

Riverview: Continuing to Grow & Diversify

For Riverview LLP, what began as a Fehr family-owned crop and beef farm has grown into a multi-faceted, ever-changing partnership. Today Riverview operates four associated but separate business segments – dairy, beef, construction, and crop production. These segments operate across five states: Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Arizona.

The story began in 1939 when Paul and Anna Fehr came to the Morris, MN, region from West Bend, IA (Anna had grown up near Morris). The couple had five daughters and three sons, including Lloyd and Paul Jr., who would figure prominently in their future farming plans. The Fehrs raised beef cattle and crops and incorporated Riverview Farms in 1976. The farm got its name because it overlooks the picturesque Pomme de Terre River.



Jason Picht, Riverview Farm Manager

In the 1980s and early 90s, as Lloyd's children were coming back to the farm, it appeared beef feeding profits were shrinking, as the feedlot industry was moving further south in the Great Plains. So the Fehrs studied their other options in livestock – pork, poultry, and dairy.

In 1995, the company's business structure changed to a partnership, which allowed several community members to invest in the new 800-head dairy, complete with a double-24 parallel parlor. Over the following years, the vision of an adaptable, integrated agricultural operation continued to grow as more dairy operations, beef feedlots, agronomy systems, and construction crews were added. Today, the company is predominantly owned by Riverview employees who strive to provide a respectful, ethical work environment, ensure animal health and comfort, enhance the productivity of the land, and add value to the communities in which they live and work.

Riverview relies heavily on the farmers surrounding their dairies to grow alfalfa and corn silage to feed the cows. Additionally, Riverview produces silage, grain corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and edible beans on its own acreage.

“With regard to alfalfa production, generally stands are kept in production for four years and rotated with corn,” said Farm Manager Jason Picht. “Alfalfa is generally planted in spring at the same time as corn (late April) at a rate of 15-18 lbs/ac. We field cultivate once, then smooth roll before and after seeding to ensure good seed-to-soil contact.”

Riverview generally uses HarvXtra seed as they like the flexibility it gives them to extend their harvest windows for haylage harvest. However, they plant several different varieties, choosing not to stick with just one brand.

Fertilizer comes in the form of liquid manure before planting and is supplemented with commercial fertilizer in years 2, 3, and 4. Pesticides are sprayed, on average, one time per year but can vary depending upon disease or pest pressure.

Riverview does not do any interseeding as their nutritionist likes to have a homogenous product and balances the ration for 100% alfalfa.

“In a normal year, we'll get two to three cuttings off our new seedlings and four cuttings on established stands,” says Picht. “Our goal is to complete the haylage harvest before silage harvest begins, which means we are typically wrapping up haylage mid- to late-August. Haylage is piled on the feed pad and covered with an oxygen barrier overlaid with a heavy-duty plastic.”



“When we make haylage, the process consists of cutting it with a 30' triple mower, no conditioners. We merge seven windrows together and run it through a chopper,” says Picht. “On new seeding we average ~3 tons/ac and on established stands, 6-7 tons/ac. Both are on a 15% moisture basis.”

Generally, after four years Riverview takes alfalfa out of production. “On occasion we’ll take it out early if we’ve experienced some winterkill, or leave it in for a fifth year if the stand is deemed viable. All of our decisions are based on stand counts.”

When it comes to the biggest management difficulty Riverview deals with each year, Picht quickly says, “Weather! Trying to make haylage in Minnesota’s variable summers proves to be a challenge every year.”

As far as the best management advice Picht has for alfalfa farmers, he says, “Be open to learning new ideas. Don’t sweat the things you can’t control. So much of making hay is out of one’s control, so focus on what you can control and adapt when Mother Nature thinks otherwise.”

Riverview has been a loyal MFA member since 2004, due in part to the unified voice it gives to alfalfa and dairy farmers. “The value of a strong membership in MFA has been very helpful in places like Washington, D.C., where we have a louder voice together than as individuals.”