

140 Years & Going Strong

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The Schmidt Century Farm located in Gresham, WI, was established in 1879, making this year its 140th year of operation. Jeff Schmidt, the fifth generation on the farm, did not start on the farm straight out of high school. He first worked as a cow breeder for 5 years. After his uncle retired from the farm, Jeff took the opportunity to return in 1994 to farm with his father.

Currently, the farm is home to 200 dairy cattle and youngstock. The cattle are milked in a tie-stall barn that was built in 1909. The production average for the herd is 29,000 lbs with a 3.9% butterfat and a 3.0% protein. In order to maintain this production, the Schmidts strive to produce high-quality forage. Their goal is to harvest the highest-quality forage possible, usually producing hay in the 180-200 RFV range. They grow alfalfa, peas, corn for silage and grain, and oats on 430 acres. This year, 240 of those acres are in corn for both silage and grain, 130 in alfalfa, 38 in alfalfa with oats, and 22 in peas and oats. Jeff says his biggest issue in producing forage for his farm is always weather. Each year's weather brings a new challenge to the farm. This year, winter weather brought severe winterkill in stands older than 2 years.



Quilt square on tie-stall barn built in 1909.

In order to help maintain inventories, Jeff follows management practices that he has found to be useful. He farms more acres than needed in order to maintain a surplus of forage for years when production is down, like this year. He also places a high value on having enough regrowth in his alfalfa stands so they are able to replenish root reserves before the first frost; he tries to maintain a firm deadline of September 1 for taking the fourth cutting. He also plans for 60 acres of new seeding each spring.

When establishing a new stand of alfalfa, Jeff starts by taking a soil test to make sure the field has the appropriate level of nutrients to grow alfalfa. Then he makes adjustments as necessary. The alfalfa field is seeded at 18 lbs/ac and it is also interseeded with oats at 3 bu/ac. He believes in using a cover crop in the first year of a stand to prevent soil erosion on the hills. An added benefit to growing oats is they use the oat straw as bedding for the dairy cattle.

In addition to the firm deadline of September 1 for last cutting, his advice for other farmers is to “walk your fields.” Jeff says, “It is important to go out in between cuttings because the 28-day schedule may not be right and you could lose out on quality if the alfalfa matures quicker than that.”

Most of the alfalfa produced by the Schmidts is chopped for haylage. They do their own chopping using a pull-type chopper. Feed is mostly stored in bags, and they use inoculant on both haylage and corn silage when bagging to help better preserve feed quality. While most of the alfalfa is made into haylage, some is put up dry. They have it custom baled in 3x3x7' bales and use propionic acid if the moisture level is high.

One-hundred-forty years is certainly a long time, but the Schmidt Century Farm plans on continuing for many years to come. The next generation is already on board. Dylan Schmidt knew he wanted to farm with his



Dylan Schmidt (left) and Jeff Schmidt (right) with their Farmall H tractor purchased in 1941.

father. After high school, he attended Fox Valley Technical College where he received an associate's degree in Agribusiness Science and Technology. He is now the sixth generation working on the farm.

In today's agriculture economy, often the next generation chooses not to farm. But when asked why he has chosen to continue his family's legacy, Dylan responded by saying, "Farming is a passion you are born with. If it isn't in your blood, you wouldn't do it." While the cows are milked in a traditional tie stall and the first tractor purchased for the farm (Farmall H) still runs, Jeff and Dylan have their eyes firmly on the future.

Jeff Schmidt has been an MFA member since 2008. Additionally, he has been a Shawano County Forage Council member for 24 years and has served on its board in the past.