



Mt. Crawford Creamery

Story and photos by Cammie Tutwiler, SVEC Writer

assumed the day-to-day operations of the farm.

"This farm has been in our family for almost 100 years, and it's our home," Nancy Hill, Kenneth Will's daughter and office manager for the Creamery, said.

The Will Brothers continued operations as a dairy farm and purchased a second farm, Oakwood, in 1989. Family members continued working both farms until a succession of events led up to the decision that in order to continue farming, the family should start processing and selling their own milk.

"We realized that in order for the farm to be self-sufficient we would have to change what we were doing," she said.

Ground was broken on the milk-processing plant in 2012, and the Creamery opened for business on Saturday, May 11, 2013.

"We are pleased to offer to people of the Shenandoah Valley, and beyond, fresh milk produced by our family, which has been in the community for generations," Hill said.

ON THE FARM

The cows are milked for the first time between 4:30 and 5 a.m., and then again at about 4 p.m.

One might imagine that at the Mt. Crawford Creamery the dairy products would be fresh, and that would be right! The milk is processed in facilities only 40 feet from where the cows are milked. As the phrase on the home page of the website states, "The whole process of milk production on one farm!" The farm itself is situated on approximately 70 acres, tucked back off of Rte. 257 and depending on the season, between 60 and 80 cows are milked, twice a day, seven days a week. More than 2,200 gallons are then used for various products, including whole milk, 2 percent milk, skim milk, chocolate milk, buttermilk, cream, and butter.

HISTORY

In 1924, Thomas J. Will purchased the land that is now the Mt. Crawford Creamery. For the next 27 years he operated it as a general livestock and crop farm: raising cattle, growing hay, and corn, with wheat as the cash crop.

In 1952 grandsons Melvin Will, Jr., and James L. Will purchased the farm from Thomas and built a dairy farm, selling their milk to Shenandoah's Pride.

In 1979 Melvin suffered a severe stroke, and his sons Kenneth and Frank

Open Monday-Friday 10 a.m. -6 p.m.
Saturday 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

795 Old Bridgewater Road
Mt. Crawford, VA 22841

Guided Tours are free for schools, civic groups, and churches, and any larger group wanting a guided tour. The type of tour varies depending on the age of the group, and SOLs can be covered if needed. Elementary tours can be scheduled by contacting Lauren at 828-3590 or emailing mtcrawfordcreamery@gmail.com with the subject "Elementary Tour." For older students and adults, contact Nancy for a tour at 828-3590 or email mtcrawfordcreamery@gmail.com with the subject "Adult Tour."



Left: Kenny Will milks the cows. The tubes above carry the milk to processing.
Below: Frank Will and Emma the dog tend to calves.





Fresh milk, buttermilk and cream butter are available at the Mt. Crawford Creamery store. Also available for purchase is logo merchandise, as well as several Virginia's Finest Products. Kay Kibler (below) helps with the store at the Creamery.



“They are milked, and the milk is then piped to the processing plant,” Hill explained. “We process on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and it takes 12 hours, including all of the steps, from setting the plant up to sterilization when we are finished.”

Distribution and delivery is done Tuesday through Friday, from Lexington to Luray. The Creamery has two distributors, Standard Produce, which distributes in Charlottesville and Richmond, and Wholesome Foods, which distributes in the northern Shenandoah Valley and in Northern Virginia.

“We offer a few seasonal products, such as eggnog in the winter,” Hill said. “We plan to start ice cream mix this

summer, and have tentative plans to have ice cream here this summer.”

She said that while they could attempt to do more products, quality over quantity has been their goal.

“We focus on a few products and do them well instead of trying to do too much with a lower quality,” Hill said.

She said the best season for the Creamery is summer, when kids are home from school and there are fairs and lawn parties, where the milk is used in fried-chicken batter.

ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES

The Mt. Crawford Creamery approaches concern for the environment in a variety of ways: It practices crop rotation, strip cropping on steep hills,

and it keeps its animals out of the North River, which runs along the farm. In the mid-1980s it received a conservation award from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation for these practices. It also uses plastic bottles, which are easy to recycle.

“We are concerned about our environment, and we do our best to keep our animals healthy and the land viable,” Hill said. “It’s how we make our living. If we didn’t have good land, we wouldn’t be able to survive.”

The Will Family Farm has been an SVEC member since the Co-op started bringing power to rural locations in 1936.