

# 2024 Conservation Farmer of the Year Award

## Marla & Todd Frescura, Dante & Evan



The farm is operated by (left to right) Todd and Marla Frescura and their sons Evan and Dante.

**F**rescura Farm, LLC., is a 100-acre organic dairy farm located in Latrobe, operated by Todd and Marla Frescura, with help from their sons Dante and Evan. The Frescuras own approximately 60 Ayrshire and Milking Shorthorn cattle.

The Frescuras and their family have been supporters of conservation dating back to the mid-1990s when Todd's grandparents, Thelma and the late Roy Kemerer, placed the farm in an agricultural conservation easement to protect the land from being developed in the future. The farm, originally purchased in 1948 by Roy, started out as a conventional dairy farm. Todd purchased the farm in 2008 and began the process to transition the farm to an organic dairy farm in 2010 due to a combination of factors such as rising seed prices, increases in cost of fertilizer and herbicides and a decrease in milk prices. After meeting the necessary



Conservation practices at the farm started with Todd's grandparents, (above) Todd and his grandmother, Thelma Kemerer.

requirements, the farm was officially certified organic in 2016 and now supplies milk to Horizon Organic.

The Frescuras' cows are pasture-based and are rotated daily between one of 53 paddocks constructed on the farm. This practice of "rotational grazing" is a



Organic milk from the Frescuras' farm is shipped to Horizon Organic facilities.

beneficial conservation practice that improves soil health and structure and reduces wind and water erosion. The cows are brought in twice a day to be milked and the milk is then shipped to Horizon's facilities in New York and Virginia. Todd follows stringent requirements



The dairy herd rotationally grazes within paddocks across the 100-acre farm.

to keep his farm compliant with organic certification protocols and receives multiple inspections each year.

The family has promoted conservation practices for several decades, which has been especially important since the farm is located within the High-Quality portion of Sewickley Creek. In 2006, the family worked with the Westmoreland Conservation District (WCD) and Sewickley Creek Watershed Association through a Growing Greener grant to establish Best Management Practices (BMPs) including installing gutters and dripline drains on the barns and a grassed waterway to aid in reducing erosion. This grant also enabled forested riparian buffers to be planted along the stream. The family also worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to install animal heavy use area protection and animal walkways.

Todd has worked with WCD over the years to establish a volunteer nutrient management plan and to keep the farm's manure management plan up to date. Other BMPs Todd implements include stockpiling manure within manure storage for use in the spring and preventing the cows from having direct access to the stream – the stream has been fenced off and Todd hauls water to them. Todd has also been practicing regenerative agriculture for several years.



Streambank fencing and a riparian forest buffer were implemented to conserve the High-Quality watershed.



(left) A stabilized animal walkway helps keep erosion and sediment out of our waterways. (right) Todd provides water to the herd as they graze through his prescribed grazing system.

With the aid of NRCS, future conservation plans include establishing a 3-acre pollinator planting to provide a buffer between Todd's organic farm and the adjacent conventional farms. Todd will also work with NRCS to construct additional fencing as part of a prescribed grazing plan which includes adding stabilized animal walkways. Water hydrants will be added within various paddocks for water access for the herd. Waterbars will also be installed along field access lanes to prevent erosion toward the stream.

The Frescuras stay busy – in addition to farming, Todd is a school bus driver and is a committee member of the county's Farm Service Agency office. Marla is a first-grade teacher at Yough School District. Dante and Evan both hold jobs outside the farm in addition to helping with the farm.

# Westmoreland Conservation District