Top O' The Morn Farms: Bringing back the milkman

To move their business forward, Ron and Evie Locke looked to the past to create value-added demand for their farm fresh milk by bringing back the milkman.

Like most dairies, Top O' The Morn Farms delivers milk from their herd of almost 2,000 Holsteins to a marketing cooperative that processes and markets milk, butter, and cheese. A few years ago, Top O' The Morn decided to pursue a venture to allow them to market a portion of their production directly to consumers, with the goal of increasing profits from milk they already produce. Thanks to the dual pressures of low dairy sales prices and high feed prices, the decision was timely.

The idea is so old it's new again: glass bottled milk, delivered to people's doorsteps. Though the popularity of home-delivered milk waned decades ago, more and more consumers are looking for both value and locally produced fresh foods. Could it be time for a comeback?

Morrison & Company was hired to prepare a feasibility assessment and business plan. After helping design a consumer survey to gauge consumer interest, desired products and delivery schedules, and price tolerance, we reviewed and helped develop the company's plans from the standpoints of business organization, markets and market risk, marketing approaches and competition, facilities and production, distribution, information technology, personnel, capital needs, and risk analyses.

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Along with the expertise of our professional staff, we engaged partners in dairy process engineering and other areas to supplement our review of the proposed construction and operations. Our findings included a thorough assessment of the key aspects of construction, operations, marketing, and risk, plus multi-year financial projections under stated assumptions.

Top O' The Morn began processing and delivering milk last fall and currently offers their Tulare-area customers a wide range of glass-bottled milk in a variety of sizes, including a heavenly chocolate milk that is more dessert than drink. The company has also opened a drive-through business that offers customers a variety of local products in addition to milk. Deliveries will eventually expand to nearby Fresno, Bakersfield, and adjacent areas with a total population of about 2.2 million.

The Morrison & Company team recently had the opportunity to visit Top O' The Morn, which included a tour of their pristine facility and, of course, tastings of their delicious milk. We've included a number of pictures from our trip and invite you to visit their website at www.farmfreshmilk.com for more information.