



CHERYL ALLEN/THE NEWS

Inspiring interest in learning more about farming – especially regenerative farming – is one of Kalona Creamery's new objectives.



Close-dated dairy products are available at a deep discount inside Kalona Creamery's shop.

velop their brands, assists with marketing and sales support, and distributes products across the Midwest. This company allows Open Gates Group to use its knowledge and resources to help more than dairy farmers. This is the direction Kalona Creamery is headed as well. The availability of space has allowed it to take on production and packaging of food products developed by local food entrepreneurs. Oasis Hummus and Jimmy Jack's BBQ Sauces are now being produced and packaged here, and Ingersoll hopes more entrepreneurs will come looking for help as well. Perhaps, he imagines, a butcher might come to them.

"When we find somebody who's an entrepreneur and has a passion for something, we can support it. We can put money into it, we can figure out how to market and sell stuff," he says. "This old machine shop right there, that could be a meat place. You know, Kalona Meats could rise again, we could do it. We just need somebody who's really passionate about it. We could support that."

The way Ingersoll sees it, if the knowledge and expertise of Open Gates Group can be used to incubate and grow Kalona-area food businesses, it could increase the prosperity of the entire community, thus initiating a virtuous circle.

"The more we develop our capacity to help farmers produce food more sustainably, then provide production facili-

ties to create those products and bring them to market, the more we generate consumer demand for Kalona products and Kalona ingredients, the better off our community will be.

"That's, I think, really why lots of us are here, because it's not a job. We believe in supporting small towns in rural America and want them to flourish," he says.

Don't overlook that word, 'sustainably,' because it is key to the Open Gates Group mission.

One side of creating a sustainable local business is structuring it so that it can compete in a global marketplace, not get swallowed up by a multinational conglomerate, and remain engaging and rewarding enough for future generations to commit to it.

The other side is to conserve the land so that it, too, can support generations of crop and livestock production. That means engaging regenerative farming practices and earning Land to Market verification.

The goal of regenerative farming is to keep topsoil teeming with nutrients so that it absorbs water and doesn't wash away. This requires an organic approach coupled with plant diversity, which includes the use of cover crops, and feed diversity when it comes to livestock.

Ingersoll hopes that Kalona Creamery can help in this way. "We've become sort of a combination tourist attraction/production center. We hope to get a little bit more into becoming sort of an educational destination where people learn about regenerative farming," he says, imagining how wall murals and other graphics in the shop could help tell the story of how the products inside came to be.

And the Land to Market verification seal is going to start showing up on those products. "We've just launched Organic Honey Yogurt, in addition to our Plain and Vanilla Yogurt, and are developing new Kefir flavors. The milk comes from Amish farms just down the road. These are 100% grass-fed products certified by the American Grass-Fed Association, which is a big deal, and they are also Land to Market Verified," Ingersoll says.

"Land to Market Verified is the regenerative certification program developed by the Savory Institute, which is the leader in global regenerative agriculture. Land to Market Verification proves that our small farms are improving topsoil quality, watersheds, biodiversity, and storing more carbon in the soil. Many of our products from Kalona are Land to Market Verified, and that seal is going to start showing up on our packaging, which then sends a signal to lots of consumers who care about the environment that our farming practices are working."

Originally purchased as a way to further support and promote local dairy farmers, the enterprise that is Kalona Creamery has been on an exploratory mission to figure out how best to do that. The scope of what it aims to do – what it feels capable of – has broadened from continuing a Kalona cheesemaking tradition and serving as a dairy outlet to assisting local farmers and food entrepreneurs in making the most of what they produce and how they produce it.

Surely a future of shared prosperity beckons beyond the open gates.

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plains.

Those companies, of which there are now ten, include a milk brokerage, a transit company, and a warehouse and distribution center, all located around Wellman, Kalona and Frytown. Such vertical integration ensures greater efficiency, reduced costs, and more control over the sale and distribution of dairy products.

Kalona Direct is a part of this group as well; it helps smaller food entrepreneurs de-

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