

Organic Dairy Farm on Cutting Edge of Technology

Growing up on a 5th generation farm, joining the family business was inevitable for Adam Seibel. “Immediately after high school I started working on the farm full time and learned to love the everyday ups and downs that come along with farming,” Adam says. He and his wife Chrissy, along with Adam’s parents, Diane and Chuck, farm about 1,000 acres southeast of Bloomer, WI.



From left to right, Adam, Claire, Chrissy, Garrett, Diane, and Chuck Seibel.

In the mid ‘90s, Chuck looked at ways for the farm to be more profitable. The organic market had a lot to offer, so he began a 3-year transition process. Another year was needed to transition the cows to organic feed. The farm was certified organic in 2001 and has shipped organic milk ever since. “In the past 5 years or so, we have also sold a fair amount of organic grain and dry hay,” Adam adds.

Moving to 100% organic has many challenges. “Getting proper soil mineral balance, which helps reduce weed pressure, was probably the most difficult aspect,” Adam explained. “One of the slogans our agronomist who specializes in organic production preaches to us is - Healthy soil, Healthy crop, Healthy cows. Fifteen years ago that seemed a little out there, but we are glad we listened. Thanks to the education Midwestern Bio-Ag and its consultants have given us, we have been able to achieve optimum yields at a premium price.”

Seibels grow a variety of crops on their mostly lighter, sandy loam soils, including 350 acres of corn, 250 acres of alfalfa, 150 acres of soybean, 100 acres of oats, 100 acres of peas & triticale, and 50 acres of winter rye. They use two different rotations depending on what they are trying to accomplish: corn, peas & triticale, followed by 2 years of alfalfa; or corn, soybeans, and oats. While these are the most common rotations, they tend to vary. “We typically use peas and triticale as a nurse crop, but occasionally we will use oats for grain.”

Seibels tend to plant their alfalfa the end of May in fields prepped with two passes of their Lemken disk. All fields are soil-tested every 3 years and fertilizers are added to correct any deficiencies. “We apply a custom blend on all our fields specifically designed for the crop grown,” Adam explains. “Since we are unable to use artificial nitrogen, all of our nitrogen comes from dairy manure, pelletized chicken manure, or cover crops. We also focus on calcium, pushing our base saturation levels over 70%, to attain a higher rate of solid-stemmed alfalfa. It also aids in weed control and water infiltration. If you are pushing for maximum yields and high-quality, you must properly fertilize your soils. If not, the forage removed will very quickly deplete your soil's nutrient reserves, resulting in lower quality and yields.”

Seibels plant at a rate of 17 lbs of alfalfa/ac, along with an added grass mixture of 2 lbs/ac. Tall fescue, brome, timothy, and ryegrass are often used to improve forage quality and provide a more diverse product when feeding it to their cows.

When harvest rolls around, they cut with a New Holland 15’ discbine, then immediately ted the hay with a Krone 4 pod tedder. “On the 4th day we rake our hay with an H&S high-capacity rake and then have our custom baler do the rest. We generally make 3x3x8’ bales and only wrap if we are unable to get the hay dry before it rains. If needed, we wrap bales individually,” says Adam. They generally produce 1,500-1,750 dry tons of hay per year with an average of 5-6 tons/ac.

Seibels average four cuttings a year with the last cutting dependent upon how the fall is progressing and whether a field is going to stay in alfalfa. “We don't harvest an alfalfa field after September 10th if we are going to keep it in hay production the following year.”

They generally store their hay in either silos or bags, with all of the 3x3x8' bales stored inside on plastic to maintain the highest quality.

Their hay is dedicated to their dairy herd of 120 Holsteins, and they use the latest robotic milking technology. They also raise about 20 Holstein steers which they direct market. Seibels became involved with robotic milking when they realized they needed to upgrade their facility. “After a few years of debate, we felt that 2 Delaval robotic milkers were going to be the right fit for us.”

“Our system is a guided traffic system, meaning I can control everything with a computer. Cows needing to be milked enter a single file line leading to the milker.” Upon entry, the cow is identified and milking begins. “First it cleans and stimulates teats, then it milks. During this process, the milk is being tested for blood and conductivity. If the milk is above certain thresholds, it will be diverted and fed to our calves. When finished, the cow is post-sprayed and released. Then the system is backflushed, the floor quickly sprayed, and the next cow enters. The system runs 24 hours a day with little human intervention.”

The biggest difference between robotic milking and traditional milking is the flexibility it offers. “Since no one needs to be there to milk cows, we can alter our feeding and cleaning schedule if needed, and do other chores.” Their herd averages 75-80 lbs of milk per cow.

Hay production not used for their own cattle is marketed and sold. “I have sold hay as far away as Pennsylvania and Kentucky.”

Adam has been a member of Chippewa Valley Forage Council and MFA since 2009. “Being an MFA member gives me information I might not be able to attain elsewhere. It's a great value to my farm.”