

# Scheevels – Farming Forages in Southeast Minnesota

David Scheevel grew up on his family's dairy and crop farm near Preston, MN, which was run by his grandfather, father, and uncle. After his high school graduation, he went on to attend college at Rochester Community College and the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, where he graduated in 1982 with a degree in Farm Management. Hoping to put his college degree to work, David came home to work on the family farm. However, four short years later, in the midst of the 80's farm crisis, the family operation had to start over. David was able to become an owner, farming alongside his brother and uncle. They were able to keep the dairy herd and a portion of the cropland and farmed together for seven years. In 1993, David and his brother split the dairy herd and farmed separately.



David and his wife Kathy leased a dairy facility about 1.5 miles away from their previous location which they continue to farm today. They currently milk a 130-cow dairy herd, mostly Holstein, in a freestall, parlor barn. “Over the years we’ve added a small manure pit to get away from daily scrape and haul, and poured an outside feeding floor, taking out the inside feed bunk and adding a row of freestalls,” says Scheevel. “Our production is 23,000 lbs milk, 3.6% butterfat and 3% protein.”

The Scheevels farm about 250 acres, most of which they own, but some of which they rent from a neighbor. Roughly 90-100 acres are in alfalfa hay and 90 more are in corn; most of the crops are chopped for silage. For the past six years the Scheevels have seeded winter rye on the chopped corn ground and have experimented with broadcast seeding and incorporating or rolling it.

“The best results have been with no-till drilling. I seed most of my alfalfa acres by running through the rye with a vertical tillage machine in April, then following with a Brillion seeder – putting on 15-17 lbs alfalfa seed per acre,” said Scheevel. “We chop that in late May or early June. Initially, we just used it in dry cow and heifer diets, but for the last two years we have been feeding it to the milking herd as well with good results.”

What he doesn't seed goes back into corn. “We do leave one field fallow through the summer to haul manure. Then we seed it to alfalfa in August. We try to go 2-3 years of corn followed by 3-4 years of alfalfa,” added Scheevel.

He plants Roundup Ready seed and sprays the hay fields once per year for weeds, believing it helps get an extra year out of a hay stand. Scheevel also uses insecticide, typically after first, second, and third cuttings.

“We take 4 cuttings per year with the last in early September. I don't think enough is gained taking a fifth cutting, even here close to the Iowa border. I have had winterkill a couple times after taking an October cutting.” The Scheevels chop all of their hay and store it in bunkers, piles, and occasionally bags.

The farm's soils tend to be clay loam, and steady rotations are needed to hold down erosion. Most of the fertility comes from cow manure, with half rates of potash added along with sulfur and boron as needed.

The Scheevels don't own any cropping equipment; they rely on equipment rental and custom hires. “We hire our hay cut with a triple mower, then merge it and chop it with a self-propelled chopper. We haul with both trucks and tractor/wagons.”

Their hay yields average 4-4.5 tons DM/ac, corn grain yields average 185-200 bu/ac, and corn silage yields average 25-28 tons/ac. David uses both his seed dealer and fertilizer/chemical supplier for agronomic advice. “The biggest difficulty I run into is just getting haylage put up with a minimum amount of rainfall, as southeast Minnesota is one of the rainiest parts of the state.”

His best advice to fellow farmers would be to “do a good job growing your forages. And don’t be afraid to experiment some.” David was a charter member of the Fillmore County Forage Council in the mid-80s and had been a member of the Minnesota Forage and Grassland Council, and is now a member of the Midwest Forage Association (MFA). “I like being able to learn about new ways I can manage our forage system and what new forages may fit our system.” Scheevel also sits on the board of directors of his dairy coop, Foremost Farms USA, serving as chairman since 2008, as well as on the board of the National Milk Producers Federation.

“In late January I had the privilege of being invited to the White House to witness the USMCA trade agreement signing. I got to stand on the podium behind President Trump, Vice President Pence, and trade negotiator Robert Lighthizer. That was definitely a highlight for me and shows how we can make a difference.”

The Scheevels have two adult children, daughter Emily (husband Eric Sinn and children Kylie and Cael) and son Andrew (wife Rachel and daughter Sylvie). Emily and Andrew are pursuing off-farm careers.



Granddaughter Kylie Sinn (milker in training).