

Sustainability key priority for seventh-generation Goodell farm

As a seventh-generation farm, Goodell Family Farm has a long history dating to 1825 when Jonas Goodell purchased land in northern Shalersville. Through the years the farm has grown and changed from a general farm that included a variety of crops as well as a dairy and other livestock to a potato farm and now an organic dairy.

One part of the farm that has been a constant is maple syrup. The tradition of making maple syrup on our farm has been passed down from each generation and remains strong. Today the dairy and maple operation is as much a family farm as ever.

Four generations of the family currently live on the farm. My grandmother, Virginia, parents, Jay and Barb, uncle and aunt, Bruce and Sherry, wife, Rebecca, and now our two sons, Ryan and Evan, are all on the farm and involved in its operation.

With a rich history and hopes for future generations, sustainability is a priority to the Goodells. In the early 1990s, my father began implementing rotational grazing in our dairy operation. This switch has proven to be an important decision in the sustainability on our farm, both environmentally and economically.

Rotational grazing is a system where the cows harvest their own feed and spread their own manure. Our cows are given a designated area of pasture to graze which is sized according to their needs. When they have finished grazing the area, they are moved to a new area with fresh grass. Once leaving a grazed area, animals are not brought back to that same place until the grass has regrown.

This allows the pasture several weeks of recovery. In this way our cows are rotated around the farm. They are given new pasture three times a day during the grazing season. This practice of rotating cows helps to maximize the pastures' potential by promoting even grazing followed by long recovery periods.

There are many benefits to grazing. First, grazing greatly reduces our operating costs. Savings are realized through less purchased feed and less machinery needed to harvest the feed and move manure.

Second, our cows are healthier. Eating the diet their stomachs were designed for and getting ad-



GREEN PORTAGE

Nathan Goodell
Portage Park District

equate exercise from walking to and from the pastures, our cows have fewer health problems and live longer, more productive lives. Third, grazing has improved our soils. Being able to leave our pastures in a sod with a minimum amount of tillage has increased the organic matter on our farm creating more productive soils.

Furthermore, erosion, compaction damage, and runoff are drastically reduced.

Finally, this more natural system of farming creates an efficient nutrient cycle. The cows leave their manure in the pastures which fertilizes the grass, grows more feed for the cows to eat, and begins the cycle all over again.

Nearly two years ago, we took our farm a step further and had it certified organic. The National Organic Program includes rules that require grazing. In addition, the organic program prohibits the use of synthetically-derived fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. Antibiotics and hormones in animals are also not permitted.

Becoming organic has added value to many of the practices we were already following. We view this as another step in keeping our family farm sustainable into the future.

As a result of going organic, we have now joined Organic Valley, a farmer-owned cooperative, and supply the nationally-known dairy with milk produced by our cows.

I look forward to teaching my children about the importance of these practices so that they might have the opportunity to continue this long tradition that so many generations of Goodells have already enjoyed.

Nathan Goodell is a partner of Goodell Family Farm, where he helps to manage a 90-head dairy and 4800-acre maple operation with his family. Green Portage is a monthly feature of the Record-Courier in cooperation with the Portage Park District.

OPINION

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