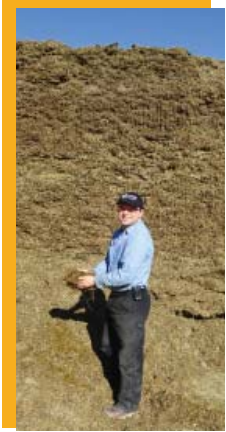


High Quality Forage is Key to this Wisconsin Dairy Farm

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On Wagner Farms, a 650 cow dairy in Shawano County, Wisconsin, Shawn Wagner knows high quality forage is the key to maintaining the herd's 92 lb/day average. As the farm's Crops and Maintenance Manager, Shawn watches over the forages from the field, to the bunker silo, and into the TMR mixer with the goal of always providing high quality feed to the cows.

Wagner Farms is a multi-generational operation, managed by Shawn's father, Hank Wagner. His mother, Pam, is focused on herd health and calf care. Grandfather Tony feeds the cows a few days a week and his sister Laura is planning to return to the farm to manage the calves and young stock after she graduates from UW-Marinette. The farm has seven other employees and Shawn's wife Crystal also helps out when needed.

Shawn first learned about crops through 4-H projects and was encouraged by his grandfather, Tony. Tony had previously served as the farm's crops manager, so when he began to step back from the farm, Shawn took on the cropping responsibilities. Tony was able to offer Shawn much encouragement and advice in his new role and to this day Tony is still Shawn's "go-to guy" for crop questions.

The farm consists of approximately 900 acres. The land typically spends 4 years in alfalfa, 2-3 years in corn, and then back to alfalfa. Traditionally, one third is used for corn silage, one third for high moisture corn, and the final third for haylage. The haylage is a mixture of alfalfa, tall fescue, perun, and cora. The alfalfa-grass mix allows them to harvest more tons, add nutritional components to the ration, and reduce the need to buy dry hay.

Shawn is open to trying new things on the farm and works closely with his nutritionist, Bill Natzke, and agronomist, Bill Schaumberg, to look for ways to improve forage production and quality. The three have had a number of corn silage and high moisture corn test plots to determine which hybrids and management practices result in the best yields and animal performance.

In 2011, Shawn decided to harvest some of the corn as snaplage rather than high moisture corn. So far he has been very happy with the results and has used it to replace some of the corn in the ration. The snaplage is stored in a bunker, but Shawn notes that it is best when fed in the winter months, limiting its exposure to rain, because it soaks up water 'like a sponge.'



Shawn is very focused on maintaining high quality forage from the field to the ration. The haylage, corn silage, and snaplage are stored in horizontal bunker silos. When the forage is brought in from the field it is carefully packed to the proper density and then quickly covered to minimize oxygen exposure. Covering the bunker properly is a large task, but all family members and employees are trained to eliminate air pockets, making sure the sides are properly sealed, and tire sidewalls are correctly placed.

Shawn also stresses the importance of maintaining a smooth bunker face during feedout to minimize silage losses. Wagners use the Easy Feed system which allows them to be extremely precise with their feeding, delivering the exact ration needed by the cows.

Nutrient management is an important component of the farm's cropping system. All fields are soil tested every 2 years to ensure they are not over- or under-applying nutrients. The fields are GPS-mapped so manure application is able to target the nutrient needs of the field. By using the GPS-application technology, Wagners are able to track the amount of manure applied per acre and match the amount applied to the nutrient needs of the crop.

Wagner Farms has been a great supporter of MFA and the local Shawano County Forage Council. They have been collaborators on many projects and opened their farm up to host Forage Council meetings. Tony is an MFA member and longtime board member on the local council.