

Managing for High Quality Forage

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Planning, producing, and managing for high quality forage at Tidy View Dairy, Kaukauna, WI, is in the capable hands of Glenn Sayler. Glenn serves as the operations manager, overseeing agronomic practices for 3,800 acres which include 1,600 acres of alfalfa and 2,200 acres of corn. Glenn was raised on a dairy farm and has been either a farm operator or farm manager for more than 35 years.

Glenn and his wife, Glenda, have raised five children and enjoy spending time with family and friends. Their children grew up in an agricultural environment that included producing much of their own food by raising goats and vegetable gardening. Glenn has been deeply rooted in agriculture his entire life and currently serves on the Executive Board of the Outagamie County Forage Council. Glenn has been a member of the Midwest Forage Association for several years and most recently earned the Pacesetter Award in 2011 which recognizes outstanding producers.

Glenn's vast knowledge and experience has proven invaluable in producing a consistent and quality feed supply for the 6,500 cows and 200-300 springing heifers at Tidy View Dairy. Glenn also contracts an additional 4,000 acres of corn and alfalfa locally to assist the dairy in meeting its total forage/feed needs. Since no young stock are housed at Tidy View, it is important all of the feed produced is of "dairy" quality. However, in an effort to ensure complete feed efficiency, 300-400 steers are finished yearly at Tidy View to feed up weigh-back and feed waste.

Alfalfa is of vital importance to the success of any dairy and Tidy View is no exception. Alfalfa is generally direct-seeded in the spring and weeds are controlled early in an effort to harvest 2-3 crops in the establishment year. Paying attention to detail and limiting early seedling/plant stress, established stands generally stay in rotation for 3-4 years. Stands are scouted regularly and pest thresholds monitored to protect against unnecessary losses. Alfalfa is harvested on approximately 30 day intervals resulting in 4-5 cuttings a year.

While Mother Nature will have a say when cutting occurs, the dairy has an objective of harvesting superior quality feed and aims for a high Relative Feed Value (RFV). Alfalfa is harvested as high quality haylage with a goal of 190 RFV. Alfalfa is generally cut and harvested in a 3-4 day period. Six self-propelled forage harvesters remove crop from the field quickly while semis deliver the harvested forage to the farm where every single load is weighed and sampled for moisture/quality. A half-dozen or more blade tractors properly pack and store the crop to ensure ideal dry matter per cubic foot densities exist, eliminating oxygen, resulting in proper fermentation while maximizing storage space. After harvest, the haylage is further managed on covered, drive-over piles to limit any possible feed degradation from exposure to the elements or weather.

Glenn and Tidy View Dairy have been key partners with UW-Extension/UWEX Team Forage on the multi-year Alfalfa Yield and Persistence Project. Over the past five years, Glenn has worked with local UWEX Crops and Soils Agent, Kevin Jarek, to collect data from alfalfa acreage in Outagamie County to be included as a part of this state team initiative. Mike Rankin, Crops and Soils Agent, UWEX - Fond du Lac County/UWEX State Team Forage leader oversees and administers this unique alfalfa assessment project. A large portion of the data collected for this statewide effort has come from fields associated with Tidy View Dairy. Glenn's cooperation with UW-Extension to collect important "on-farm" data has been invaluable in identifying agronomic trends and correlations as well as answering long-term management questions associated with high quality alfalfa production in Wisconsin. The most recent project data can be viewed on the MFA website at <http://www.midwestforage.org/pdfRschProj/11WIAlfalfaYieldandPersistenceProject.pdf>.

Harvesting high quality corn silage begins with managing the crop long before harvest. For 25 years, Tidy View Dairy has partnered with Jeff Polenske, Polenske Agronomic Consulting, to ensure they are maximizing forage quality and quantity while evaluating the bottom line to account for financial efficiencies. Glenn and Jeff work cooperatively to identify the most effective nutrient management strategies to protect and manage the soil. This effort is rooted in a regularly scheduled soil testing program which helps the dairy take full advantage of legume and green manure credits while reducing the amount of purchased, commercial fertilizers.

Lastly, Glenn is very proud of the conservation and environmental protection aspects they employ while maintaining agronomic productivity. Glenn Sayler and Tidy View Dairy are representative of how successful managers and agricultural operations will define themselves in the future... by constantly looking for ways to improve on sustainability of practices that help their operation be productive, profitable, and environmentally sound.

