



managed grazing for dairy profits

Wedemeier Dairy

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Scott and Catherine Wedemeier
Maynard, IA

Introduction

Wedemeier Dairy is an organic dairy farm located near Maynard, IA. It operates as a partnership between Scott and Catherine Wedemeier, along with children Mae, Evan, Will and Jed; and Scott's parents, Gary and Becky. They have been farming together since Scott returned from Iowa State University with a degree in Dairy Science. Not long after Scott had returned from college, he began to think about becoming a grazing dairy on a larger scale. They had always had pasture, but Scott thought they might need to take it to a higher level if they were going to survive in the dairy business. He approached his dad with the idea and the plan was started. They have been grazing now for 12 years and as of last November, they have completed the three-year transition to organic.

The Wedemeiers operate about 711 acres, all farmed organically. They rent 84 acres of that total, Scott owns one

farm acreage, and his parents own the rest. A little over 700 acres are tillable. One goal for the Weidermiers is to grow their own feed supply.

Herd and milking

The 200-cow milking herd consists of both Holsteins and Brown Swiss cows, with Holsteins making up about 40% and the Swiss about 60%. There are a few crosses in the herd as well. The Wedemeiers calve heavily in the spring and fall periods to maintain a fairly even milk production year around. When not grazing, cows are housed in a freestall barn and are milked in a swing 15 parlor. With this efficient set-up, they are able to milk the herd in a little over two hours.

Pasture and land management

On the tillable portion of their land, they grow corn, soybeans, oats and wheat. Thirty-five acres of corn is grown for corn silage. About 250 acres are for hay production with a base of clovers and grass. Utilizing

annual crops also allows them to re-establish pastures every few years. About 20 acres each year are put into an annual forage before it is seeded down. Rye is planted as a cover crop and for forage. The rye will be grazed up to three times before sowing down the pasture. Oats and triticale are also harvested for forage.

Pasture management for both productivity and quality has been a learning journey for Scott. Every year is different and there have been some failures as well as successes. Cows receive a new allocation every twelve hours. Paddocks are allowed about 30 days rest between grazing. This interval, along with managing the grazing period to leave some residue, has increased the productivity of the pastures.

The goal of the pastures is a 50:50 ratio of legumes and grasses. Scott's choice of grass now is a mixture of orchard, meadow, and tall fescues along with some Kentucky blue grasses. His legume choices are red and white clovers along with some alfalfa. Plantain is also included in the mix. Scott has found density of the stand is extremely important to maintain dry matter intake. This is why he has come to use this combination of forage species.

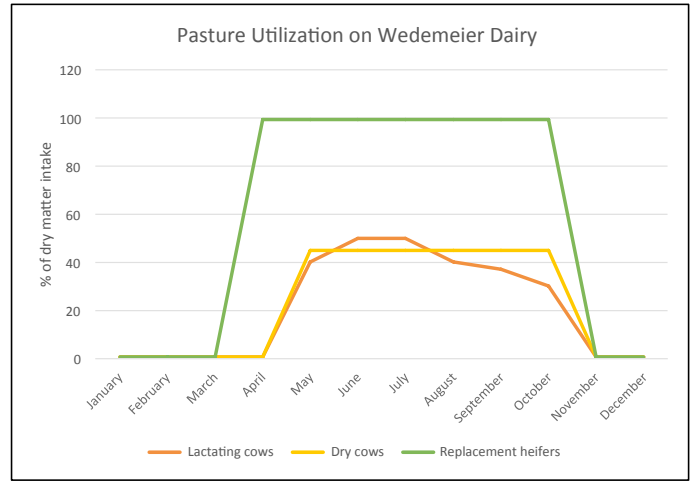
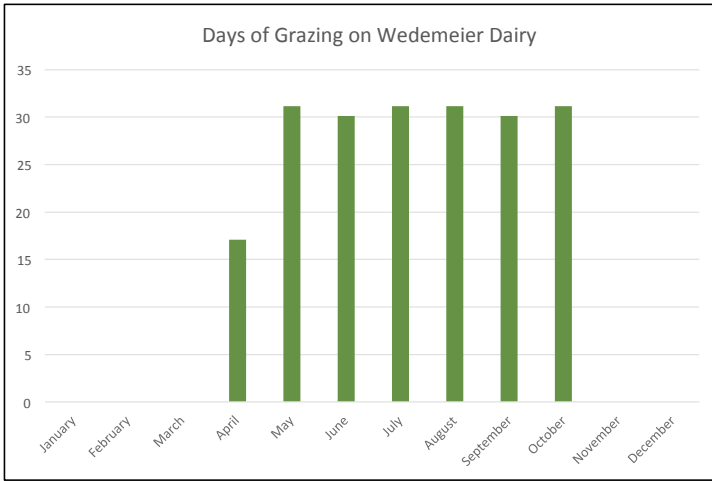
Marketing and financial management

Growing high quality forage allows the Weidermiers to have very little purchased feed cost. Great effort is put into harvesting the forages at optimum quality for feeding during the winter and non-grazing times of the year. Pasture dry matter yield is in the range of six tons/year/acre. Harvested hay as baleage yields about 4.5 tons of dry matter/acre. Corn silage yields 28 tons (10 tons dry matter) per acre. Corn for grain is harvested as earlage with moisture content in the mid to upper 40% range. Last year, the earlage averaged 13.8 tons/acre. All the feeds are combined in a TMR for feeding to the dairy herd as needed to complement the pasture. Milk is sold on the organic market.

Summary and key points

The Wedemeiers have an integrated crop and pasture operation with a goal of producing all their own feed for the dairy. This allows them to be a certified organic dairy and sell on the organic market, but yet to limit feed costs by growing rather than purchasing costly organic feed. They have worked at improving their pasture management to maintain productivity.

| Monthly Grazing on the Wedemeier Farm | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|--|----------|---------------------|
| Month | Days of Grazing | % Dry Matter Intake (DMI) from Grazing | | |
| | | Lactating cows | Dry cows | Replacement heifers |
| January | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| February | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| March | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| April | 17 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| May | 31 | 40 | 45 | 100 |
| June | 30 | 50 | 45 | 100 |
| July | 31 | 50 | 45 | 100 |
| August | 31 | 40 | 45 | 100 |
| September | 30 | 37 | 45 | 100 |
| October | 31 | 30 | 45 | 100 |
| November | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| December | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |



Testing Dairy Financial Risk through Grazing and Insurance. 2018. Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group, Green Lands Blue Waters. www.greenlandsbluwaters.net/dairy.html. Study conducted with funding from USDA-Risk Management Agency.

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