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Straus Organic Dairy Keeps Working To Save The Family Farms

Marshall, CA – Straus Family Creamery

Albert Straus began helping his father William Straus, feed the cows when he was 3 years old by learning to steer the feed truck while his father threw hay out the back. Albert was always trying new things, much to the alarm of his father, who worried that Albert's great ideas always cost a lot of money. Forty-two years later Albert's most innovative idea to date, converting the farm to organic, saved the farm. Today, he helps to guide other family farms in their decision to go organic.

Albert knew he would continue in his father's footsteps from an early age. He always loved the outdoors and farming life. He paid his own tuition and expenses by working on local dairies while going to college at California Polytechnic institute in San Luis Obispo, one of six polytechnic universities in the United States, best known for its engineering, agricultural, architectural, and business programs. He graduated with a degree in Dairy Science and came home with plenty of ideas for improving the family farm.

After college, Albert came back to his family's dairy and convinced his father to modernize the operation. As with most dairies in the U.S., the Straus farm was facing extinction. In the face of this impending doom, Albert showed no fear. First, instead of take the feed dealers suggested rations; he reformulated the feed mix to include exotic feeds which increased milk production (sorry, we can't disclose his secret recipe). He bought feed in

truckloads and mixed his own rations. He experimented with drip irrigation and the farm began to grow its own silage crop. He was among the first farmers to use a computer in 1977 when he used it to balance feed rations. In the early 80's he implemented no-till planning protecting the land from increased erosion. Most no-till practices use herbicides, but Albert devised a way to avoid their use. He has worked very hard to minimize water usage on the dairy and creamery.

In 1990 he heard about organic dairying and consequently met with one of two homeopathic veterinarians in North America. Subsequently, Albert began practicing homeopathy on dairy cows in his own herd. In 1992, he eliminated antibiotics and hormone use and in 1993, converted the farm to certified organic, becoming the first organic dairy west of the Mississippi.

In 1994 Albert opened his own bottling plant and began making products from the farm under the Straus Family Creamery brand. Albert made the bold decision to bottle in reusable glass bottles made from 40-50% recycled glass and to not homogenize the milk. He began a resurgence of interest in dairy products. The reappearance of cream-top milk in glass bottles started people thinking of dairy products as a delicious food item and not just a commodity.

It took a few years, but after much work Straus family creamery ensures that the Straus farm would remain in existence. The farm was saved. By taking the leap to do something different, and certainly experimental, Albert made sure the farm received a fair price for its milk, and the Straus family farm would endure.

Albert has not stopped. Two years ago, he installed a methane digester on the farm. Albert hopes to build a new processing plant using methane as the energy supply. Despite pressures from retailers, he has stayed the true to his environmental ideals and stuck with glass bottles to avoid waste. He has worked closely with the community to eliminate potential greenhouse gas emission issues.

Always an innovator and with an eye towards responsible farming and business practices, Albert Straus has shown one way to continue farming into the 21st century. Now, he's helping share his experience with other farmers who are making the choice to farm organically.

Albert Straus is the founder of Straus Family Creamery, the first organic dairy west of the Mississippi River. Albert Straus is a noted authority and activist in the areas of family farming, organic farming, sustainable agriculture, waste reduction in farming and food processing, and alternative-energy production.

Straus Family Creamery makes organic varieties of yogurt, milk, ice cream and European-style butters that are available at natural and specialty food retailers throughout the 11 western states. For more information visit www.strausfamilycreamery.com

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