

Family's Farming Tradition Growing the Next Generation

Jon Dockter, Midwest Forage Association

In 1979, Brian Hazel formed a partnership with his parents and brother to begin farming near Lanesboro, MN. Then, in 1990, he bought out his parents and brother and began farming as a sole entity now known as Haz Broy Farms. Brian is bringing his son and daughters into the operation to carry on the family's farming tradition.

Hazels own 825 acres (430 acres of which are tillable) of silt loam soils in the hills of southeast MN. They also rent 550 crop acres and two grazing parcels totaling 150 acres on which they rotationally graze their dairy heifers.

Hazels presently milks 305 cows and owns 310 dairy heifers. They also have about 450 calvings a year. The herd averages 28,003 lbs milk, 1,011 lbs fat, and 879 lbs protein. About 40% of their Holsteins have been rotationally crossed with Montbeliarde and Scandinavian Red.

Managing their herd is very rewarding for the Hazels and always keeps them on their toes. Pictured on the Forage Focus cover is a little bull calf that slipped away when being moved to the hutches. Brian said, "He found a soft, shady place to lie down in Judy's garden while waiting to be retrieved."

To feed their sometime mischievous herd, the Hazels maintain a crop rotation consisting of 400 acres of corn, of which 250-300 acres is harvested for corn silage and high moisture shelled corn. They also no-till 250 acres of soybeans.

Haz Broy Farms maintains 250-300 acres of alfalfa as well, with the goal of harvesting all of the forages on fields of 5% slope or less. This aids in speed of harvest and generally provides better access to haul the forage away. Brian stays away from planting alfalfa on steeper slopes because the chopping is more challenging. He generally saves the steeper slopes on his farm to rotate no-till corn and soybeans.

All row crops are no-till planted, with cover crops drilled right behind the corn silage with a no-till drill. This year, Brian plans on seeding cover crops on his bean and high moisture corn ground.

Hazels usually leave their alfalfa in for three years and then rotate back to corn. "We have established our alfalfa about every way there is, from no-till drill to blowing it on, then rolling," says Brian. "They have all worked for us. But currently, we have gone back to seeding at 14 lbs/ac with a Brillion-type seeder."

They had tried adding grasses to their new seedings but have moved away from the practice, as it makes managing the moisture levels in the bunker silos too difficult. They plant 50-60 acres of a barley-pea nurse crop harvested for heifer feed, with any remaining acres direct-seeded with conventional seed.

Hazels cut their alfalfa four times each year with a target relative feed quality of 155-170. They use a 13' disc mower with a goal of cutting 80-90 acres per day. The fields are then merged and chopped with a pull-type chopper during which an inoculant is applied. The last cutting usually falls somewhere between August 25 and September 10, depending on weather conditions.

The third cutting is baled if weather allows them to put it up in less than a week. Brian says medium square bales work best for his storage, however, he also bales and wraps both dry hay and medium moisture hay to protect it from the elements. He also tub-grinds the round bales so they feed better in a TMR. They do not market any hay, preferring to maintain an adequate inventory for those years when the crops fall short.

Hazels grid sample all of their fields, believing the information it provides makes the best use of their nutrient dollars. They also keep their rotations relatively tight so they can spread manure back on those acres when seeding to row crops. Brian feels strongly that good fertility helps all of the crops endure the year to year stress that comes along.

Brian is an active member of Midwest Forage Association (MFA) and affiliate Southeast Minnesota Forage Council (SEMFC). He has gone above and beyond, volunteering to host field days, as well as helping secure speakers and sponsors for SEMFC. "MFA has been a great resource for me as a dairy and forage producer. I look forward to each issue of Forage Focus. It's a great publication which keeps me up to date with the latest forage research."

Forage Focus, May 2016



Brian Hazel, his wife Judy, daughters Amy & Amber, son Adam.

