

Farming a Family Affair for the Tauchens

MFA member and Bonduel, WI, farmer Alan Tauchen has been farming with his family for close to 42 years. He, along with his brothers Greg, Gary, and Steve, and his parents Marlys and Herb, operate Tauchen Harmony Valley farm in Wisconsin's Shawano County. The Tauchen story begins with Herb, who was raised on an 80-acre farm in Dorshester, WI. While attending the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in the early 1950s, majoring in ag education and science, he met Marlys. After getting married in 1952 and graduating from UW-River Falls in 1953, they moved to Barron County, where Herb worked for USDA's Soil Conservation Service (SCS). After a short stint there, the Tauchens moved their growing family to Waupaca, where Herb continued to work for SCS. They began farming in 1963 with the purchase of a 100-acre farm near the small town of Weyauwega. They also purchased 14 dairy cows and began milking.



In 1965 they moved their ever-expanding family (seven children by this time) to Shawano County, where they purchased an 80-acre farm north of Bonduel. In addition to dairy heifers, they raised beef cattle, sheep, chickens, and pigs, which Herb saw as a way to keep his children busy. Naturally, the Tauchen children became heavily involved in both FFA and 4-H.



After years of working on nearby farms throughout high school, Alan decided he wanted to farm for a living following graduation in 1976. It was also around this time that Gary, Alan's oldest brother, decided he wanted to farm. Eventually, brothers Steve and Greg would come home to farm as well. Seeing the writing on the wall, and knowing 80 acres wouldn't be enough to support the growing number of children interested in farming, Herb purchased a farm southeast of Bonduel in 1976 that would become Tauchen Harmony Valley, Inc. The farm had 180 acres, more productive land than their previous farms, a two-story stone house, and a 47-stanchion barn. Their dairy herd increased to 80 cows, then 120, then a big jump to 500 after three years of planning – then building – a new freestall barn and milking parlor in 1996. “Steve participated in a few dairy tours in New York and Michigan to learn more about expanding our operation,” said Alan. “We sold all of our machinery and just concentrated on cows from 1996 to 2000.”

In 2000, they built another freestall barn to handle an additional 500 cows. Today, they milk a total of 1,200 cows, divided into three herds: Holsteins (900), Jerseys (100), and Holstein-Jersey crosses (200). All are milked three times a day with the Holstein herd leading the way with a rolling herd average of 30,288 lbs of milk and 1,140 lbs of butterfat, followed by the Holstein-Jersey cross herd with an average of 26,226 lbs of milk and 1,115 lbs of butterfat, and the Jersey herd with an average of 21,280 lbs of milk and 1,071 lbs of butterfat. In order to maximize herd yield potential, the Tauchens utilize artificial insemination in an effort to mate the correct bull to each cow.

After expanding their herd for a second time, they concentrated on growing crops again. Currently, they farm 2,500 acres (1,675 owned; 825 rented), with 1,450 acres of corn, 700 acres of alfalfa (plus 120 acres of pasture), and roughly 100 acres each of winter wheat and soybeans. Even though the Tauchens do all their own planting, they rely on custom harvesters and manure haulers to reduce their workload.

They typically keep alfalfa in production four years (including seeding year). “We generally see production decline around then, so we rotate into other crops, generally, corn, then soybeans,” explains Alan. “We rely heavily on soil testing and make sure to test every field at least once every four years. We always put alfalfa on higher-fertility land and tend to plant alfalfa at 20 lbs/ac.” They have used RoundUp Ready varieties for the past few years because of weed control advantages. This year is the first year they've planted HarvXtra alfalfa, so they're anxious to evaluate its yield and quality compared to previous varieties.

The Tauchens hire custom harvesters who take four cuttings in a normal year. The haylage is then stored on a feed pad for easy feed-out.

In addition to remaining a full partner in the farm, Gary has served as a Wisconsin State Assemblyman since 2006. He makes his home in the old stone house included with the purchase of the farm, but spends most of his time in Madison when the legislature is in session.

Alan's mother Marlys plays an integral role in the success of the operation. She manages books and payroll for 20 full-time employees.

Alan has been a loyal MFA member since 2004. “I find my membership to be invaluable to raising good forages. *Clippings* and *Forage Focus* articles have relevance to what we're doing on the farm.”

With Herb and Marlys' 24 grandchildren (and 6 great-grandchildren), it won't be long before a new generation of Tauchens become involved in the day-to-day operations of Harmony Valley Farm, continuing the Tauchen tradition.