

# Forget the chicken; Foster Farms Dairy largest privately owned dairy in California

**Copyright Ferndale Enterprise; originally published 7/9/09**

While Foster Farms is synonymous with chickens, it's no stranger to cows. Foster Farms Dairy is the largest privately owned dairy in California, according to the company's Chief Financial Officer Tom Van Autreve. It produces fluid milk, juices, butter, ice cream, cottage cheese, sour cream and powdered milk.

In 2008, Foster Farms Dairy changed its name to Crystal. The

name comes from Crystal Cream and Butter Co., a Sacramento producer that Foster Farms bought in 2007.

The purchase of Crystal, founded in 1901, boosted Foster Farms' milk production from about 2.5 million gallons a week to 3 million. It added hundreds of retail outlets.

According to the Foster Farms Dairy website, it was 1939 and Max and Verda Foster took a chance in pursuit of a dream. Borrowing \$1,000 on a life insurance policy, the couple

placed a down payment on a small abandoned 80-acre farm south of Modesto in California's San Joaquin Valley. The operation, which began with a few chickens and turkeys, quickly expanded. In 1941, the Fosters added an all-Jersey cow dairy and distributed fresh milk in chilled glass bottles to the front doors of local Modesto residents.

Over the years, the couple's business experienced phenomenal growth, with production and distri-

bution increasing tenfold. In 1954, the Fosters added a modern creamery to their operation and in the 1960s, they opened a cultured products plant in an effort to produce a more diverse product line, including cottage cheese, sour cream, yogurt, ice cream and butter. Max continued to concentrate on the Foster Farms Dairy operation while Paul, one of his sons, focused on the poultry business.

Today, according to the website, Foster Farms Dairy

remains a family-owned business and continues the family tradition and vision of producing premium quality products. Jeff Foster, the grandson of Max and Verda Foster, is the president of the company. After serving 15 years as the general manager overseeing production in the poultry operation, Jeff replaced his cousin Ron Foster as the president of Foster Farms Dairy.

Each week Foster Farms Dairy milks more than 5,000 cows (at its

five dairies located throughout Stanislaus County) and processes approximately 2.5 million gallons of milk (at its three processing plants, two of which are located in Modesto, the third in Fresno). The company provides distribution via eight additional facilities located throughout the state. Annual sales average \$300 million and the company employs approximately 650 people.