

Construction well underway at Hilmar Texas cheese plant

AS MORE and more cows continue to head into the Texas Panhandle region, Hilmar Cheese Co. officials say their new plant in Dalhart will be ready for them this fall.

Even though groundbreaking ceremonies were held only 11 months ago, the ambitious construction schedule is well underway. Over a 10-year period the company plans to invest \$190 million in the project.

As seen in the accompanying photo, all walls and roofs are up and most silos have been installed. The cheese processing and cold storage facilities are complete, and the whey processing area and dry storage structures are nearly so. The focus now is on equipment installation.

"Construction continues right on schedule to process milk in the fall," said David Ahlem, Dalhart Site Manager.

Will open in October . . .

Scheduled to open in October, the plant's initial phase of construction will allow a processing capacity of 5.0 million pounds of milk per day. This volume will be reached as market demand and sales to customers allows. The facility has been designed to grow quickly and efficiently, and long term site design



Construction of the new Hilmar Cheese Company plant in Dalhart, Texas, is on schedule for an

allows for up to 9.5 million pounds to be processed per day.

By all appearances, the arrival of sufficient cows to supply that milk is also well underway.

During the inaugural dairy forum held at the Amarillo Farm Show in November, Dr. Ellen Jordan, Texas A&M University Dairy Extension Specialist, said cow numbers in the Panhandle region have grown from 23,000 in 2000 to more than 125,000 in 2006.

"One third of Texas' milk production has moved to the Panhandle in the last five years," she said, "And well over half will be here by the time another five years passes."

Jordan said dairies have come

October 2007 opening. Processing capacity will start at 2.0 million pounds of milk per day, and

because of the area's cow friendly environment and ag-friendly business climate. In addition, the opening of Hilmar Cheese Company and Southwest Cheese in nearby Clovis, N.M. continue to draw producers to the region. She estimates another 150,000 cows could arrive in the next five years to meet the demand these plants are creating.

New dairies arriving . . .

Roger Sybesma, owner of Skyward Dairy, moved to Dalhart from southern California and has been milking 2,300 Holsteins in Dalhart for just over a year. "Our family was attracted to Dalhart because it's a great place to dairy and also

expand each year until maximum capacity of 9.5 million pounds per day is reached in 2014.

provides a great quality of life with good schools and churches right here in town," he says.

Richard and Jennifer Avila, owners of Avilanche Dairy, a 2,400-cow Jersey operation, began milking in January. "The reason we chose Dalhart is because of Hilmar Cheese Company's new plant and a local market for milk" said Richard.

Several other new dairies are currently under construction. Full Circle Jersey Dairy, owned by Sieto Mellema, plans to milk 1,800 Jersey's starting in July this year. "Dalhart has an abundance of high quality roughages and the weather is ideal for raising dairy cows," he explained. 