

# Rancho el Acicate

## building a super scale dairy

by Jackie Dunham

At what owners predict will be the biggest facility of its kind in Mexico, construction is underway to house 3000 milking does, as well as replacement stock, bucks, and excess male kids up to one month of age.

The does will all be purchased from Mexican farms - no imports are planned. The chosen breeds are Alpine, Saanen, and Toggenburg. Potential source farms are currently being surveyed to determine what diseases they have in their herds. Rancho el Acicate plans to be very careful with new animals - all must be negative for brucellosis. Brucellosis is the only disease that the farm will vaccinate for; owners say there is no enterotoxemia in the area and any other disease problems will be assessed before animals are bought from prospective farms.

Strict biosecurity measures will be put in place to maintain the health status of the herd. The entrance to the facility will be restricted, with a sanitary arc, and the milk room will be equipped with showers and fumigation equipment.

The farm plans to breed and kid out does in groups of 600. Does will be bred by direct pen mating to bucks to start, with the farm moving to artificial insemination in the future, with semen from France. The kids from CAE positive does will be removed from their dams at birth, while kids from CAE negative does will nurse for one day before removal to the kid rearing pens, which will have plastic slatted floors to aid in cleanliness. After weaning, kids will go out on pasture.

The pens will be of typical Mexican style - open to the elements except for the roof. Occasionally the temperature dips below freezing in the area but generally the weather is hot, with harsh sunshine.

The pens will be outfitted with conveyor belts capable of moving feed 36 metres in four minutes. Does will be fed in their pens three to four times a day. The farm, situated on 150 hectares, and with its own well, grows alfalfa with the help of irrigation, getting 10 crops per year. Rain water is also collected in a lagoon during the rainy season, which is about two months long in this area.

The milk room will be big enough to hold 480 does at once, with the same capacity in the holding pen. A Westfalia AutoRotor Capri 90 parlour will take care of the milking; various models hold 24 to 64 goats at a time. With the translation, it was difficult to determine which model the farm plans to use; one would hazard a guess that it would likely be the biggest one they can find, as they plan to milk 600 does per hour! Perhaps they will need more than one!

The goal is to average three litres of milk per day per doe. The farm has a contract with a cheese company that is building a plant within a ten minute drive of the farm. The farm is committed to 850 litres per day for January and February; this amount will increase with time as the farm and herd develops. Once a day the cheese plant will pick up the milk from the farm. The cheese plant will pay 5.5 pesos per litre, but the farm would like to negotiate a higher price (1 pesos equals about 10¢ Canadian). The estimated cost of production is 2 to 2.2 pesos per litre of milk. To augment the milk cheque, the farm plans to sell excess male kids (they already have buyers for all they can produce) and sheep. They also plan to compost the manure and sell it. The owners estimate it will take six or seven years to recover their investment.

The owners estimate that 15 to 20 employees will be needed for the farm, depending on the management and handling required. It is estimated that five hours per day will be spent milking, with three hours for cleaning the milk room and equipment. In addition, employees will be needed for feeding the herd and cleaning pens. Pen cleaning will be on a continuous cycle, with a goal of one cleaning per pen per month. The farm will also feature a lab and a crematorium.

In order to build the best facility possible, the owners and managers visited Mexican dairy goat farms as well as some in Spain and Canada, to get ideas.



tour group in the hay shed



pens and shelters under construction



office and storage shed



exterior of the hay shed