

## Honest to Goodness Dairy and Community

*An honest commitment to dairy farming, community relations, agricultural education, and adaptive business planning by Richlands Dairy and Creamery. This short vignette is part of our “Virginia Food Systems and COVID-19 Story Collection Project” that aims to highlight, collect, and share stories of hope and resilience in our food system amidst the pandemic. Find out more about this project and view our entire series on [our website](#).*

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Farmers, in general, need to be extremely adaptive, creative, and dedicated because of the many risks and challenges that confront them from day to day and year to year. After strong fluid milk prices in 2014, dairy farmers have since been particularly hard pressed financially due to extenuating circumstances. A Shenandoah Valley dairy farmer recently shared that he had not experienced four years as challenging as 2015 to 2019 in his fifty years of farming.

Farmers are increasingly interested in distinguishing their businesses in the current highly competitive marketplace. In addition, there has been significant growth in the demand for local and regionally grown foods. In response, a growing number of dairy farms have developed farmsteads, creameries, and supplemental enterprises to persevere and buffer themselves against the whims of the weather and vagaries of a changing dairy market.



*Richlands sharing the goodness of dairy and community.*

[Richlands Dairy and Creamery](#) is one of Virginia’s farmstead creameries and is owned and operated by the Jones family of Blackstone, VA. Their farmland straddles Dinwiddie and Nottoway counties and dates back to the mid-1700s. The Joneses researched different business plans for five years and decided to commit to starting a farmstead creamery to bottle milk, serve ice cream, offer meals, encourage agritourism, and provide a venue for other farms to sell their produce and merchandise. The Creamery officially opened to the public in June 2019, and

is celebrating its one-year anniversary. The Joneses, like all of us, could not imagine they would be in the throes of a global COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020.

Coley Jones Drinkwater is the founder and owner of the creamery. Coley and her family are great proponents of agricultural education and [Virginia's Agriculture in the Classroom](#) program. She regularly provides live updates on the "Joys and Concerns" of a modern dairy and creamery through their [Facebook page](#). Coley's father Hugh Jones, similarly shares updates on aspects of day-to-day farming and quizzes friends and neighbors on farm and county-based agricultural facts.

During COVID-19, Richlands Dairy and Creamery adapted their business plan to offer drive thru hours, call ahead curbside meal services, and outdoor picnic seating to serve their community, while being conscious of social distancing to protect everyone. In addition, they partner with an area food bank to share one gallon of milk for every 10 gallons sold to give back to their community.

Coley admits that responding to COVID-19 is similar to dealing with a moving target. Everything is in constant motion and flux with different challenges each day. She states, "It is imperative to keep up with official announcements and changes in phases of social distancing and allowable protocols. As a business owner, you have to be cognizant of the needs of your business, your employees, your customers, and community, as well as the unique needs of a mother visiting the creamery with a three-year old child." Overall, Coley finds that the risks and challenges associated with dairy farming prepared her and her family well to be adaptive, responsive and creative as present circumstances require.



*Honest dedication to community, local farmers, agriculture, and family time.*

Coley and the whole Jones family are so grateful and humbled by the outpouring of mutual support, patience, and commitment. Coley and her family continue to have joys and concerns for themselves, their neighbors, and their wholesale business partners. So, they aim to look for the best in a difficult and stressful situation, and the promise of the honest goodness of dairy and community.

This vignette was adapted from a [Hoard's Dairyman](#) article by Sarah Thomas, a current Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences undergraduate student of dairy science, which was published on May 15, 2020.

## Reference

Thomas, S. (2020, May 15). *They're finding the best in this*. Hoard's Dairyman. Retrieved from: <https://hoards.com/blog-27913-theyre-finding-the-best-in-this.html>