

Durovec Dairy: A Lesson in Managed Grazing Benefits

Bob and Patty Durovec began their farming career early. Only one year out of high school, at the age of 19, the two married and purchased their current farm – Durovec Dairy – from Bob’s parents, Steve and Stephanie. Together, they have been managing the farm since 1979.



In the 40 years they’ve been operating the farm near Meadowlands, MN, they’ve made a number of improvements and have adopted practices leading to consistent production, which earned them recognition by the University of Minnesota. In 2017, Durovec Dairy was awarded the St. Louis County Farm Family of the Year by the University’s Farm Family Recognition Program honoring farm families throughout Minnesota for their contributions to the agriculture industry and their local communities.



Back row L to R: Jared Schminski, Chad Durovec, Chase Durovec, Amber Durovec, Eric Weinraub, Bob Durovec. Front row L to R: Brea Schminski holding Braylee Schminski, Naveed Durovec, Negar Durovec, Nadia Durovec, Hanna Maly, Patty Durovec.

With two full-time and four part-time employees, the Durovecs farm 820 acres (300 rented) and milk 200 dairy cows (two-thirds Holstein; one-third Holstein-Jersey-Ayrshire crosses). They also raise 200 heifers.

The Durovecs built a low-cost, time-efficient, Swing 16 New Zealand-style parlor 17 years ago along with a 100-cow, sand-bedded, free-stall barn. New Zealand-style dairies captured Bob’s attention, as it emphasizes forages and managed grazing; pasture/grazing is king, and everything else is built off what the pasture can provide. He felt it was a viable model for northern Minnesota with its cool summers and shorter growing season.

“We have a 20,000-lb herd average, 4.2% butterfat, and 3.3% protein,” said Bob. “We’ve maintained a somatic cell count (SCC) under 150,000 for 9 years.” Somatic cell count is the total number of cells per milliliter in milk and is a main indicator of quality.

If not being milked, generally half the herd is in the freestall barn while the other half grazes. Heifers graze during summer and bale-graze during winter, helping rejuvenate low-producing paddocks. “The grazing herd consists of mostly first-calf heifers and crossbreds.” Durovecs intensively graze annuals and perennial crops. To say Durovec Dairy is “all-in” on grazing would be an understatement. “Grazing has cut production costs significantly, but the season is short, mid-May to the end of October,” said Bob. “We try to extend grazing by planting winter cereal grains, and for fall grazing we use Italian ryegrass planted early in April. We have winter waterers located in paddocks, and there are above-ground waterlines in all pastures which we drain before they can freeze up in the fall.”

Durovec Dairy is fully fenced with high-tensile perimeter fencing. “Heifers are grazed from 600 lbs to calving, intensively,” said Bob. “Heifer pastures are changed every 3 days and the dairy herd every 12 hours. In the winter, we use portable windbreaks for the pasture herd; this year we started using a one-acre limestone feeding area to feed on. It is also used when pastures are muddy to prevent paddock damage.” The average pasture rest period is ~28 days during the growing season. Pastures are composed of orchardgrass, quackgrass, Kentucky bluegrass, reed canary grass, red and white clover, alfalfa, and birdsfoot trefoil.

Durovecs grow nothing but forages, ~40-50 acres of perennials and 100 acres of annuals per year on heavy clay and peat soils. Two years of annual crops followed by 4-5 years of a perennial tend to be a typical rotation. Perennials

include alfalfa, red clover, orchardgrass, and meadow fescue, while annuals include winter triticale, winter rye, BMR corn for grazing, and a mix of oats, Italian ryegrass, turnips, and Winfred.

Durovecs generally fall-plant alfalfa, prepping the field with a moldboard or chisel plow, then a soil finisher with a grain drill, Brillion, or no-till. Grass and red clover are interseeded with alfalfa to produce a good baleage and grazing mixture.



At harvest, Durovecs cut with a Vermeer TM1410 discmower with no conditioning and rake with a high-capacity 16-wheel rake. “We bale with a John Deere 469 silage baler.”

They wrap 90% of the forage harvested with an inline wrapper. “We’ve done baleage for almost 30 years and inline wrapping for almost 12,” said Bob. “We bale at 40-60% moisture and always wrap as soon as possible, always the same day to capture the highest quality. We strive for dairy-quality palatability at a low cost.” He wraps his 4x5' bales with a minimum of 6, 1-mil layers of plastic. “We pick the bales up in the field with a self-loading bale picker and inline wrap them in a north/south configuration so the sun hits them evenly.”



Durovecs take 3-4 cuttings/yr, with the last cutting after a dormant frost, usually in October. Alfalfa stands generally stay in production until they no longer produce at least a ton/ac, typically 6+ years.

When asked what his most difficult management challenge is, Bob quickly replied, “That’s easy – weather.”

Bob has been a member of the Northeast Minnesota Forage Council and the Midwest Forage Association for many years, citing as his reason the cutting edge information on forage production and harvesting. “Membership in MFA and the Northeast Minnesota Forage Council has been a no-brainer,” he said. “The topics and information covered in *Forage Focus*, *Clippings*, and at meetings such as *Tour de Forage* keep me up-to-date on the latest in forage-related news and information and have paid huge dividends to my operation. It’s the easiest decision I make every year.”