

WA 'Cow Town' dairy farmer takes home top prize for milk quality

Dairy enthusiasm does not get any bigger than in the Western Australian hamlet of Cowaramup, where cows are worshipped, in art and in life.

About a three-hour drive south of Perth, the idyllic locale affectionately known as 'Cow Town' is home to 42 Friesian sculptures and dairy farmer of 55 years Rodney May, his wife Nicole and their four children.

The family own 235 hectares of land on the outskirts and lease another 202 hectares where they milk a 230-cow herd and produce more than two million litres each year.

This year, they are proud to be among the top 100 farmers in Australia for milk quality, and among the top five in WA, based on annual average bulk milk cell count (BMCC) records.

'To be in the top one hundred farmers in the country for milk quality means a lot to us – it's fantastic,' Nicole said.

'A healthy cow in most cases will produce more milk and more profit.'

Nicole May said there was no 'big secret' to producing high quality milk but credited keeping a close eye on each cow's health and wellbeing, maintaining thorough hygiene practices, and having a son who was passionate about the industry taking the lead in the dairy.

Nicole and Rodney's 20-year-old son Justin, a WA College of Agriculture Harvey graduate, has carried out most milkings at the dairy since he left year 12 in 2016.

'We are all very proud of what Justin has achieved,' Nicole said.



Rodney, Nicole and Justin May at their dairy farm in Cowaramup, Western Australia

'He's very thorough when it comes to milking and keeps a close eye on our cows.'

To prevent mastitis, Justin monitors the cows at each milking and removes freshly calved cows from the calving paddock to milk soon after calving.

All freshly calved cows have their teats sprayed with iodine before and after milking, for up to four days, and grain pullers are sterilised to minimise the spread of disease.

'To keep the teats clean we also keep cow tails trimmed and we upgrade laneways when necessary by compacting and keeping them free of manure and dirt,' Justin said.

'We advise all staff members, especially new and inexperienced people, to maintain good standards of hygiene.'

These standards include teat spraying and wearing new milking gloves at each milking, as well as keeping rubberware and liners in good condition and changing them as required. The dairy is positioned in the middle of 65 separate paddocks so the herd does not walk more than one hour to come home for milking.

The rapid exit dairy has 15 cows each side and doubled up, featuring automatic cup removers and an automatic drafting gate controlled by ALPRO™.

The family also owns some well-trained working dogs who are responsible for bringing the herd to the dairy in the morning while the family prepares for milking.

The dogs then assisted with rounding up in the afternoon. While not able to bark, pet ostrich 'Reena' does her best to keep watch over the calves in the home paddocks.

'We breed from the end of April through to mid-July using artificial insemination,' Nicole said.

'Three quarters of our cows calve between the end of January and mid-May and the rest calve before October,' she explained.

Despite the industry accolades, the family have no plans for expansion just yet – preferring instead to continue doing what they do best in the cow capital of Australia.