

Aim for Quality & Consistency

Dan Martens, University of Minnesota Extension

O&S Dairy's nutrition advisor says the most noticeable thing about working with O&S is that hay and corn silage feed is always of good quality and very consistent. The Olsons and Schreindls will tell you the weather doesn't always allow them to put up hay the way they like, but quality and consistency are the driving goal in their efforts to grow, harvest, store, and feed high quality forages.

Bruce & Linda Olson and Troy & Melissa Schreindl are O & S Dairy, located near Rice, MN. Troy and Melissa joined the operation with Missy's parents Bruce and Linda in 1997 and they expanded the dairy in 1998 to 190 cows. Troy and Missy have primary responsibility for the dairy herd while Bruce takes the lead with crops and Linda is in charge of the bookkeeping. They all work together to get things done with good hired help and assistance from other family members.

O & S Dairy raises its own heifers and feeds out Holstein steers. Their crop rotation consists of 185-190 acres of established alfalfa hay, 40-50 acres of new seeding alfalfa, ~60 acres of grass hay from meadows, 125 acres of corn for silage, 150 acres of corn harvested as high moisture shell corn, 200 acres of corn for dry grain, and 60-90 acres of soybeans that are roasted and used in dairy rations. Corn acres are handled to meet feed needs first.

O & S Dairy finished the 2011 DHIA year with a 24,142 average. They aim to feed half corn silage and half alfalfa hay in the forage part of their ration with ~1 lb/day of grass hay.

Hay Crops

Alfalfa follows corn in the rotation and they try to stretch the alfalfa interval as much as they can to reduce problems with aphanomyces. Pen pack manure is applied prior to seeding and the land is usually moldboard plowed. They use 1-2 tons of lime per acre on land that is in alfalfa regularly and sometimes more on rented land.

Varieties are selected for winter hardiness and resistance to root and seedling diseases. They use 18 lbs of inoculated seed per acre in the spring with 1.5 bushels of barley to reduce erosion risk. Seed is dropped ahead of the press wheels on the grain drill and an empty Brillion seeder is pulled behind the drill. The goal is to seed about ¼" deep. The pockets made by the Brillion seeder help with holding water and reducing wind and water erosion.

Their goal is to harvest alfalfa that will be 150 RFV in the feed bunk. They cut with a self-propelled 14.5' disc-bine. This year they bought an inverter that picks up a 6' swath; leaving a 6' swath with the disc-bine made a noticeable difference in drying time. They look for leaves to be wilted through the swath as a sign they are ready to chop and they are usually chopping within 24 hours of cutting. They aim to chop at 55-60% moisture. They have the equipment ready, get it cut quickly, and get it off the field, cutting half the night or through the night if needed. Haylage is treated with a lactobacillus inoculant and stored in bags.

Three to four thousand gallons of liquid dairy manure are applied right after harvest on older stands that might have a little grass in them; the response is usually very noticeable. If they get delayed, there can be some burning on new growth. These fields need to be dry and firm to avoid compaction and rutting up fields.

Corn Silage

Silage specific, grain-producing hybrids are used for corn silage, to achieve higher stalk and leaf digestibility. Corn is planted at a 34,000 population, using 97-103 day varieties for silage and 95 days or less for grain. Their target is to chop at 65% moisture. Most of the silage is stored in bags and treated with a lactobacillus inoculant. For corn silage and alfalfa they are able to feed off 3-4' per day from 10' bags – which helps to maintain fresh quality feed.

Care of the Land

Bruce makes taking care of the land a priority, and aims to instill this value in the next generation. He tries to keep alfalfa on the rolling land as much as he can to reduce erosion. They continue to improve land with tile drainage. Even on rolling fields, pattern tiling helps them enter fields sooner for everything from planting to harvest.

Continue to Learn

The Olsons and Schreindls continue to learn from their experience in the field through each crop and feed season. They enjoy visiting other farms to learn from them. Bruce is a long time MFA and Central MN Forage Council member. O&S Dairy hosted a forage and dairy tour in 2011 and is a cooperator with the Central MN Forage Council alfalfa scissors cut project.