



CHERYL ALLEN/THE NEWS

Kalona Creamery's brightly lit retail space is filled with Kalona-made and -inspired products.

## Kalona Creamery: supporting farmers, regenerating soil, creating opportunity

*“We believe in supporting small towns in rural America and want them to flourish.”*

BY CHERYL ALLEN  
The News

**KALONA**  
If you were at the grand opening celebration six years ago this February, perhaps you remember the Kalona Creamery Shop & Deli, which sold grab-n-go soups, salads, and sandwiches.

Or perhaps you don't. After three years of pent-up demand, people flocked there mainly for the cheese curds. Hundreds of thousands of pounds of cheese curds.

“When we bought it, we first tried to do a deli and make what most would regard as expensive sandwiches, sort of organic sandwiches like, say, the Bread Garden downtown. And that didn't really work,” says Sam Ingersoll, Marketing Director for Open Gates Group, the umbrella company of which Kalona Creamery is a part.

Kalona Creamery purchased the Twin County Dairy (aka the Cheese Factory) in 2015, completely renovated the building that once housed production of “Kalona Championship Cheese,” and got to work creating a new life for the property.

Getting those squeaky cheese curds back on the shelves was top priority, for which the creamery installed a brand-new vat and started churning out 2000 lbs. of cheese curds a week.

What else could it do? Within a year, they were making their own ice cream. Fudge followed shortly after.

Stocked with the full range of products from sister company Kalona SuperNatural – milk, half & half, yogurt, buttermilk, whipping cream, butter, cottage cheese, kefir, French onion dip, sour cream, eggnog – Kalona Creamery seemed on track to become a dairy-based destination.

Instead, it broadened its focus. Why limit itself to dairy?

“You know, the cheese market is so hard now,” Ingersoll says. “The dairy industry changed to where lots of people can make cheese curds. Everybody can make cheese,” Ingersoll says.

When Bill Evans, founder of Open Gates Group, purchased the Twin County Dairy property, he wasn't fulfilling dreams of being a cheesemaker. His mission, as Ingersoll tells the story, was ultimately to sup-

port the farmers in our community.

“In 2004, Farmers Creamery was founded by a group of Amish and one English guy. They were getting killed in the conventional dairy market. Prices were bad. The market was flooded with conventional dairy from all over. Production had increased,” Ingersoll begins.

“They thought, well, we need to start our own little creamery, so we have a place to sell our milk. Well, a creamery is a high-technology business. The economy was changing. It was becoming more corporatized. Retail was becoming more corporatized. So it kind of struggled.

“Bill Evans came in as an accountant to help with financial stuff and then kind of started taking over sales. . . Bill kind of got it going, and then he bought it from the original

owner. And then to survive, he created a series of businesses where he saw opportunity that would support the creamery,” Ingersoll continues.

“Most little creameries . . . they last about as long as the original owner, and then the kids want to move to the big city and the business dies. Or if they're clever enough to get big, they get bigger and then they sell out to the venture capitalists, who then fire everybody, ruin the brand, ruin the quality, dump the farms, and perform their exit plan and make millions afterwards.

“What was unusual about Bill is that he saw opportunities to support and protect the farms in the community and protect the creamery. And to do that, he created a series of companies,” Ingersoll ex-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4C



Part of Kalona Creamery's rebranding efforts is a fresh logo and new labeling. New exterior signage for the shop on Highway 1 is forthcoming.

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