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The Forage
INFORMER

THE BEST SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR FORAGES AND CORN SILAGE Fall 2006

Daveland Farms of Burford, Ontario

Paul Wight, Ontario Sales Manager

This issue's Forage Informer takes us to a fourth-generation farm in the County of Brant, just a few miles from Burford, Ontario. Today we are visiting with Larry Davis of Daveland Farms. Larry farms with his wife Sally and their two children, Justin age 5 and Melissa age 6.

The Davis family originally farmed at a location near Brantford, not far from the Bell Homestead. Larry's grandfather purchased the current farm in 1927. Cecil, Larry's father, and a hired hand were responsible for all farming activity during the first year at the new farm. Cecil, then 11 years old, was expected to help ready the farm for the family and livestock while attending Valley Grade School, a one room school house about a mile from the farm.

Cecil followed in his father's footsteps becoming the second generation to farm this ground. He increased the dairy herd to between 60 and 80 cows and installed one of the first milking parlours in Brant, a first shared with Mt. Pleasant Farm. Along with the dairy cattle Cecil ran a hog operation, fattening about 900 pigs per year. Larry explained how his dad installed one of the first slop feeders where dry hog feed was mixed with water for the pigs, however, as Larry recalled, this hog feeder came with many mechanical problems. Their elm woodlot was always an important timber and lumber resource for them, but in the 1960's Dutch Elm disease wiped it out.

Larry Davis of Daveland Farms

Now the third generation, Larry's farming operation consists of 600 acres, 365 acres of which are owned. The fields are rolling and soils are sand to sandy loam. His crops consist of 280 aces of corn, 170 acres of soybeans, 100 acres of forages (90% alfalfa, 5% timothy and 5% reed canary grass), with the remaining acreage going to wheat. The home farm's rotation consists of forages and corn; often the corn will be continuous for 4-5 years. He uses this area as a place to spread his manures. The rotation used for the rented ground is 1 year of corn then soybeans or wheat.

Larry is a strong advocate of soil conservation. He is currently Director of the Brant County Soil and Crop Association as well as Provincial Director with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture where he is responsible for the Governance Review.

Larry is someone who "practices what he preaches". Some of his farm's ground has seen many years of conventional tillage. He found that the valleys of his farm were sometimes ten feet deep in topsoil while the hilltops were lacking that very soil. Larry used bulldozers and trucks to relocate the topsoil back to the hilltops then seeded these areas back to forage for rehabilitation. Impressed with his stewardship program, a neighbour offered Larry some of his ground, rent free, if he would do the same, which he has.

Also to his credit, Larry was a founding member of the Brant Resource Stewardship Network. This organization has received funding from large corporations, unrelated to farming, which wanted to do their part for land stewardship by investing in a farm project known as "Farmers Doing their Part". Larry has used funds from this project to help reestablish the American Chestnut Tree to parts of Brant County.

At the end of our conversation I asked Larry what concerns him about farming. He relayed this story to me. Last night he was visiting a farmer who was approaching retirement. That farmer wondered if he was doing the right thing by passing the farm onto his son. This is an issue that concerns Larry, and I'm sure, many other farmers. What is happening in the farming industry is that, as Larry puts it, "all the efficiencies that a farmer puts in place are nothing more than consumer efficiencies". What this means is that as farmers continue to improve their operations making them more efficient than they were a year ago, their rewards remain the same. The cost savings created by the efficiencies are being picked up by the consumer, they are not going into the farmer's pocket where they are needed and should be going. Larry added that to survive, a farmer needs a "real smart business sense".

I want to thank Larry for allowing us to highlight his farming operation in the Forage Informer.

INSIDE ...

The Clear Benefit of Poncho™ Protection:

Matt Anderson
Research Associate, PICKSEED CANADA INC.

As a producer, the main goal is to implement the best management practices that will result in an increased profit. There has been widespread adoption of Roundup Ready® and YieldGard® corn technologies due to the ease of use, overall plant health and noted yield increases. However, when it comes time to order seed, the benefits of using Poncho™ seed protection insecticides are questioned. My question is why?

Poncho™ is the only product that provides systemic protection of both the seed and the seedling from the five major groups of corn insect pests. This includes the root system as well as the above ground growth. Older products only protected the seed.

Poncho™ 250 protects the corn seedling from wireworms, white grubs, European chafers, black cutworms, corn flea beetles seed corn maggots and even aphids.

White grubs and wireworms are more of a concern when planting corn after sod. When planting corn after corn, it is the cutworms, chafers and flea beetles that are more prevalent. Seed corn maggots can cause problems when there is significant decaying vegetation on the soil or an application of manure at emergence time, which would be the case in some reduced tillage situations. The corn crop will be more affected by these insects when the spring is cool and wet and the plants are growing more slowly.

The mode of action of Poncho™ 250 is both systemic and by contact, so the seed is protected at planting and then the seedling is protected as well as it is able to absorb and translocate the Poncho™. It is important to realize that if the decision is made not to treat with Poncho™ 250, and the crop is then attacked by one or more insect pest, there is no treatment you can apply after the fact to solve the problem, it's too late.

In 554 side-by-side trials (2003-2005), Poncho™ 250 treated seed yielded 4.2 bu./ac. more than seed not treated with and insecticide. Bayer CropScience, 2006.

Left: Poncho™ 250 treated seed, Right: Untreated seed, Ontario, Bayer Crop Science, 2006

Poncho™ is available in both the 250 and 1250 rates. Poncho™ 250 should be used for seed and seedling protection whereas Poncho™ 1250 should be used in fields where corn rootworm and heavy or late season insect pressure is expected.

In 1351 head-to-head trials, Poncho™ 1250 treated seed yielded an average of 11.4 bu./ac. more than seed not treated with an insecticide.

For 2006, the price of corn is unfortunately expected to be between $2.50-2.80/bu. However, even at this low value, using Poncho™ treated corn still pays for itself.

Consider the two examples below for Poncho™ 250 and Poncho™ 1250.

Not only do you receive seed and seedling protection, uniform and vigorous stands, increased yields and overall profit, but Poncho™ is also commercially applied at the same rate for every seed and delivered to your farm, in the bag. You minimize your exposure to and handling of the product.

PICKSEED corn hybrids will still be treated with Maxim XL fungicide, which is required to protect against soil borne fungal diseases. This year, selected hybrids are offered with Poncho™ 250 seed treatment in addition to the Maxim XL.

If you are planting corn after corn, in areas of high crop residue and manure, in light textured soils, early in the spring or in fields with a history of emergence problems you should seriously consider the benefits that only Poncho™ seed applied insecticides can offer. Any growers who used to use D&L would certainly benefit from using Poncho™.

Example 1: Poncho™ 250		**Example 2: Poncho™ 1250**	
Cost of Poncho™ per acre:	$7.00	Cost of Poncho™ per acre:	$22.00
Poncho™ Yield Advantage per acre:	4.2 bu.	Poncho™ Yield Advantage per acre:	11.4 bu.
Price of Corn:	$2.70	Price of Corn:	$2.70
Gross Income per acre:	$11.34	Gross Income per acre:	$30.78
Net Income per acre:	$4.34	Net Income per acre:	$8.78

How to Produce Milk – a story from Ontario's top producing herd

Jack MacLaren and Jay Hackney

Jack MacLaren is a 'Joint Venture Partner' (equivalent to a district sales manager) for PICKSEED. Jack was out doing sales calls recently when he met with Leo Bauman of Lyn in Eastern Ontario. Leo came to Canada in 1995 from Switzerland where he was a breeding technician for a breeding company. He bought a farm at Moncton in Perth County and milked cows there for 1 1/2 years, but the barn was old and too small so he sold and bought his present farm at Lyn in Leeds County in 1997, where land was much cheaper and there was a newer, bigger barn.

Leo milks 70 cows and owns 290 acres. He grows 160 acres of hay/haylage and 90 acres of corn - all for feed for his cows. Leo has no plans to expand his herd but will continue to work at maintaining and increasing production which will be a challenge because he had the top producing herd in Ontario in 2005. Leo says that much of the credit for his herd's high production numbers should go to his herdsman, Rob Mallette who has been with him for 3 1/2 years. Leo told me that Rob is an excellent herdsman. Rob is the son of dairy farmers Dale and Donna Malette of Lyn who are also loyal Pickseed customers and who grow Starbuck alfalfa and PICKSEED corn.

On July 20/06 Leo told me the story of his high production dropping by 4 kg/cow/day which was 500 l/pickup every two days when he started to feed a competitors 1st cut haylage this spring. This popular well known competitor's variety had a feed test on 1st cut of 20% protein, NDF of 50% and lignin of 8. A normal lignin number would be 4. The 2nd cut feed test was 20% protein, 41% NDF and lignin of 6. His herd intake dropped 25% on 1st cut and 10% on 2nd cut. The competitor's alfalfa had fast regrowth and good standability, but did not have improved digestibility. Leo has purchased PICKSEED's Starbuck alfalfa the last two years because he has experienced the cost - in lost production - from not having the higher NDFD (Neutral Detergent Fibre Digestibility, i.e. fibre digestibility) that is offered by PICKSEED's Starbuck alfalfa. Starbuck has higher yield and improved forage quality as well as regrowth, persistence and disease resistance. It is lower in total fibre and higher in fibre digestibility, giving it a higher RFQ (Relative Forage Quality) and the potential to produce 12% more milk per acre than OMAFRA recommended reference varieties (Data available by request from your PICKSEED agent or through the Lindsay main office).

It's important to choose an alfalfa variety that has all the characteristics you require, and if you are milking, you certainly can get an advantage from improved quality varieties like Starbuck.

Tall alfalfa – But is it higher yielding?

Jay Hackney, Product and Research Development Manager, PICKSEED CANADA INC.

Sometimes when we walk alfalfa fields (or fields of other crops) we tend to think that the taller field will be the better yielding. There may be two varieties side-by-side for instance, with one taller than the other. Is the taller one really higher yielding?

Usually that is not the case. Tall does not mean high yield - there is more to yield than just height. You need leaves, and you need to have leaves from the top to the bottom of the stem. No point in having leaves just at the top. If tall plants meant high yield, then research and plant breeding programs would just measure height in order to select for high yield. The fact that all successful programs measure yield in order to select for yield shows us that height is not a good estimate of yield. It would be convenient if we could use height as a yield estimate, and so much easier than actually harvesting. That's why researchers have looked carefully at the relation between height and yield.

As you would expect, Campbell and Arnold found that if you visually estimate yield, you overestimate yield of taller varieties and you underestimate the yield of denser varieties (the ones with more leaves). Koenig and colleagues say that "the visual estimate of yield has not gained acceptance in published research". If the science-based agronomists don't think that height is a good estimate of yield, we shouldn't either.

There is a different aspect of height that is important when it comes to forages, and that is the relation of height to forage quality. Taller alfalfa generally tends to be lower forage quality. In other words, tall stemmy alfalfa is higher in total fibre and lower in fibre digestibility. Higher fibre means lower feed intake, and lower fibre digestibility means less available energy in the feed. The cows spend time chewing fibre instead of making milk. Just look at what happened to Leo Bauman (in the previous article), where feeding a high fibre stemmy tall alfalfa led to a reduction of 4kg of milk per cow per day.

References

Campbell, N.A. & G. W. Arnold. 2006. The Visual Assessment of Pasture Yield. Aus. J. Exp. Agr. & Anim. Husbandry. 13(62):263-267

Koenig, R.T, M. Winger and B. Kitchen. 2000. Simple, Low Cost Data Collection Methods for Agricultural Field Studies. J. of Extension. April, 38(2): 23-28

Forage Quick Cuts

Leafy Silage is the Way to Go

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada researchers in Ottawa investigated silage harvest timing of dual purpose vs. leafy corn hybrids. They discovered that leafy hybrids have a softer kernel texture, a slower decline in whole plant moisture content, and therefore a longer harvest window compared to dual-purpose hybrids. They also discovered, as others have, that kernel milk line isn't the best way to predict proper silage harvest time. Silage harvest should be based on whole-plant dry matter content.

Fill Your Tips:

Incomplete kernel set is most often caused by pollination problems, which are usually weather-related. Adult corn rootworm silk feeding can also cause poor kernel set. Yield potential is determined prior to silking, while actual yield is determined after silking. While we often blame poor kernel set on hot, dry weather during pollination, Heather Darby from UVM Extension notes that cool, cloudy summer weather (for example the summer of 2004) may delay silk emergence until pollen shed is almost complete, with the same result. Tip kernels are the last to be fertilized and are less vigorous and therefore are more susceptible to not getting pollinated.

How's Your Soil?

Fall is a great time to do soil sampling, so if you haven't had a soil sample done in the past 2-3 years you should get out your shovel or probe and get busy sampling. Take your shovel and a large plastic pail and take at least 2 sub-samples per acre. Sample from the top 6-7 inches of soil, making sure (when using a shovel) that you take the same amount of soil from each depth, and that each sub-sample is the same size. With a shovel, the idea is to take a thin slice of even width to a depth of 6 inches without getting surface trash. Put the sub-samples into the bucket and then mix all sub-samples thoroughly. Take a representative sample from the bucket and send this out for analysis. Each field should be done this way. Soil test results are only as good as the sampling you do, so make sure you spend the time required to do it properly. A good soil test is essential for managing fertilizer costs as it allows you to adjust fertilizer applications to get optimum crop response.

At the least you need to look at pH, buffered pH, P and K. For growing alfalfa a Boron test is useful.

About THE FORAGE INFORMER

The Forage Informer is an information publication edited by Jay Hackney, Product and Research Development Manager for PICKSEED and distributed by PICKSEED Canada Inc. It is available in English and French versions. Call us and we will send you a copy of the Forage Informer in the language of your choice. If you wish to subscribe, contact Sylvia Taylor at 1-800-661-GROW (4769) or send your name and address to
Sylvia Taylor,
PICKSEED CANADA INC.
1 Greenfield Road, Lindsay, ON
K9V 4S3, Email:
staylor@pickseed.com

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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).

PICKSEED®
PICKSEED Canada Inc.
1 Greenfield Rd., Box 304,
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