



➤ Dusty and Stephenie Machado with their daughters, Hayden and Daphnie.

PRAYER, PATIENCE AND PURPOSE

Dairy farmers, Dusty and Stephenie, 'lean on' God

BY LYNETTE MAGNINO | PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE GERMAN

"HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW," DAIRYMAN DUSTY MACHADO ADMITS AS HE EXPRESSES ALMOST CERTAIN RUIN AT THE THOUGHT OF LIFE - AND FARMING - WITHOUT GOD.

"I can't imagine how it would be if I *didn't* believe in God," he says, searching for other possibilities but knowing there are none. His words wander and his mind reckons. "I'd go crazy," he adds, 100 percent convinced that his strength and his ability to cope with all the stressors of agricultural work in California stem from his faith and trust in God.

"I thank God I have his shoulder to lean on," he continues, summoning vivid and magnificent imagery and telling of his ongoing dialogue of trust with God, reminiscent of Psalm 37: *"Trust in the Lord and do good, that you may dwell in the land and live secure. Find your delight in the Lord who will give you your heart's desire."*

Dusty prays for strength and help but he also offers refined prayers of awe and gratitude, in the fields, in the barn and in his heart. And prayers of praise on Sundays at St. Joseph Parish in Elk Grove.

Dusty and his wife, Stephenie, own Machado & Sons Dairy in Elk Grove, having committed to revitalizing the family dairy legacy first started by his grandfather in Bellflower in 1958. When Dusty's grandfather John moved to Northern California,

he eventually bought acreage in Elk Grove to carry on farming with Dusty's father.

"I'm the third generation," he says, drawing on his earliest memories of growing up on the property and sharing a two-bedroom mobile home with other families long before anything was built on the land. He recalls old photographs, dirty boots, Sunday shoes and hard work.

When Dusty's grandfather died in 1998, his father, David, assumed dairy duties for a short while before exiting the business in 2000. The strain was real, taxing his health physically and mentally. But by 2017, Dusty had decided he wanted to give it a go and

revive the farm of his youth and the "dairy life" that had been the mainstay of his family for decades.

"I'm running it for him," Dusty says with respect to his grandfather. He bought cows and redid the milk barn with a vision to carry the dairy forward to the next level.

ABOVE AND BEYOND WITH PRAYER

"My dream is to go above and beyond," Dusty shares, keenly aware that the next level can only be accomplished with God. In 2020, Dusty and Stephenie decided to enter the process of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) at St. Joseph Parish.

While Dusty was raised in a Catholic household, he had never been baptized. "It just never happened," he says. Stephenie had been baptized as an infant and also sought full communion



with the Catholic Church. The Easter Vigil in 2021 marked a turning point for the Machados. Their daughters, Hayden and Daphnie, also subsequently received their baptisms. Dusty and Stephenie look forward to welcoming their third child in August.

In their journey to rebuild the dairy, the move to solidify their faith journey made perfect sense. They knew God's presence in their marriage, family and farming would mean God's grace throughout the good times and the trials.

"There have definitely been experiences that have tested our faith," Stephenie acknowledges, alluding to the inevitable ups and downs of the agricultural industry.

Dusty expresses a litany of factors beyond his control that contribute to each year's outcome: the weather and change of seasons; new or changing government rules and regulations; the volatility of the commodities market; and the demands of round-the-clock milking and feeding of the cows.

"It's a lot of faith and a lot of praying," Dusty insists, revealing an interior hope that things might get easier. The weight of caring for 200 animals, farming more than 150 acres and managing equipment can be immense.

"I pray to go another year," he admits, his voice heavy and weary but resolute as he quickly adds, "I don't want to sell this place."



There have definitely been experiences that have tested our faith."

STEPHENIE MACHADO

PATIENCE TO ENDURE AND BUILD A SUSTAINABLE DAIRY

Prayers and petitions give way to patience.

"Give me the strength," Dusty begins, and then quickly adds "the patience" to his appeal to God. He emphasizes how his special requests are not just for the physical ability to endure, but also for the mental wherewithal to greet the challenges that face him every day.

"There are days when I catch myself," Dusty admits of the recognition that stress is mounting and sensory cues make him take pause.



▲ Stephenie checks the milking equipment.



▲ Dusty pulls a mixer to feed hay to the cows.



“
To be working with
creation – I have no
better way to say
it – to be working
with the land and
with animals, it is
so vastly different.”

DUSTY MACHADO

ready for the next planting.

“It’s the same cycle over and over” and it includes big-picture planning to prudently rotate crops to avoid stripping the soil of the necessary nutrients. Yet, Dusty concedes that sometimes even the best of plans and the most efficient schedules submit to nature. Cows die. Weather dictates. Fields flood and crops are lost.

Dusty and Stephenie know that dairy living is a collaboration with nature and reverence for God’s creation.

**PURPOSE-DRIVEN
IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH THE CREATOR**

“Sometimes I shut off the phone and take a break,” he says acknowledging the need to take action, but clearly an action of another kind – a thoughtful response to God’s grace.

Stephenie, who works full time for the state of California, sees how these “pauses” mixed with “patience” seem to transition Dusty and the dairy to a place of peace. “Things just seem to fall in line when they’re supposed to,” she says, accepting whether “something works out or it doesn’t.” She appreciates how everything usually unfolds as it should.

The unrelenting dairy lifestyle requires that cows be milked every 12 hours, at 5 a.m. and again at 5 p.m.

“After the cows get milked, the cows get fed,” Dusty explains,

detailing how babies may be bottle-fed, and older cows are bucket-fed. “Then we feed the mama cows and the heifers and the calves,” he says of the constant work and the added dimension of growing their own feed.

“I usually have one field of alfalfa and two other fields of rye grass and clover through the winter,” he shares, before describing the summer corn crop and silage that ensures feed after October.

In between the growing cycles, Dusty is “working and prepping the ground” – discing, ripping, tilling and lasering the acreage to get it

“To be working with creation – I have no better way to say it – to be working with the land and with animals, it is so vastly different,” Dusty confides, searching for words to explain the magnitude of his experience and purpose.

“I’m out there driving a tractor at 10 at night, or whatever, and I get up the next morning and do it again,” he says, hinting at the vigilance and anticipation to work ahead of a forecasted storm. After tilling and planting, and after he puts in borders, he looks at the field and “the ground just looks so beautiful.”

Once the plants peek through the dirt, Dusty confesses, “you look back and you smile.” The same smile brims when he cuts and bales and fills the barn, knowing the cows will be fed and people will be fed once the milk lands in the stores.

Dusty values the opportunity to work the earth, farm the land, and nurture the cows to produce milk products as a partner in the “cycle of life.” It is a partnership that he does not take for granted.

Recalling his childhood, Dusty remembers praying each night before bed. “I was thankful” for everything from the grass that grows to the shining sun. His Catholic sensibility stuck with him and he wants the same for his family.

“I want to instill these values in the next generation,” Dusty confides, concerned that “changing times” are subtly eliminating appreciation and gratitude for God’s gifts of farming, land and resources, and animals.

The Machado’s say it’s their purpose to make “sure our kids are good people,” faithful and focused, grateful and growing, respectful of God’s creation. In the same way, with steward’s hearts, Dusty and Stephenie strive to lean on God and live a life that highlights God’s creation and generosity that flows like milk and honey. †



▲ Dusty’s father, David, visits the dairy.