

# SWEET SPOT

*Consistent size of farm and herd helps the Fontaines keep a tight grip on quality control, which pays off financially too.*

STORY & PHOTOS BY JAMIE COLE

Jim and Steve Fontaine walk up the path from Bartz Road,..... just outside the tiny township of Strykersville, N.Y., toward the milking parlor, open-air barn and silos that make up Fontaine Farms' highly regarded dairy operation. The puddles in the driveway have frozen in the last hour. The late-winter sundown brings a shock-to-the-system sudden cold and a biting wind.

"Colder the better," Steve says, laughing. Afternoon milking is finished and the fresh milk is cooling quickly—all the better when it comes to the quality for which the Fontaines are known. Faces are red and chapped, and it's time to call it a day.

It's March, and the snowbanks around the barn haven't quite thawed. "They get pretty brown around this time of year because you've been pushing them around all winter," says Jim. Today, though, "everything's just nice and bright and white," he says. "The farm looks pretty good in the snow."

There's a lot of white stuff in these parts year-round. The brothers' Strykersville farm sits in a region rich—and getting richer—in milk production. New York is the country's third-ranked dairy state, and Wyoming County is New York's top-producing county, and a top 20 county in the United States.

Annual output in the area is more than a billion

pounds of milk. Everything milked here is shipped somewhere else for processing, much of it to neighboring counties where cooperatives churn out high-quality dairy products that ship worldwide. The Fontaines pool their milk with the 350-farm-strong Upstate Niagara Cooperative, which produces beverage milk as well as yogurts, dips, cheese and butter.

"We ship 7.5 million pounds a year," says Jim, "and we have three full-time guys: my brother, my son [Jacob] and me."

The dairy herd in Wyoming County is upward of 50,000 head. The Fontaines milk 300. They have 40 dry cows and around 250 replacement heifers. They feed off 900 acres of combined corn silage and haylage, and supplement with some purchased grain. "You get out in the county, it seems like dairies keep getting bigger," says Jim. "And everybody asks me, 'When are you going to get bigger?'" >>

## VISIT WITH THE FONTAINES.

Watch an interview and see inside their award-winning operation at [myFarmLife.com/fontaine](http://myFarmLife.com/fontaine).