

USBusinessExecutive



Fresh from the family
farm since 1987

Pearl Valley Farms Inc.

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Produced by Elizabeth Towne & Written by Molly Shaw

Since 1987, the Thompson family has been perfecting the formula for a better, safer, high-quality egg. Deep in the heart of Illinois farm country, the family-owned and -operated egg farm is a collection of 350-foot and 450-footlong white henhouses home to 1.1 million chickens. While there's nothing small scale about Pearl Valley Farms Inc. (PVF), the Thompsons have been working to uphold a serious commitment to humane hen care and sustainable farming practices, instituted

by PVF's founder and president, Dave Thompson. "We have a stacked-deck cage system with manure belts under each cage that remove the litter daily," explains Ben Thompson, second-generation executive vice president of PVF. "This ensures good air quality for the birds and our employees. As my father always said, 'If you're comfortable, the bird is comfortable.'"





As a United Egg Producers-certified operation, PVF adheres to strict animal treatment guidelines. "We live by the acronym F.L.A.W [feed, light, air and water]," explains Ben. "Those are the essentials a bird needs to lay a quality egg."

bought the chickens from told him about a job opportunity at Jewel Egg Farm and encouraged him to look into it," recalls Ben. "He started working there for \$3.50 an hour and began to work his way up into management with a lot of willpower and perseverance."

A city boy finds a passion on the farm

PVF's quest for better quality eggs initiated with Dave, who originally lived in the Chicago suburbs. He was first introduced to the egg industry while teaching. "My father was hatching chickens for a first grade class experiment and the person he

In 1987, after 10 years working for Jewel Egg Farm, Dave decided he wanted to buy his own farm and started looking at land in Pearl City, Ill. "We lived in a farmhouse and had about 200,000 birds spread among two barns with a small farm packing facility," recounts Ben. "I started helping my father when I was in second grade and all through high school. The operation slowly began to grow, from 200,000 birds to about 500,000 and 35 employees."

Today, PVF has nearly doubled with 1.1 million laying hens and 106 employees, serving local, regional and national grocers, retailers and industry partners across the U.S. From classic white eggs to cage-free brown and white, organic to Omega-3

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and vegetarian-brown, PVF distributes a wide assortment of varieties to meet the needs of retailers and consumers.

“Every day our hens lay fresh eggs, which are shipped within 48 hours to retailers nationwide,” notes Ben. “In fact, many retailers choose to carry PVF eggs because of our speedy delivery, premium quality and commitment to food safety and sustainability.”

Setting the industry standard in a sustainable cycle

Renowned for fantastic animal conditions, clean cages and setting the mark for new sustainable farming standards in the egg industry, PVF takes great pride in having ultimate control over the entire process from hen to market. Starting with the

hen, the family farm is designed to care for birds throughout every stage of their life, from newborn chick to growing pullet and adult hen.

Once ready to lay eggs, the birds move into a henhouse. “Our henhouses are equipped with an advanced belt system, programmed to bring food to the hens, collect eggs for processing and packaging and carry away manure to the compost facility,” explains Ben. “In the egg-wash facility, the eggs are given a gentle bath to remove debris from their shells.”

From there, PVF’s on-site wastewater treatment plant collects the dirty water and pumps it into sequencing batch reactor tanks where 4,000 gallons of water is aerated daily to separate the solid matter from the clean water. The excess solids are pumped



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into the reed bed, where it is used for plant food.

"The majority of the industry uses a wastewater lagoon, which results in odor problems," says Ben.

"We knew there was a better way so I networked with a college friend whose father had contacts in that area; he assisted in finding us an engineering firm and we built the plant with two sequence batch reactors and a biosolids holding tank to handle all of the wastewater. The result is water as clean as if it were from a municipal treatment plant."

From water to manure, the family farm lets nothing go to waste. In the company's compost facility, chicken manure is collected and dried and converted in a safe, natural process to create odor-free fertilizer rich in nutrients, organic matter, proteins and carbohydrates.



COMPANY AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED : 1987

EXECUTIVE VP: BEN THOMPSON

EMPLOYEES : 106

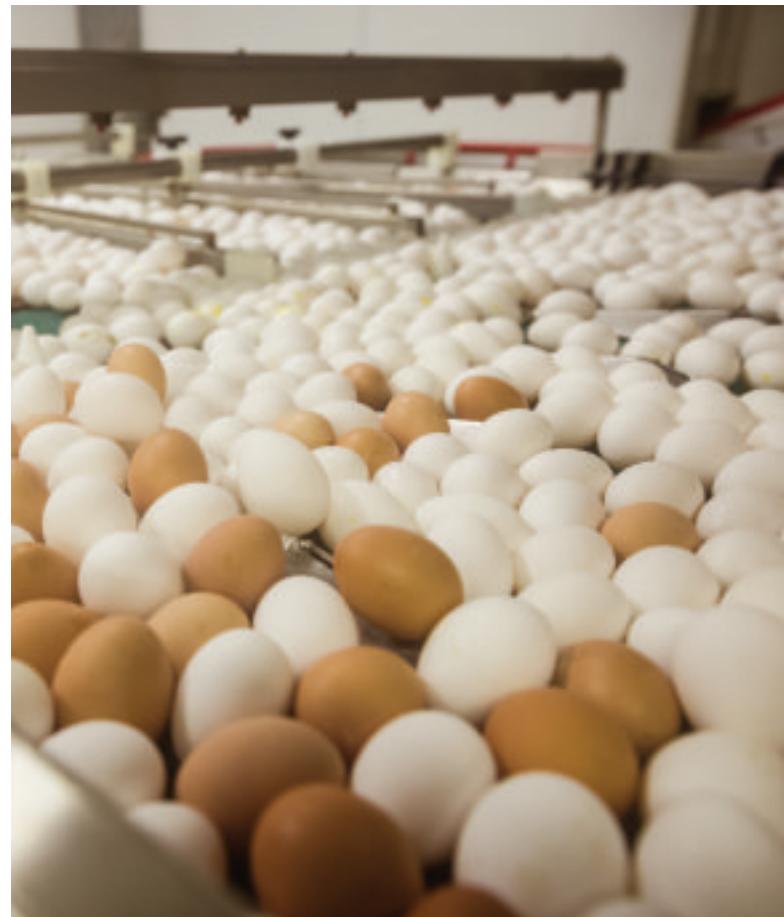
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The compost is sold as Healthy Grow through PVF's Pearl Valley Organix division. "Everything comes full cycle," describes Ben. "Many local farmers purchase the fertilizer for

their crops, which we in turn buy and process at our on-site feed mill to serve to our birds."

Through responsible, efficient use of land and natural resources, PVF is helping reduce its carbon footprint without compromising the health of its hens and quality of eggs. The company is a poster-child for egg farms across the country, upholding affiliations with the United Egg Producers, Mid-West Poultry Federation and the American Egg Board.

As Ben assumes leadership in the next phase of the company's growth, he's excited to continue the time-honored tradition his father started nearly three decades ago. Since 1987, Pearl Valley Farms Inc. has integrated all the important components – animal health, renewable resources and conscientious farming – to produce a better egg and a sustainable business. •



PEARL VALLEY FARMS INC.

968 SO KENT. RD.
PEARL CITY, IL 61602
UNITED STATES

WWW.PEARLVALLEYEGGS.COM