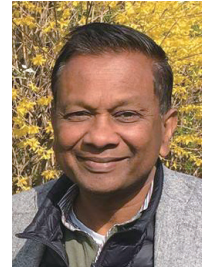


# Isonuma Happy Farm for Cows & Community



Author Mukesh Williams

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To run a dairy farm at the age of 69 with 90 cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, rabbits and poultry, and with just a five-person team, is no joke. Masanori Isonuma is a second generation crop farmer-turned-dairy farmer and believes that dairy farming is not just business but community development and cattle well-being. He believes that an understanding must be created between the life of the bovines and human beings. If cattle are fed well and kept well they will provide good quality milk. Isonuma not only provides milk to the community of Hachioji but educates them about milk production, dairy products and compost creation so that the cattle farm becomes a catalyst of change. The change will involve city dwellers in the life of milking cattle and help them to appreciate the deep connection between human life and nature. During 50 years he has become one with the bovine, understanding their desires, and they in turn understand him. He is one of the few cattle farmers in Japan.

## Creating a Happy Farm for Cows & Human Beings

Isonuma runs a unique business venture in Hachioji in western Tokyo that connects his dairy farm in Kobikimachi Hachioji City with the community, schools, fresh food companies, and research groups. The farm is 10 minutes from Yamada Station on the Keio Takao Line. He endeavors to create a sustainable environment for quality milk production for centuries to come. He can understand which calf is from which mother by the sound it makes. The motto of his farm is to create a happy farm for both cows and human beings.

Photo: Author



Masanori Isonuma

He lives up to his motto. The farm provides milk which tastes good and is also a source of enjoyment for the city. Isonuma Farm has become a place where many people come to meet, share their experiences and learn new things. Isonuma believes that his farm “lubricates society through the presence of cows”. A business which is in harmony with society can be sustainable.

At a departmental store called Celeo Hachioji housed in Hachioji railway station building, Isonuma has a farm outlet called Isonuma Farms. Here he showcases and sells his products ranging from cheese, cakes and ice-creams to yoghurt, cookies and milk. In the shop he sells a special kind of milk in glass containers called *milk no ogon ritsu* or “Golden Harmony of Milk” which is a blend of raw milk with a sweet rich flavor. The blend is heated to 65 degrees Fahrenheit for 30 minutes to keep its original flavor.

He believes that showcasing local and regional products can help sustain his business and invigorate the local farmer’s economy. Both at the shop and at the farm he runs a scheme for people to own a cow. It is possible for customers to buy a cow which will be taken care of at the farm and its produce transferred to the owner. This is an excellent method of connecting individuals with the farm and the cow. Isonuma explains, “The idea of this ownership is that we will seek people who would like to name our cows after birth and get involved in the cow’s entire life, including milking, dairy farming, cheese making and so on. I believe the owners would get fun and enjoyment in taking care of a living animal indirectly. What we are trying to do now is to establish a new system of ownership. It is a system to ask people who are interested to donate some money to buy a calf.”

Getting involved with the growth of a calf also creates a sense of bonding and an understanding of how animals live, breed and produce milk.

## History of Isonuma Dairy Farm

Isonuma dairy farm was started on farming land by Isonuma’s father with just one cow about seven decades ago. The farm is spread over two hectares of farming land of which one hectare is used as open grassland and one hectare as cow pens, manure creation, pig farm, sheep farm, goat farm, poultry farm and factory to manufacture cheese, yoghurt and pasteurize milk. He is apologetic that the area is not so big: “As for grazing, we keep calves and milking cows outside on the grassland. Milking cows are kept in cow pens. There are 45 milking cows. Including calves and cattle we have

Photo: Author



Children's class

90 in total." All the cows and their calves look healthy and happy. During the day they are munching on fodder enriched with vegetable leftovers and fruit peels all the time.

The idea of expanding the farming business in the 1950s was quite new. Even now it is new. The foresight that his father had has worked well for both his son and the community at large. Isonuma has an interesting story to tell in this regard. "When I was born my father started the farm. After 10 years we had 10 cows. When I started the business at the age of 20 we had 20 cows and in 1989 when I was 40 years old we had 40 cows. What a coincidence!" The connection between the cows and his own life is apparent. He plays with them and takes care of them when they are sick.

### A Hard Schedule at the Farm

Isonuma creates a hard schedule for himself but enjoys it nonetheless. He gets ready to milk cows at 6:00 a.m. and the milking machines begin at 6:30 a.m. until 8:30 a.m. Cleaning of the cow pens between 7:00 and 8:30 a.m. and checking of the quality of milk at 9:00 a.m. From 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. calves are fed. Washing of milking machines and the milking room takes place until 11:00 a.m. Obviously two more persons help him in the overlapping time. At 11:00 a.m. he begins making fertilizer from cow dung. At 12 o'clock the morning session comes to an end. At 2:00 p.m. the compost delivery truck comes. Between 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. the coffee dust pickup comes. At 4:00 p.m. calves are fed. At 5:00 p.m. second milking begins and ends at 8:30 p.m. Clean up takes place at 9:00 p.m. He has a long day. He also manages veterinarian care, calf management, fieldwork and entertaining guests after the morning shift and conducts classes. Obviously it is not easy to run the farm with just five persons. Also the profit is not so high. So it becomes difficult to pay the management and invest in new machinery and

products.

Isonuma explains, "There were many things difficult for me in running the farm. First of all, five of us manage the farm. It is quite difficult. As this is work with a very small amount of profit, it is tough to get an investment. Returning the investment is also difficult. At the farm we have a factory which produces yoghurt. Trying to be in the sixth sector of industrialization, namely processing and distribution, has not been easy. We made our own brand of products. Our customers purchase our products. The profit we get from it supports our management activities. This diversification is successful only when products are sold, otherwise it is not going to help the management."

Over decades, international competition and globalization have brought down agricultural production in Japan. To increase domestic production, the government encourages the sixth industrialization which promotes domestic agriculture. But still many cattle farmers like Isonuma feel the going is tough. Like most dairy farms in Japan, Isonuma's is a family-run business. He feels that a labor shortage and investment are two big problems in dairy farming. How long he will be able to work with this energy is anybody's guess. Isonuma has few days off, perhaps one or two days in a month. The Japan Dairy Council estimates that an average dairy farmers get 17.7 days off in a year. Also they work long hours from 6 in the morning to 9 at night. Knowing that family-owned farming comes to an end due to old age, sickness and absence of a successor, Isonuma wants to create a community succession.

### Using Social Network Services to Promote Business

Isonuma uses social network services effectively to conduct both business and social services. He uses Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and a website to regularly post photographs of cows getting milked, school children attending classes on cow education, milking cows and lessons on cheese making. He also posts write-ups accompanied by photographs. He has the following information printed on his visiting card: "Happy farm for both cow and people! Animal Welfare! Isonuma Milk Farm Since 1994 CEO Masanori Isonuma". The SNS is used to inform people of upcoming events. Occasionally he has a flea market of farm goods and produce manufactured on the farm which is also advertized through SNS. Isonuma says: "I think it is important to spread the pleasure of dairy farming so I update information about the farm and farming on a daily basis on Facebook." The visiting card tells the story and philosophy of his life.

### Open Community Farm

Isonuma Farm is an open community farm symbolically held in

trust for the community. It uses sustainable practices for feeding, milking and sheltering animals. Isonuma also trains future farmers, especially the young, who do not know much about how cows live or how dairy products are manufactured. He also has many farm programs to educate adults on the ways milking is done and dairy produced. Isonuma believes that connecting people to the milk they consume is the best way to safeguard the future of milk production. He has devised many programs and events to promote cow farming from cowboy-cowgirl school lectures, trial milking classes, dietary education, fresh cheese trial classes to pizza trial classes, camping at the farm, working in rice fields and experiencing wheat fields. Isonuma tells us, “We keep our farm open to people so that anyone can come anytime if they wish to. We have an introductory viewing lesson of the farm for elementary school students and university students. We also provide training for young people with cows through a day’s experience. So the idea of an open community is to create a place in the city which functions as an open access area for all.” Isonuma believes that business is done through people’s happiness, not their exploitation.

The raging pandemic in Tokyo and the emergency measures imposed by the government have not dampened Isonuma’s spirits. He conducts his business within the rules of the measures. Maintaining social distancing, Isonuma conducts classes on milk and cheese production with full infection control measures. The body temperature of participants and workers is measured, their hands disinfected and they must wear face masks.

The Internet has given added value to his business and farming philosophy. Isonuma Milk Farm Online Shop sells many farm products as well as conducting classes which can be booked online. A one-hour class for milking cows and tasting milk costs 700 yen, while a one-hour class to make butter from fresh cream costs 1,000 yen. In the butter-making class students are taught how to shake a

bottle of fresh cream to make butter. Usually three to four persons share one bottle of fresh cream.

Isonuma tells us: “I am a part of dairy farming education for elementary to high school students. I want to let them know how dairy products are made and how milk is produced and stored. My aim is to let students know the life of animals and their connection to human beings. Dairy products are the only food that does not deprive animals of life. So by participating in this educational process my intention is for students to get interested in farms, cows and our products. Since we are a dairy farm in Tokyo I believe that it is our duty or mission to let students know about this process of dairy farming in their precincts. We also provide dairy product-making experience from time to time, including how to make butter, cheese or pizzas.”

There is a lot of passion in his voice when Isonuma explains about his farm and the activities conducted on it for the community. “There is hardly any place in Japan to learn about dairy farming today even if one wishes to. We welcome people for milking on Sundays so we extend that one-day experience to one year at school. Once in a month or perhaps more children come to the farm and experience making milk products. As of now there are five to six children joining our classes. They come when they want to as nowadays children are very busy.” Isonuma accommodates school children on his farm according to their school schedule.

### Health of Cows, Milk Extraction & Recycling Food Waste

Isonuma keeps different varieties of cows on his farm to ensure that he gets the right kind of milk for creating a good blend and in producing other dairy products like cheese and yoghurt. At present Isonuma has six different varieties of cows – Holstein Friesian, New

Photo: Author



Isonuma Farm Counter

Photo: Author



Cows eating cabbage



Jersey, Brown Swiss, Ayrshire, Gandy and Milking Shorthorn. The Holstein cows are the most common variety at the farm and also in Japan. About 99% of dairy cows in Japan are Holstein. They are called Holstein as they come from the Holstein region of Germany. Some are also imported from The Netherlands. Their udders are large; their milk yield is high. They have a gentle temper and thrive in cold climates. New Jersey cows have thick milk as the fat content is higher. Premium yoghurt is made from such milk. Its thick cream is like clotted cheese. They are the second most popular cows at the farm and also in Japan. They come from Jersey in the Channel Islands. They are not as large as Holsteins and are light brown in color. Then there are the Brown Swiss from Switzerland and their milk is used for making cheese. He often mixes milk from six cow breeds at the farm to give a wholesome quality to the milk.

Isonuma also sells Tokyo *gyunyu* (milk) from the Kyodo Gyunyu Kyokai to support the milk cooperative. It is sold in a black and white tetra pack and has no strong smell to it. Isonuma is also supporting the Glaming Campaign of Nakanishi Farm. “Glaming” means glamorous and camping. The camping in the open gives a glamor to the animals and the camping. The process of milk extraction is directly connected to the process of pasteurization and the health of the animals. The production of milk per day is about 1,000 liters out of which 90% is sold. Untreated milk is kept in a cool tank at 4°C and every day a tanker comes to pick it up after checking its quality. The farm has a pump which digitally checks the amount of milk that is extracted from each cow daily. They also create a “positive list” which is the basis for providing safe milk. The checklist also includes things such as “does not include milk from a sick cow”.

At the farm there is a factory to make milk into yoghurt and ice cream. Isonuma tells us that when they make yoghurt they “sterilize the milk at 95°C for five minutes and add bacteria for milk to ferment”. The farm also has a veterinary doctor who is commissioned to take care of the health of the cows and attend to them when they are sick. Isonuma says: “Yesterday he came over to check the cows. We usually ask him to come home but at the time when he came a calf was getting born. The doctor would check if the cow goes into labor normally. On other occasions he would check if cows have a fever or do not eat enough.”

The veterinary doctor keeps the farm healthy and free from disease. Keeping the animals healthy and clean helps in maintaining the normal rhythm of the farm. The animals are well-kept and their welfare and happiness is of prime concern. Isonuma Farm is a member of the Animal Welfare Food Community of Japan (AWFCJ). Isonuma finds tasty fruit peels and other products for his cows to feed on. He believes that “if cows feel happy they will produce tasty milk”. This is the goal of Isonuma Farm: to have a win-win relationship between the cows and their customers.

Recycling waste food in the city is the primary goal of the farm. This is the need of the hour and makes Isonuma Farm synchronize

with the goals of the international community. Isonuma is concerned about food wastage and does eco recycle at his farm. It means he uses waste material left by beer and *anko* (red bean paste) manufacturers and vegetable packaging companies to feed his cows. Malted barley, spent grain left over in the process of beer making, cabbage pieces left over during packaging and peels from *azuki* beans are all mixed with cow feed to make it both nutritious and tasty. Isonuma has a contract with a factory in Higashi Murayama which supplies him with pineapple peels that please the cows. Isonuma says: “I watch the cows munch pineapple peels and it makes them happy. They are also living beings.” The cows enjoy the tasty morsels and give good quality milk.

Making cow dung compost and supplying it to big farms and kitchen farms is perhaps the most sustainable way to run a dairy farm. Making *uchinosuke* or ripe coffee peels and cow dung compost is a sustainable business project at the farm. Cacao shells and coffee bean shells are used for rapid aerobic fermentation. As the dung is frequently turned the heat of fermentation also converts the coffee peels into compost. It takes about four months to turn cow dung into compost. The compost is then sent to local farmers, open field vegetable producers, house cultivators, school farmers, and kitchen garden owners for use. The compost is also used as waste material for converting kitchen waste into compost and promoted by local governments. The compost is packed in bags and transported by trucks to different locations.

The history of harvesting cow milk by human beings is centuries old. Isonuma is part of a gathering called *milk man nen no kai* – that is, “the gathering for milk to last for 10,000 years”. Isonuma tells us that the farm organizes information on milk chronologically. The teachers try to re-create the connection between human beings and cows from ancient Sumerians using cow’s milk to make cheese and butter around 3,000 BC. Today Mongolian, Indian and Turkish families use processed milk extensively in their diet. He says, “We study how whole milk was involved in human life in ancient times. Milk of course was a precious thing in the past.”

Isonuma has a warm, gentle and curious personality. He embraces everyone warmly. He talks to them politely and listens to them attentively. He is curious about everything connected to milk. He was inquisitive to know about the use of ghee as medicine in Indian Ayurveda. Isonuma is not just a businessman selling milk but a visionary and a transformer of society. He is creating a great future for the community of Hachioji.

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Professor Mukesh Williams is advisor to the South Asia Research Center at Soka University, visiting faculty at Keio University, consultant/news analyst for the BBC World Service, St. Stephen's College Alumni representative and Academic Exchange Programs coordinator in Japan.