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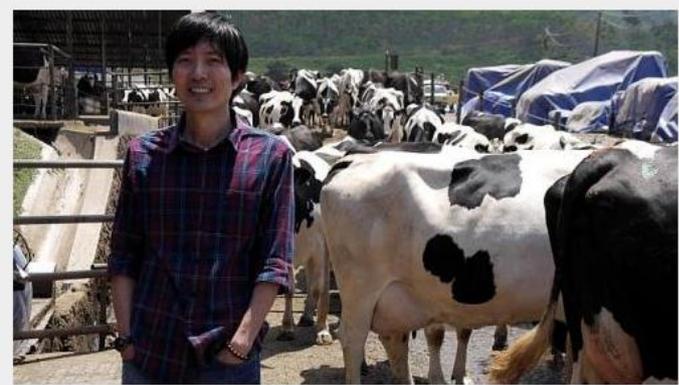
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One Singaporean, 6,000 cows

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Singaporean Alvin Choo (above) manages the Greenfields dairy farm on Mount Kawi. It produces milk and makes cheese such as mozzarella. -- PHOTO: ARDITYA/AUSTASIA FOOD



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By John Lui

The hills around Malang are home to many dairy farms. Cows imported from Australia and Europe seem to be happier in the cool, semi-temperate climate and happier cows make more milk.

On the slopes of Mount Kawi is the largest dairy operation in South-east Asia, the Greenfields dairy, home to the 6,000 Holsteins producing 20 million litres of milk a year, enough to fill eight Olympic swimming pools.



Watching over the operations is a Singaporean, Mr Alvin Choo. He laughs when he is asked what a city boy is doing there, looking after a farm.

The 51-year-old head of dairy operations has been there for more than two years. Before going over, he had worked in supply chain management for Fiji water and other products.

"I took this job to learn. There's no industry like this in Singapore," says the father of three. His family lives in Singapore, while he stays in a hotel in Malang and visits home once a month.

As we walk around the dairy, he stops to admire the farm's vantage point, at over 1,000m above sea level.

"This is my view every day," he says proudly, looking at the clouds and the town below.

Each morning, after an hour-long drive from town to the dairy, he makes an inspection tour of the farm and adjoining plant and meets some of the operation's 550 staff working in three shifts.

Set up in 1997, the joint Australian-Indonesian operation not only produces milk, but also processes and packages it into retail cartons. Being closer to customers in Asia means fresher, better-tasting milk, which is the concept behind the farm and plant.

Greenfields is a major supplier of milk to cafes in Singapore for lattes and cappuccinos. Recently, it set up a cheese-making room: the plant now produces and ships fresh cheese, namely mozzarella and bocconcini. Most of it is sold to restaurants, which use it in pizzas and salads.

In Malang, Mr Choo likes to relax at Java Dancer Coffee (12, Jalan Kahuripan, 0341-819-9899, javadancer.com).

"Good ambience, good coffee and snacks," he says. The cafe serves Arabica and Robusta coffee and sells coffee beans from around Indonesia - including the infamous Kopi Luwak, or civet cat coffee, made from the digested remains of beans eaten by the forest creature. It also offers cakes and pastries.

There is not much time for relaxation for Mr Choo, though, as work takes up most of his week.

Milk production is a full-time job. The Holsteins have to be milked three times a day and calving is constant.

"There's no holiday where cows are concerned," he says with a laugh.

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