



Above: The tour bus stops at the Country Cupboard store down the lane from Cinnamon Ridge Dairy. The Country Cupboard sells fresh eggs, pork, beef and the farm's famous cinnamon rolls. Top right: A tour group of farm-equipment dealers from Hungary sat down to lunch in the home of John and Joan Maxwell, who own and operate Cinnamon Ridge Farms near Donahue. Middle right: The Jersey calves are curious and enjoy watching the visitors. Bottom right: John Maxwell converses with the interpreter, Peter Kertil of KITE, an farm-equipment dealership in Hungary. Kertil once worked on a dairy farm in Wisconsin and says robotic milkers are commonly used on European dairy farms.



Continued from page 4

summer, the Maxwells host up to four tours, and hundreds of guests, each day.

AND BECAUSE IT'S a working farm, Joan will often be out in the fields, running the tractor or combine, while John gives the tours.

"I have a drive within me that wants to educate others," John said. "All the tours that we do, education is at the base of what we do. And I actually love it. I love every bit of it."

In addition to giving tours, the Maxwells also treat visitors to lunch inside their home. It's an opportunity that many international visitors don't get while they're in the United States, the Maxwells explained.

"IT ALL HAPPENED because they were asking for it," Joan said. "A lot of (the visitors) wanted to see a house that an American family live in. And then a lot of them were traveling so much, they really wanted a home-cooked meal."

The Maxwells built a commercial kitchen inside their home, with three cooks on staff who prepare meals for guests.

To keep the farm cooks busy when they aren't preparing lunches, the Maxwells opened an on-farm store called the Country Cupboard, down the lane from the dairy barn.

THE COUNTRY CUPBOARD is a little cabin stocked with fresh

baked cookies, bars and the farm's famous cinnamon rolls. (If you're wondering, Cinnamon Ridge Dairy is named after the color of the Jersey cows, not the rolls.)

The store also offers beef, pork, eggs and cheese — all from the Maxwells' farm. John's brother, Ed, is a master cheesemaker trained in Wisconsin. He makes the cheese on the farm, in a room next to the milking parlor.

ALSO UNIQUE, the Country Cupboard is a self-serve store. Customers can take what they want and place their money in a mail slot to pay. Joan said they've never had a problem with customers not paying, although the signs in the store caution that it is monitored by cameras.

Visitors often travel from as far as Iowa City to pick up their favorite Cinnamon Ridge Farms products, such as the beef ribeye steaks, the Sriracha cheddar cheese curds and the rhubarb bread, which is popular year-round.

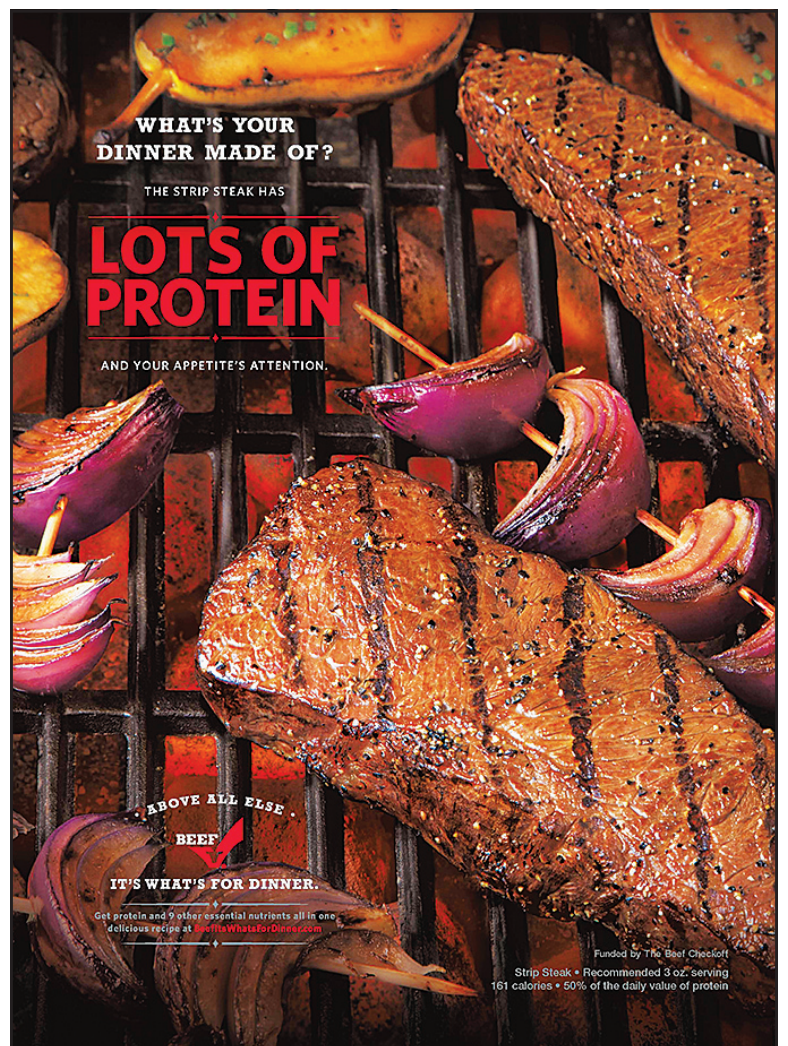
"There is a crowd that wants to know where their food comes from, exactly," John said.

IN ADDITION TO the international guests, the Maxwells said they welcome local visitors to experience a day at the dairy. The farm regularly hosts church groups, school tours, women's outings, family get-togethers and anyone interested in seeing the dairy cows up close.

"It's like people-watching in the mall," said John with a laugh, as he looked through the windows to see the cows lounging in the barn and walking back and forth to the robotic milker.

"THERE IS A LOT of opportunity to come out and share the agriculture experience, both modern — with the robots — and we also have old tractors and things like that too. So it's kind of mix of the modern and the historic," John added.

"If you are at all curious, we are for you," he said. ■



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Cinnamon Ridge Farms is located at 10600 275th St., Donahue, Iowa. Groups in size from one to 140 people are welcome to tour the farm. For more information, or to schedule a tour, visit www.tourmyfarm.com. And for the latest specials at the Country Cupboard on-farm store, check out the store's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/CinnamonRidgeCountryCupboard>.