

[back to article](#)



Printed on page G1

## A peek inside a farm

By HALLE STOCKTON

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As Raina Donoho ran her hands through buckets of feed and watched cows cooling off under the shade of a barn, she yelled.

"Eww. I saw poop," she said, shriveling up her face in a grimace.

But 5-year-old Raina walked on and learned about the "cow to bottle" milking process with about 15 others on an afternoon tour of Dakin Dairy Farms, which Jerry and Karen Dakin opened to the public for the first time Saturday.



STAFF PHOTOS / CHIP LITHERLAND  
Raina Donoho, 5, plays in a hay bail maze during a tour of the Dakin Dairy Farms in Myakka City, Fla., on Saturday, October 4, 2008.

The 200-acre farm, 30771 Betts Road, will be open on the weekends through April for milk plant and agritours. There also will be pig and goat races, a nine-acre corn maze, pony rides, petting barn and campfires to roast hot dogs and marshmallows around.

The first stop on the tour: the compost. A tour guide explained that the leaves, manure and other organic matter would improve the soil on the farm by providing nutrients.

The freestyle barn was the next exit, where hundreds of cows were in stalls.

Buckets of cow feed, such as corn silage, citrus pulp, cotton seed and molasses, were set in a line for the group to sink their hands into as tour guide Malinda Winn talked about the heat-repelling barn roof and the fans and misters inside the barn used to keep the cows cool.

There is a "flush lane" in the barn, positioned to collect and rinse out the cows' waste.

"This all works to keep the cows cool and clean and minimizes bacteria," Winn said. "You'll see that it doesn't smell, and there are hardly any flies."

Additionally, the cows are cleaned every day with high-pressure revolving shower heads. Air pressure herds the cows up to the drying area.

The next building housed the milking equipment. The 1,400 cows on the farm have a

routine. Each bovine willingly walks to the barn and is attached to the equipment three times a day, giving about nine gallons of milk daily.

"It's not your grandpa's milking dairy anymore," Winn said.

In the coming weeks, the Dakins plan to update the bottling facility and add cheese and yogurt processing to the plant.

On Saturday afternoon, those on the tour got an unexpected surprise. A cow was ready to give birth in front of about 30 onlookers.

"It's a girl," Jerry Dakin said after a few workers pulled the calf's hind legs from the mother and it had plopped into a wheel barrow.

"In two years, she'll be back ready to milk for us," Karen Dakin added.

Frank and Robin Butler, along with their children, were pleased with the authentic dairy farm experience. Their 8-year-old son, Hunter, worked his way through the crowd to find a better view of the birth.

"He was holding his nose the whole time," Robin Butler said, laughing.

Seven-year-old Keanu Donoho had only one word to offer about seeing the up-close birth: "slimy."

His older sister, Athena, 10, had mixed feelings about the calf.

"It looked weird when it came out," Athena said. "It was kind of cool and gross at the same time."

Raina Donoho, their cousin, shook off her initial disgust from the beginning of the tour as she watched the mother cow affectionately clean the calf.

"It was so cute. She was beautiful," she said. "It was fun. I saw the baby cow for real being borned!"

This story appeared in print on page G1

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