FARMER INTERVIEW

Forage is Key for this Top Dairy Farmer

Greg Blonde, University of Wisconsin-Extension - Waupaca County

Scott Seward, Waupaca County, WI.

Although he'll never admit it, you'll be hard pressed to find a better dairyman than Scott Seward. This second-generation Waupaca County dairy farmer was one of the first in Wisconsin to average more than 30,000 lbs of milk per cow annually more than twenty years ago (1993), that was shortly after moving his 120 registered Holsteins from a tie stall to a free stall barn. Continuing to improve and grow, today Scott's herd includes 420 registered Holstein cows averaging over 35,000 lbs annually with 1,281 lbs (3.6%) fat and 1,111 lbs (3.1%) protein. Scott describes himself as a registered Holstein breeder with a commercial herd manager mentality. In other words, he expects his well-bred herd to work hard and fill the tank. One of the best ways he knows how to do that is with a well-balanced diet using lots of high-quality home-grown forage.

Scott and his wife Dawn operate 900 acres of diverse farmland in the southwest corner of Waupaca County about an hour southwest of Green Bay. He has been a full-time dairy farmer since age 16, leaving the farm for only two semesters of short-course at UW-Madison following high school. In addition to Dawn, who does the bookkeeping and payroll, Scott also relies on other key employees and management team members, including: Conrad Kliest, Feed/Equipment Manager; Shelli Robbert, Feeder and Calf Manager; Dan Cruz, Parlor Manager; Eric Duch, DVM; Bennet Crochet, Cargill Dairy Nutritionist; Todd Schaumberg, Tilth Agronomy Crop Consultant; Lisa Busse, CHS Larsen Coop Sales Agronomist, and Jim Busse, Dairyland Custom Chopping (Todd, Lisa, and Jim are also MFA members). In addition to breeding his own cows, Scott is responsible for all herd, crop, and personnel management decisions.

Located just east of the irrigated sands in central Wisconsin on the edge of a highly concentrated dairy region in northeast Wisconsin, the soil on Scott's farm was deposited as glaciers receded back toward Green Bay following the Ice Age. He has 600 acres of sand, or loamy sand (180 with irrigation well and center pivot), and 300 acres of loam and heavy clay. While many might see that wide range of soil type as an extreme challenge, Scott views it as natural insurance against extreme weather providing flexibility with spring planting and forage harvesting schedules.

The diet for this record-setting herd is based on 60% corn silage and 40% alfalfa. Forage varieties include: Dairyland (Hyber-Force Alfalfa); Pioneer, DeKalb, and Mycogen silage corn (half BMR). Alfalfa is seeded at 12-18 lbs/acre and corn silage at 27,000-34,000 plants/acre, depending on soil type. Highly erodible fields (10%) are planted no-till, with reduced tillage in most other fields (one-pass corn, two-pass alfalfa). Approximately 100 acres of alfalfa are direct-seeded each year, half in spring and half in early August (summer seeding on sandy soils). Ryegrass is used to interseed injured stands.

The farm follows a nutrient management plan based on UW recommendations. Liquid manure is custom-hauled and applied on corn and winter wheat fields prior to planting. Potash (400 lbs/acre) is typically split-applied immediately following first- and third-crop alfalfa harvest. Micronutrients (Boron, Sulfur, Zinc) are applied as needed based on field scouting and foliar testing. Insects and weeds are monitored by professional crop scouting services each week during the growing season with harvest or treatment schedules established accordingly (Scott does most of his own spraying). Nitrogen stabilizers are mixed with urea fertilizer for corn to reduce environmental losses and increase yield. Alfalfa averages 5 TDM/acre and corn silage 18 TDM/acre (Lactobacillus inoculants are also used on all forage crops). Alfalfa fields are usually rotated after three years or when stem counts drop below 45/ft^2.

Half the corn silage (3,000 tons) is custom chopped and stored in a bunker. Scott harvests and stores all other forage in silo bags to help improve inventory and quality control. One hundred acres of high-quality alfalfa hay are also harvested each year in large square bales to help manage fiber levels in both the milking and replacement calves (calves are weaned in a new automated nursery, then raised in small group pens and custom raised off the farm between 6-21 months).


UWEX Alfalfa Fungicide Field Research Plots (2012-2015).

Scott has been an active Waupaca County Forage Council and Midwest Forage Association member since they began, helping him stay current with cutting edge forage technology and management information. He is firm believer in using the PEAQ stick to help time first-crop alfalfa harvest and volunteers each year to share his readings as part of the local council countywide alfalfa monitoring program. For the past several years, he has also partnered with the local and state UW-Extension specialists with several on-farm replicated field trials to explore the agronomic and economic impact of using foliar fungicides on alfalfa. In 2008, Scott received the Outstanding Forage Producer Award from Waupaca County Forage/MFA and typically attends the Symposium each year in Wisconsin Dells to learn more about forage production and management as a key to his future success.