

Krause Holsteins – Six Generations of Dairy Production

Charles Krause, owner and operator of Krause Holsteins, has been involved in farming his entire life – full time since 1991, when he graduated from the University of Minnesota. The 500-acre farm is a sixth generation dairy farm located west of Buffalo, MN. As Charles fondly puts it, “Someone in my family has been getting up to milk cows every day for the last 150 years in Wright County.” If the Krause name sounds familiar to many readers, it should. Not only is Charles Krause active in many community, dairy, and agricultural organizations, his father, Warren Krause, was a board member of the Minnesota Forage and Grassland Council, a precursor of MFA.

Today, Charles farms with his son Andrew. “We currently have ~350 Holstein cows, as well as the female offspring we raise on our farm,” says Krause. “In all, we have ~650 head from birth to mature cows.”

In terms of milk output, Krause’s cows have a rolling herd average of ~25,000 lbs with 4.2% butterfat and 3.35% protein. They milk two times a day in a double eight parallel parlor. Their Holsteins are housed in a freestall barn built in 2013, and they use recycled manure solids for bedding (deep bedded). They also have a small compost barn for special-needs cows.

In terms of crops, corn and alfalfa are their staples. “We grow ~300 acres of corn and 200 of alfalfa,” says Krause. “Since we only plant these two crops, we have about two-thirds corn-on-corn each year.”

“Our soils are primarily heavy loam, with a clay base. We also have some sandy soil on a rented farm close to Crow River.”

They generally keep alfalfa in production for three years. “This year we actually have a fifth-year field. Due to severe drought last year, we were uncertain how a new seeding would come through the winter, so we kept it for a fifth year. So far, it has performed well.”

They direct seed most of their alfalfa in the spring. “In past years we did quite a bit of summer seeding (early August) with good success. But our forage needs are greater now with the increased herd size, so we spring seed with hopes of getting three cuttings.”

If needed, they apply lime to fields in the fall before spring seeding. “We work the field twice with a conventional field cultivator and plant with a Brillion seeder. We had been using Roundup Ready alfalfa since it came out, but in the past few years glyphosate hasn’t worked well on water hemp, the toughest weed to control here, so we’ve switched back to Dairyland hybrid alfalfa.”

They plant alfalfa at ~16 lbs/ac and may interseed with grasses to increase tonnage. “Alfalfa is our main crop. The past couple seasons we planted oats (1 bu/ac) as a nurse crop to get a larger first cutting.”

In terms of fertilizer, they haul bedded pack manure with a twin beater vertical spreader and/or direct inject liquid manure from their dairy prior to seeding. They believe the new manure spreaders are so good at distributing



Robyn, Morgan, Charles, and Andrew Krause.



solids at a thin, even rate that they are able to apply some solids to the stands in the second or third year as well.

Alfalfa is harvested as haylage and stored in bunkers. “We take four cuttings every year. The first around May 25-31 depending on crop condition, then every 28-30 days. About every third year we get a fifth cutting late in October after the frost,” adds Krause. “We try hard to not go past the first week in September for fourth cutting. It is important to let the plant build root reserves prior to a killing frost.”

They cut their hay with a John Deere R450 discbine, then merge three windrows into one with a cross conveyor H&S merger the following day. They chop with a John Deere 7300 self-propelled forage chopper, pulling a Meyer 22' rear dump wagon behind it. “This allows us to chop with 1-2 fewer people moving wagons to the bunkers.”

They dump haylage on an asphalt floor earthen wall bunker, or occasionally pile it on asphalt pads which are packed with a John Deere 9320 4-wheel-drive with a Degelman blade. They also apply inoculants to all forages. “We use a vapor barrier and a 5-mil plastic layer combination to cover the pile, ideally at ~60-63% moisture.”

They get ~1,200 tons of haylage a year. “Our establishment year yield is usually 2.5-3.5 tons/ac and 5.5-6.5 tons/ac the following year.”

Stands are taken out of production based on plant counts and yields. “Mostly we follow a three-year rotation. If a stand has poor winter survival, we are better off taking it out sooner and planting corn. A low alfalfa plant count is a poor utilization of good land.”

As far as the toughest thing to deal with, they, like many other farmers, cite the weather. “The biggest challenge we run into is working around the weather. Chopping makes it easier than if we were trying to bale the alfalfa, but sometimes it gets harvested too wet and you run into butyric haylage, which is bad for dairy cows.”

His best advice is to “take the cuttings at prime time,” – based on maximum quality, with good tonnage. “You have to harvest the crop anyway, so you might as well do it at the optimum time. Also, get the soil fertility up before you establish the stand. It’s much easier to get a good stand with proper soil fertility.”

The Krauses’ have been MFA members since it was established in 2004 and have hosted of the Central Minnesota Field Day in the past. “I think MFA helps farmers in many ways. Primarily, it creates opportunities for learning, through field days, information sessions, conferences, and *Clippings* and *Forage Focus*, which are filled with tons of information on new practices and ideas on improving existing practices. We find it to be very valuable.”

If you want to follow the Krause family operation on social media you can do so on Facebook and Twitter (Krause Holsteins). They post interesting everyday events to share with fellow farmers and consumers.

