

## BrenHar Dairy Farms – Every Aspect Has its Own Niche!

Marv Eberle, PICKSEED JVP

“Quality nutritional value is our clear priority when it comes to feeding our current 75 milking cows.” And with plans for future expansion, Harold Soepboer’s thought process is that “every aspect of his operation has its own niche—growing crops, raising livestock, breeding livestock for good genetics and selecting the right cows to carry this process through.” Harold and Brenda farm in Lambton County, Ontario’s South-west Coast, near Forest. Harold’s parents, Ted and Audrey, immigrated to Canada from Holland in the early 1950’s and started a mixed farming operation close to their present farm. In 1980, Harold expanded their operation to dairy only, with 30 cows, and since that time has expanded to 75. As son Terry has recently returned to the family business, further expansion is being considered for the near future. Harold and Brenda have three other children who at this point all have other interests.



Terry Soepboer, Harold Soepboer, Peter Jansen

The operation currently consists of 375 workable acres, including 80 acres of alfalfa, 120 acres of corn, 90 acres of soybeans, 70 acres of wheat and 15 acres of pasture. Growing Pickseed forage and corn has met Harold’s demands to provide quality product to his herd. His TMR mix of 60% haylage, 40% corn silage, along with grain corn, supplements and free choice dry hay in balancing his feed ration is “Keeping the pail full of high quality milk which is the main priority.” “Pete Jansen, my local PICKSEED Agent, has given us superior support with recommending the

best varieties and hybrids to meet our requirements. We have been growing 2065MF and 2037MF, 91% alfalfa 9% timothy at 17lbs/acre and use oats as our cover crop at 60 lbs per acre. Our priority is to keep our silo full and after that we will do dry hay.” Harold likes Pickseed Alfalfa’s for its fine stem, along with the persistence and re-growth. Because he cuts timely he feels neither disease nor pest has been an issue with any of his forage. As of this writing, he will be using PICKSEED Silage Inoculants – ENSURE and ENHANCE - in 2009 for both his alfalfa haylage and his corn silage.

Harold’s corn acres are all seeded in 20” rows. He grows ExMax for his corn silage requirements and indicates it “to be a heavy yield producer with big cob size and soft deep kernel to always match the stalk and leaf for good ratio.” Feed analysis reports are always excellent for both his corn silage and haylage. His 2008 grain corn varieties were 4956Bt, 5686BT and 5675 with average yields of 226 bu/ac. Terry’s comment of Pickseed is “Good

Stuff” is acknowledged by Harold with saying “Grow the Best”.

Harold and Terry both realize the challenges and the importance of good agronomics. “Managing with the right products, seeding at the right rates, seeding and fertilizing at the right time, seed placement at the right depth, manure management and timely rotation, along with the support provided by Peter and Pickseed, our farm operation will be expanding.”

On behalf of Pickseed, thanks to the Soepboers, for letting us share their family business with our Forage Informer readers. We at Pickseed wish everyone a safe and successful 2009 growing season.

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# Growing and Harvesting Grasses for Dry Cows

Ev Thomas, Oak Point Agronomics  
Hammond, NY 13646

Prefresh dairy cows--those in their last few weeks before calving--need high quality, low potassium forages, and grasses are great for dry cows. It's not difficult to produce high quality grasses: Fertilize well and cut early; just before heading is recommended for the best combination of yield and quality. It's also not hard to produce grasses with a low potassium concentration: Don't fertilize at all and harvest really late, when the grass is over-mature. However, early-cut grass is usually too high in potassium for prefresh cows, while late-cut grass is too high in fibre to get these animals off to a good start when they freshen.

One problem in trying to produce low-potassium grasses is that grasses are super-efficient in their uptake of even low amounts of soil potassium. In fact, grasses will often thrive (and contain well over 2% K) at soil potassium levels that are so low that alfalfa wouldn't survive. Years ago at Miner Institute we leased a field that had very low soil test K levels just to do some research on producing grasses for dry cows. Even though soil test K was extremely low we found it impossible to harvest timothy, orchardgrass or reed canarygrass that was acceptable in quality (particularly NDF content) but less than 2.0% K. But all was not in vain: During this process, we developed some guidelines for producing grasses for dry cows:

Uptake of potassium is greater when soils are cool and moist. Therefore,

in most years first cut grasses will be higher in % K than will second cut grasses. Second cut grass, as long as it's harvested early, is very high in palatability. So, feed first cut grasses to early dry cows (the first few weeks after they dry off), and second cut grasses to those in their final three weeks or so before calving.

Delaying harvest will decrease grass K concentrations, but it will also decrease the concentration of other minerals. Therefore, late-cut grass often doesn't have a more desirable cation-anion balance (DCAD).

Cows make more efficient use of the minerals in silage than in dry hay, and since potassium is the primary mineral in grass, dry hay is preferred for prefresh dry cows. There's not a huge difference, but every little bit helps.

Producing low-K grass requires careful planning, and patience! The best idea is to reserve some grass acreage just for dry cow forage, preferably land you haven't buried in manure in prior years. Then apply plenty of nitrogen fertilizer, which will greatly increase grass yield, at the same time removing potassium from the soil. It may take several years to draw soil potassium levels down enough to make a meaningful difference in grass K concentration. (That's where the patience comes in.)

Timothy has slightly lower K concentration than other grass species, but is

lower in other minerals, too. Also, second cut timothy yields are often very low. Orchardgrass and reed canarygrass also are relatively high in K, so bromegrass and tall fescue are probably the best options. In some areas, oat hay is a popular dry cow forage.

Fertilization with sulfur to improve the DCAD balance hasn't been successful, but fertilizing with chloride (calcium chloride is probably most economical) is a possibility. Research at Miner Institute and more recently in Quebec with calcium chloride is promising. Chloride significantly improves DCAD without reducing yield or palatability. Some Canadian farmers have been applying about 100 kg/hectare of calcium chloride and report good results. However, much of the research was with first-cut grass; we might get similar or even better results by applying half as much calcium chloride right after harvesting first cut grass, since while second cut grass yields are usually somewhat lower they're also lower in potassium.

After reading the above information, is it any wonder why many dairy farmers give up on trying to produce low K grasses and simply use anionic salts? But even though you might not be able to grow the perfect grass for prefresh cows, the combination of using N fertilizer (instead of manure) and then harvesting second cut as dry hay should get you most of the way there.

## Ev Thomas, CCA

Mr. Ev Thomas has written a couple of articles for the Forage Informer and is appearing in these pages once again, so it's time we gave him a more formal introduction. Ev likely doesn't need an introduction with many of you familiar with the William H. Miner Agricultural Research Institute in Chazy, New York. Ev Thomas has worked as an agronomist in Northern N.Y. for 42 years, first for Cornell University and from 1981 to 2008 for the Miner Institute. His responsibilities there included field crop

research and forage production for the Institute's 320-cow Holstein dairy herd. He's had over 100 articles published in Hoard's Dairyman over a period of 36 years and is the author of over 400 technical and popular press articles. He's been involved in farm management and field crops consulting in North America, Mexico, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, China and Japan. He graduated from the University of Connecticut in 1965 with a B.S. in Animal Science. Then he completed a M.S. degree

in Extension Education at Cornell University in 1967. Ev is a member of the American Society of Agronomy, and he is a Certified Crop Advisor.

His expertise in forages and feeding dairy cattle is extensive and he still practices as a speaker, advisor and consultant. We are happy to have him accept our invitation to contribute to the Forage Informer, and we hope we will hear from him regularly. He has much to contribute.

# Corn Planting 2009

Patrick Lynch CCA ON

As you read this you should be ready to plant corn. Consider this as a last minute review of some of the things that you should have ready.

Corn planter is ready. This means all parts that were not working last year have been fixed. It is not uncommon for planter to drop 2 seeds at a time. These are called doubles. Doubles not only cost you in lost seed but can cause a yield loss. Typically one of these seeds comes up after the other and sort of acts like a weed. It is not uncommon to have planters dropping 2,000 doubles per acre. This will cost you about \$4/ac in wasted seed. Make sure your planter is dropping seed uniformly. Uneven seed drop will lead to uneven emergence. Uneven emergence means lost yield. Check that disc openers are not worn down too far. If they are you will not get the desired seed trench to drop the seed into. Check your planter manual

Crop plans are all in place. It is easier to change a plan than make one. You know what hybrid and refuge hybrid will be planted in every field. Somehow set aside or mark bags designated for which farm/field. Know what fertilizer program you will have. If you are using the same fertil-

izer on all fields (Rate and analysis) then you are wasting money or losing yields. It is impossible for all fields to need the same fertilizer. Make sure you value the manure. Nutrients are too expensive to “count manure as a bonus”.

Have a plan for spreading manure. Every year too many growers delay planting corn until all the manure is out. You lose too much yield with that strategy. Better to start planting some fields that either had manure or are not getting manure, then spread manure. Too many growers will spread manure when it is too wet to work the ground. If it is too wet to work the ground it is too wet to spread manure without causing compaction.

Have good maps of all your farms/fields. Give these to anyone who is doing custom work or making deliveries for you. Each year too many fields get spread or sprayed by mistake because of lack good maps.

Develop a record keeping system that is more involved than a little book in your pocket. Too often when there is an issue with crops growers are not sure what happened. If something went wrong with

a planter or sprayer you need to know which field the planter or sprayer was before that field and also after. This helps sort out if the poorer crop is specific to that field or whether it occurred in other fields as well. It would be nice to take weather and other notes in the journal. A note such as “planting conditions less than ideal but decided to keep planting since poor weather is predicted for next week” can help explain lower yields.

This spring as you plant be safe. Take the time to do things right. If you feel tired you probably are. Better to quit early than take a chance getting hurt. Happy planting.

Pat Lynch is another personality who needs no introduction as he has been working advising farmers on corn management issues of every kind for many successful years. Currently, Pat Lynch is an agronomist with Cargill on a part time basis. He has worked with Ontario Farmers growing crops for over 35 years. Former Soils and Crops Specialist with OMAF now OMAFRA. Member of the Ontario Herbicide Committee. Regular contributor to Better Farming. Currently a Certified Crop Adviser, he is also Past chair of the Ontario Certified Crop Advisor Board.

## “Forage Quick Cuts” What people are saying about Forage Quality

Jay Hackney PICKSEED Vice President Research and Product Development

“High quality hay results in better animal performance. It also reduces the need for supplementation.” Gary Lacefield (Alfalfa Hay Quality Makes the Difference, AGR-137, University of Kentucky)

“Increasing fibre digestibility will increase feed intake and energy content of the diet.” Mark McCaslin (President, Forage Genetics International, alfalfa breeder)

“Forage Quality is the single most important factor in putting together a ration.” Tom Wright, OMAFRA.

“Dairy cows fed high-quality forage produce more milk with less supplemental

concentrate than cows fed lower-quality forage.” W.P. Weiss, M.L. Eastridge, J.F. Underwood, Forages for Dairy Cattle, AS-0002-99, Ohio State University Extension

The leafy hybrid had greater digestibility and resulted in greater milk production compared with the dual-purpose hybrid. Thomas, E. D., C. S. Ballard, P. Mandebvu, C. J. Sniffen, M. P. Carter, and J. Beck. 2001. Comparison of Novartis corn silage hybrids for yield, nutrient traits, and lactational performance by high producing dairy cows. J. Dairy Sci. 84 (Suppl. 1): 197(Abs.).

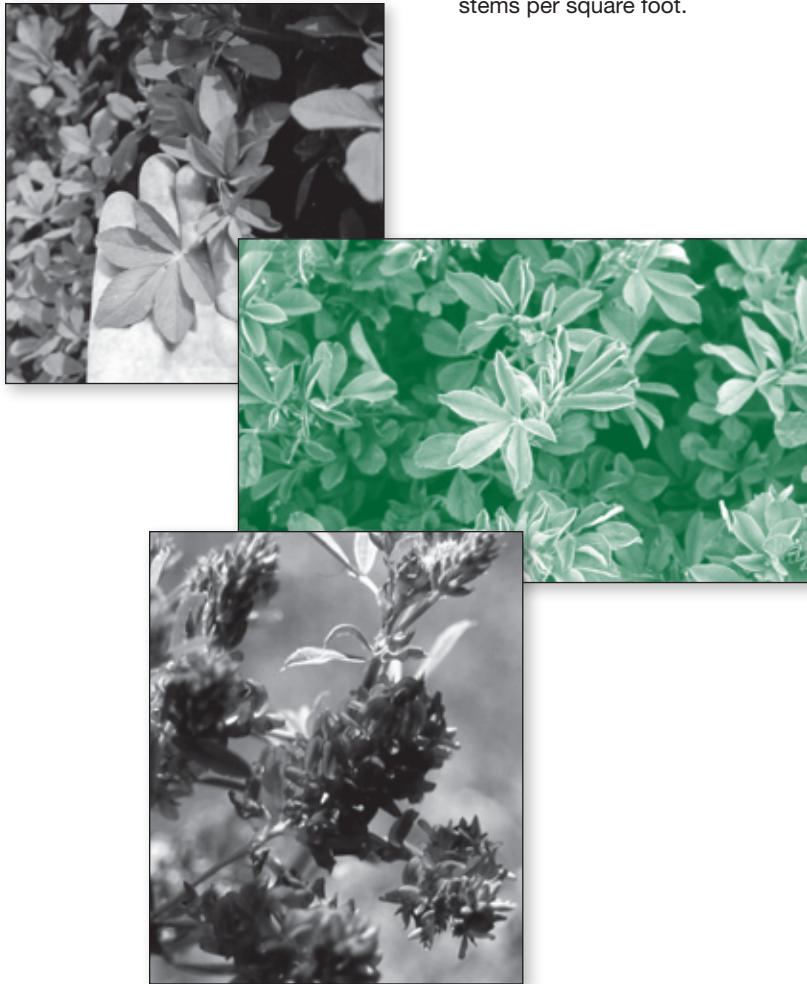
“The importance of quality forages in dairy rations cannot be overemphasized.” “Feeding average or poor quality forages may limit milk production per cow and income over feed costs. Higher-producing cows usually have greater income-over-feed costs than lower-producing cows.” Jodie Pennington, University of Arkansas.

In practical terms, forage quality has been referred to as “milk in the bucket.” Yoana C. Newman, Barry Lambert and James P. Muir. Defining Forage Quality. Texas A&M University.

# Assessing Alfalfa Stands

Plant density is NOT a good indicator of yield potential of a stand, although having less than 6 plants per square foot you is a sure indicator that you should plough. The reason is that smaller or weaker plants will not produce as many stems or total dry matter.

Stem density IS a good predictor of yield. You want at least 40 stems per square foot, but should dig plants and inspect the condition of the crowns and roots. If there are more than 30% of plants with significant discolouration, then winter survival ability will be impaired. Maximum alfalfa yield potential occurs at 55 stems per square foot.



## Join the PICKSEED Team

Have you considered a career in selling seed? Why not join the PICKSEED team. PICKSEED has some key areas where we are looking for sales agents in Eastern Canada.

Our current sales agents have a broad range of background and experience and their talent, knowledge and emphasis on customer service combined with the quality and performance of our forage, hybrid corn and turfgrass varieties together makes an excellent recipe for success.

If you are interested, call PICKSEED's provincial Sales Manager for more details. Paul Wight 519-717-2226 (Ontario & Atlantic provinces) or Victor Lefebvre 450-230-0815 (Québec).

## About The Forage Informer

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If you wish to subscribe contact Bonnie Benoit at 1-800-661-GROW (4769) or send your name and address to Bonnie Benoit, PICKSEED Canada Inc., 1 Greenfield Road, Lindsay, On K9V 4S3, Email: [bbenoit@pickseed.com](mailto:bbenoit@pickseed.com)

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PICKSEED  
1 Greenfield Rd., Box 304,  
Lindsay, ON K9V 4S3  
Toll-Free: 1-800-661-4769  
[www.pickseed.com](http://www.pickseed.com)

