

Farm History and Executive Summary

Kurtland Farms, owned by Tim and Deborah Kurtz, is located in Berks County, directly bordering Chester County, which is one of the fastest growing counties in Pennsylvania. A third generation dairy farm, the family milked 125 cows in a tie-stall barn, three times a day, prior to the Transformation Team project. As Tim and Deborah considered a future in the dairy industry for themselves and their children, the farm's location presented unique urban sprawl pressures and a dwindling land base.

With the help of the state's dairy organizations, Tim began strategic planning and eventually, developed a farm business plan that considered expansion options. That plan included robotic milkers to improve cow comfort and business profitability, while also preserving the Kurtz family's quality of life. Tim's research led him to trade shows, workshops, conferences, phone calls and emails with experts in robotic technology.

Transformation Team professionals helped Tim focus on his robotic expansion plans, completing a critical feasibility study, pursuing funding grants through the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PENNVEST) for manure storage and separation and navigating the maze of engineering and environmental permits required for a new animal agricultural construction project.

With the advice of the Transformation Team and his lender, Tim began leasing a satellite dairy in 2011. The satellite dairy allowed Tim to keep his replacement heifers, absorb additional costs and begin to delegate specific responsibilities to employees. Notably, after just three months of Tim's management, the satellite dairy cows' production increased 15 pounds per cow.

The project was not without many challenges and hurdles during the two year planning process. After four rounds of applications, the PENNVEST grant was finally approved in the spring of 2012. As detailed in the case study, the family had to find a new construction company, after the original company closed its doors; secure financing from a new financial institution; and work through additional expenses and delays caused by unexpected environmental permitting issues.

In September 2012, the Kurtz family finally broke ground on their 220 cow free-stall barn, with a LELY A4 Astronaut robotic milking system. By the following March, the family moved cows into the new barn, bedded with separated manure solids, and by that Fall, hosted an Open House for the industry.

Today, the family is excited to welcome son Jared and his wife Marla into the business and a new generation of Kurtz dairymen, with the birth of their son.

