



## **AUGUST FEATURE:** **GAR-LIN Dairy Farm** **A Rich History in the Agriculture Sector**

**GAR-LIN Dairy Farm** of Eyota is a multi-generational dairy farm owned by Gary and Linda Allen and their children, Dean Allen and Dana Allen-Tully. The farm started in 1971 with 40 cows. It now consists of over 1,850 cows, with 1,740 calves and heifers. The farm also consists of 4,470 acres of corn, alfalfa, sweet peas and corn, soybeans, and winter rye.

Dana Allen-Tully manages the farm's dairy operation and dairy employees. **GAR-LIN** is the second largest employer in the Eyota area, with 45 full-time and 8 part-time employees, not including the number of people involved in collaborations and community business partners.

I had the opportunity to visit with Dana at **GAR-LIN** earlier this week. When asked if agriculture is simply growing crops and raising animals, Dana explained, “Agriculture is the foundation of our country. It means providing people across our country with a safe, abundant, and secure food supply. That comes from the raw product, which would be growing crops and raising animals to processing those raw materials into products that consumers want. It could be taking milk and pasteurizing it into ice cream. Corn goes into ethanol, so a portion of that becomes a part of our fuel supply; the same with biodiesel.”



Dana has hearty roots in farming. She and her brothers grew up on **GAR-LIN** farm, the farm that her parents started. After graduating from high school, Dana enrolled in college at the University of Minnesota, with plans to get a degree in Agricultural Business Management. She recalls, “I really didn’t want to be a farmer, I just wanted to be in the industry. I was going to use my childhood experience to guide my career path.” However, she decided that she didn’t want to go into business and wanted “to be closer to the cows.” Dana continued her education, earning her Master’s and Ph.D. degrees in Dairy Cattle Nutrition, with the goal of being a professor at a university. After working for a year in Washington, D.C., she decided that she wanted to be the owner of a business. Dana said, “That’s what brought me back to **GAR-LIN**. I wanted to be responsible for my success or failure.” In addition to managing the farm’s dairy operation and dairy employees, she manages youngstock care and herd nutrition.

A lot has changed in farming over the last few decades. Dana believes that changes **GAR-LIN** Dairy has made in the last ten years correspond with what she believes the biggest changes have been in the Agriculture sector in during the same time frame. For starters, “There is a massive amount of technology used in farming today,” Dana explained. “GPS is used to determine how many corn seeds to put per acre, how to put fertilizer on, what fertilizer to put on, or what yield was in a specific area of the field. For our cows, we use computer radiofrequency identification (RFID) technology.” The cows each have a RFID button in their ear that “reads the cow.” “The tags are used to track each time the cows come into the parlor and what each cow milks.” Computers also assist feed workers with nutrition of the cows; telling them how much feed ingredient to add when making the cows’ diets. “We have computers in each calving facility as well. It’s complicated because of all the data we collect.” “The other change is that everything has gotten so expensive,” she indicated.



“Agriculture has taken on some characteristics of other occupations, in that there are levels of advancement,” Dana explained. “It’s not that everyone is going to be a farmer.” It’s... How are you going to contribute to the team? What are your strengths? What core competencies do you bring to the table, and how are they going to fit with the rest of what’s going on?” The most common occupations at **GAR-LIN** are milkers, who work one of three, 8-hour shifts, milking 1,850 cows three times a day; those who work in the calving facility, closely monitoring expecting cows and assisting cows who give birth; herdsman, who work with cows that have just had calves or who are sick; those who work in the nursery with calves that are less than four months old; those who provide feed, keeping cows comfortable with continuous access to fresh water and feed; and the agronomy side, with one agronomist and five full-time agronomy specialists.

Dana believes that entry-level Agriculture industry positions in Southeast Minnesota are in high demand, but are difficult to fill. “People don’t want to work on farms or lack soft skills, which can make them difficult to manage,” she stated. She noted that Millennials entering the workforce create “a whole special challenge” because of the absence of soft skills; like showing up for work, being on time, and self-discipline. They have grown up in an environment dependent on technology that eliminates the need for face-to-face encounters and interpersonal relationships, and the result is a lack of what is needed to advance forward in the workplace.



In Southeast Minnesota, an entry-level Agriculture industry employee can earn about \$10.00 per hour. More experienced employees can earn a salary up to \$80,000 per year. **GAR-LIN** has three recent college graduates. Half of the employees at **GAR-LIN** have been to college, have trades certifications, or have some type of specialized skill set. “Because modern day agriculture is global, not just a national view, I think that post-secondary education provides people with a broader thought base and more awareness,” Dana stated.

Dana indicated, “as long as people want to eat food that’s from our country, there will be a demand for occupations in Agriculture. The United States has been so spoiled because it has been food-secure since the Great Depression. Food insecurity would change a lot. We have a cheap food policy, as does our government.” I asked Dana what she believes the future of Agriculture will be for smaller farmers when it seems like so much of the farming world has



gotten corporate. She stated, “There is room for smaller farmers in niche market manufacturing, like cheese, ice cream, and sausage. You have to set your business principals to be successful. I think more of it will go to niche market because of automation and the expense of farming.”

Finally, I asked Dana what advice she would give someone who has an interest in the Agriculture industry, but may not have grown up on a farm or have a background in Agriculture. She discussed that, “Agriculture is broad. There are a lot of things that need to happen on a farm. I think they need to go work on a farm; start there. Ask one of your neighbors or a large



animal veterinarian if you can ride along with them. See if you even like it.” She also explained, “Trade degrees are so big! Plumbers, electricians, mechanics, welders, (and other trades) are on the farm every week. Some start at \$95 per hour to come on the farm for a site visit. It’s not like you have to go get a four-year degree. Learn how to do the stuff that matters (on the farm). There are a lot of moving parts all the time.”

Visit [www.garlindairy.com](http://www.garlindairy.com) for more information.

***Submitted by: Jill Miller, Executive Secretary, Workforce Development, Inc.***