

WORKFORCE

development

it's about more than curriculum

MCC partners with Foremost Farms to provide support in and out of the classroom

In just nine months, Foremost Farms turned a green field into a multi-million dollar state-of-the-art milk processing facility, and Montcalm Community College was there to provide support and training to help ensure their workforce was ready for the first load of milk to arrive.

"The college has truly showed its sense of community in how they have reached out to us and interacted with us since day one," said Foremost Farms Plant Manager Glen Kienitz. "They were a very gracious host and helped us quickly put our roots down."

Foremost Farms broke ground on the 65,000-square-foot facility in March 2018 and opened in December. Located on Fitzner Road north of VanDeinse in Greenville's industrial park, the plant employs 34 people and operates 24/7, 365 days per year.

Kienitz has been in the dairy business for more than 22 years and has been involved in other green field site builds. Throughout his career, he said "this is by far the most automated plant I have ever worked in. Three-quarters of the plant is run by four people – two in the intake bay receiving the milk, one in the control room running all of the equipment and the other person relieving the other three positions."

Thus, the employees required specialized training to learn the ins and outs of the technology used to support the operation of the equipment.

"MCC welcomed us with open arms," Kienitz said.

During the construction phase, the company had very limited space at its location and construction trailers were used as temporary offices. Kienitz said MCC allowed the company to use classrooms on its Greenville campus for employee interviews, as well as training.

MCC's team provided training in Allen Bradley controls, PLC logic and PLC troubleshooting, as well as other specialized training.

"Two of our maintenance technicians have either graduated from or earned certifications from MCC," Kienitz said. "We're extremely pleased with the overall skill set of the workforce and their eagerness to learn."

In addition, Kienitz said the college's Information Technology (IT) Department provided extensive support during the training process.

"We have an Oracle based system that all of our plants operate. MCC's IT department helped set up our system so we could run a lot of our actual systems in test mode using the college's computer labs," he said.

"The college made it much easier for us to hire and train our workforce," he added.

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Glen Kienitz
— Foremost Farms Plant Manager

Pictured, from left, are Foremost Farms Lead Operator Bill Ashman, Operation Supervisor Tim Cummings and Plant Manager Glen Kienitz.

about Foremost Farms

Foremost Farms USA is headquartered in Baraboo, Wis. It is a farmer-owned milk processing and solids cooperative with about 1,300 members and annual sales of \$1.5 billion. Its 12-plant network creates dairy products from some of the world's most trusted brands.

The Greenville plant, located on a 96-acre site in the city's Industrial Park, handles approximately 4.2 million pounds of raw milk per day through a process which pulls the water out of the milk, separating the skim milk and the cream, which are both pasteurized. The cream is typically shipped to Foremost's butter processing plants in Wisconsin, while the skim milk is run through a reverse osmosis system to pull the water out of it. This provides a concentrated product that is shipped to Foremost's cheese plants in Wisconsin.

According to Foremost Farms Plant Manager Glen Kienitz, the concentrated product allows the company to blend a base with the exact percentages of butterfat and protein needed to produce a variety of cheeses such as cheddar, mozzarella, provolone and others.

"It's key to provide plants the exact bases they need to help reduce any waste," Kienitz said. "Also, by producing a concentrate, it reduces transportation costs to Wisconsin."

The company is also environmentally conscious and runs its wastewater through a system that purifies it to a quality similar to rain water. The water is then provided to the City of Greenville to be used to help dilute some of the city's household waste.

"As a company, we talk about being Foremost – that's your job with a focus on quality, service, and efficiency," Kienitz said. "That's the key to a lot of our success."



Pictured, from left, are Foremost Farms Process Operator Ryan Christensen, Process Operator Dana Hancock, Lead Operator Matt Paulson, Lead Operator Bill Ashman, Plant Manager Glen Kienitz and Operation Supervisor Tim Cummings.

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MCC Dean for Industrial Education & Workforce Training Susan Hatto said the college was just doing its part to support the community and local economic development, which benefits the entire region.

As part of the college's commitment to training the area's next generation of workers and supporting economic development, Hatto led the effort to secure Michigan New Jobs Training Program (MNJTP) money to support Foremost Farms' workforce training efforts.

"While in the planning stages, we put in a request for MNJTP funds as part of the recruitment package," Hatto said. "The new jobs training amount is determined by how many people are coming and potential wages. Based on that, we can determine how much money will be available, and that gives us the training amount."

Designed as an economic development tool, the MNJTP allows community colleges to provide free training for employers that are creating new jobs and/or expanding operations in Michigan. Training for newly hired workers is paid by capturing the state income tax associated with the new employees' wages. By providing this training for companies, the college plays an instrumental role in advancing employment opportunities in the communities it serves. MCC professionals work with each employer to design customized training based on what the companies need to help them be successful in the marketplace. In addition, Hatto assists with tracking the information needed to fulfill MNJTP reporting requirements.

"We did training in the summer for Foremost's maintenance folks, making sure they were ready for their PLC's. When they got ready for their onboarding process, our IT department worked with their IT department to ensure they could access their software live from Wisconsin to complete training in our facility," Hatto said.

"Our goal was to provide whatever support they needed during this process. In addition to some



Intake Operator Walt Taylor takes a sample from a load of milk at the Foremost Farms processing facility in Greenville.

specialized training, we worked to provide a friendly atmosphere where they felt at home during the training process. It was kind of like they worked here – they became part of our family,” Hatto added.

“MCC’s guidance in providing training has been instrumental in our success,” Kienitz said. “Starting a new plant and training the workforce is very costly, and the Michigan New Jobs Training Program has been a real benefit to our bottom line. Susan provided guidance throughout this process, and our documentation was very clear and on point. This added another benefit to putting our roots down here.

“MCC has gone out of its way to treat us as a long lost neighbor and that’s part of the appeal we have had as a company locating here,” Kienitz added.

Foremost Farms employees said the combination of support from the company and the college has made them feel at home in their new environment.

“Right from the get-go, it was very noticeable how many resources Foremost has dedicated just to training us. They focused on team bonding exercises, personality profiles — just a lot of different ways to help us learn how to work together as a team,” said Process Operator Mike VanderVeen, of Allegan. “They really

put a lot of resources into training us up front. It’s obvious that they have a lot of interest in how well we are going to do working for the company down the road.”

Lead Process Operator Bill Ashman, of Greenville, agreed.

“Foremost is very family oriented. They care about us as employees, and our families, too,” he said.

“The college has been awesome. They have been very open and accommodating. We felt very welcome at MCC,” Ashman added.

Intake Operator Walt Taylor, of Belding, grew up milking cows, and he worked at a manufacturing facility in Grand Rapids for 20 years before being hired last year as part of the new team at Foremost Farms. He said he appreciates the level of training the company has provided for its employees.

“We were able to train on Foremost’s operating system using the computers at MCC, so we actually got to experience in the classroom what we would experience on the job,” Taylor said. “I think Glen has really experienced everything that we have experienced, so he knows how to train us to be successful.”

Operations Supervisor Tim Cummings, of Allendale, said he appreciated the specialized training he received at MCC.

“Before we hired everybody, the college put together some maintenance curriculum for us to come in and work on some PLC logic and PLC troubleshooting. Tim (Rogers) walked me through it and taught me how to do it. He taught me what I needed to know for what I’m doing at Foremost,” he said. “They scheduled lift training for us and all sorts of other specialized training, too. They worked very closely with the maintenance crew to make sure we were ready to go when the plant opened.

“This is just a testament to what the college has done for us. We have come and gone as needed to continue training, and they have always been very welcoming to us,” he added.

Hatto said the college is supporting its mission of being a leader in creating a learning community while contributing to shared economic, cultural and social prosperity for everyone.

“If they’re going to expand here, we want them to feel welcome here,” she said.

For more information:
Visit www.montcalm.edu/workforce-training
Email susan.hatto@montcalm.edu
Call 989-328-1254

discover YOUR tomorrow



thursday
MAY 9

Join us for this showcase exhibition to educate students and the public about programs and workforce training offered at MCC.

Discover Your Tomorrow features hands-on demonstrations in program areas such as:

- Agricultural Science
- Computer Science
- Digital Arts
- Health Careers and Advanced Manufacturing

In addition, MCC faculty and staff will be available to discuss program and training options available at the college, and representatives from area businesses will be on site to talk about career options.



For more information, visit www.montcalm.edu/DYT or contact Mel Christensen at melissa.christensen@montcalm.edu or (989) 328-1290.