specialty markets, and is one of the largest U.S. dairy processors. Darigold, Inc. operates 11 processing plants throughout the Northwest, processing high-quality milk produced by its dairy farm families. For more information, see www.darigold.com or www.facebook.com/darigold.

About Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy: Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy® is a forum for the dairy industry to work together pre-competitively to address barriers and opportunities to foster innovation and increase sales. The Innovation Center aligns the collective resources of the industry to offer consumers nutritious dairy products and ingredients, and promote the health of people, communities, the planet and the industry. The Board of Directors for the Innovation Center includes dairy industry leaders representing key farmer organizations, dairy cooperatives, companies, manufacturers and brands. The Innovation Center is staffed by Dairy Management Inc™. Visit USDairy.com for more information about the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy.
It's the relationships he built that drive the farm's continuous improvement. For example, when solids were building up in the manure lagoon, Louie initiated trade with a seed farmer to provide fertilizer in exchange for feed. He also collaborated with a local food processor to use their waste water for irrigation.

Careful attention to Rickreall Dairy's resources started with his father-in-law, Gus Wybenga, a third-generation dairy farmer who redesigned the farm when he purchased it in 1990. Wybenga configured the operation with conservation in mind. Kazemier refined the system to ensure tap water is recycled at least three times before it's used for irrigation. That's just one instance.

He also reduced his energy use by hundreds of thousands of kilowatts per year by upgrading his barn lighting and parlor laundry systems through work with Energy Trust of Oregon and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This whole-system approach relies on Kazemier’s constant attention to what matters – which turns out to be everything. And at least one measure would be the envy of any business: his employees’ loyalty.

“People don’t quit very quickly here,” Kazemier said, “and I take a lot of pride in that, because agriculture is a tough business, and my guys, they know that I’ve got their backs if they put one-hundred percent into this job.”