The Takala Farm – Dairy Farming in NE Minnesota

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Most folks would think northeastern Minnesota would not be a fun place for a modernized dairy. Not so, however, for the Jim Takala Farm near Iron. The Takala Farm is a fourth-generation operation that has always had not only dairy, but beef and sheep as well, which has virtually demanded that forages MUST be part of the cropping system. The Takalas' 250+ cow dairy farm has focused on high quality grass/forage as the basis for their rations.


Jim Takala

The Takalas' rotation consists of approximately 1,000 acres of hay with about 33% of that being alfalfa and 66% alfalfa-grass mixtures. The alfalfa varieties which have been the most successful for the Takalas due to stand longevity and productivity in their soil have been the branch root-type of genetics. The grasses they seed with their alfalfa tend to be orchard or tall fescue.

In addition to the perennials, the Takalas use about 40 acres of Italian ryegrass and about 80 acres of brassicas. Both of these crops are used for specific reasons – for soil building, reducing hard pan, as well as yield potential per acre.

When reestablishing a perennial stand, the Takalas like to use 1-2 years of annual crops to help get the silty loam or clay loam mellowed, allowing for the creation of a well-prepared seed bed. This preparation enables them to plant a good stand with 12-15 total pounds of seed per acre using a Brillion seeder. The new seedlings are established with an oats cover, then cut and wrapped early for oatlage.

The best and most useful piece of equipment and technology for the farm has been a bale wrapper. The bale wrapper has increased production and quality in their operation substantially. Generally, the Takalas bale at 40-60% moisture. In addition, they also use propionic acid for hay with moisture at 18-23% to extend the baling window. They produce ~2,500 tons of hay per year.

The Takalas also fertilize their hay as needed. Their fertilizer regimen is based on the quality of the stand and consultation with local Extension, nearby producers, and adopted strategies. Manure from their dairy plays a vital role in both field and pasture fertilization. They also use industrial byproducts of lime, wood ash, and bio-solids to help supply nutrients to the soil and correct soil abnormalities in order to help grow a healthy crop. John makes it very clear they do not make any applications or renovations without first using a soil test to start the process. From there, they are better able to start making informed decisions based on test results.


Jim & son John

The Takalas have been a great asset to the Northeast Forage & Grassland Council and the Midwest Forage Association by hosting summer field days and marketing programs, as well as participating in research plots and sharing yield, financial, and harvesting information on all aspects of their forage production. The Northeast Forage & Grassland Council and the Midwest Forage Association are proud to have the Takalas as members.