A Family Business

Don Taber was raised on a dairy in Pennsylvania. His father worked for the Union Pacific Railroad and his mother raised the children while milking cows. He attended Pennsylvania State University and studied Ag Business along with Dairy Science. He married Beverly in 1968, and soon after they started their family.

They moved from Pennsylvania to Idaho in 1976. Don had come out west on earlier travels and found Idaho to be perfect for his beef operation and eventually his dairy business. The couple wanted to get away from the rat race of big city life and the accompanying urban sprawl. At the time, they had two elementary school-aged sons — Chris and Darren. Their brother, Matt, was born in the early 1980s. The boys were helping with chores from the time they were in grade school, making them instrumental to the operation.

In 1990, the Tabers wanted to expand their operation with milk cows.

Who's Who

Don is the "big boss" and oversees the entire operation, while Chris is on the farming side, overseeing their farm operations related to their 5,000 acres (lease and owned).

Chris said he has always loved playing in the dirt and can remember planting seeds in his sand box.
from the time he was 7 years old. Not afraid of hard work, his father instilled in them this work ethic. Their father raised the boys to be productive and in their own way “feed the world.” That childhood lesson remains with Chris to this day.

Darren assists in the management of the dairy and is also responsible for the alfalfa harvest.

Brother Matt works at the dairy as well, working with the calf operation.

By the Numbers

In 1984, they incorporated, forming Donnelly Farms.

They have 5,000 acres in production. Their crop rotation includes alfalfa, corn, sugar beets and small grains in addition to irrigated pasture.

They have a closed herd of 900 milk cows. Steer calves are raised to maturity and marketed as beef; heifers are raised and used as replacements. Nothing leaves the farm for the most part.

Keeping It Healthy

The Tabers started using cover crops in 2005 at which time they purchased strip till. A great investment, the strip till helps them combat soil erosion on the sandy soils and aids in the one-pass planting operation.

Chris said he has always been aware that keeping the soil covered is a good thing, but he found out through experiments just how beneficial it was.

As the farmer in the group, he selects the cover crops for the corn and sugar beets. He uses a simple grain cover crop: either triticale or winter wheat in the fall and oats or barley in the spring. Each year, he and the “big boss” look at the seed costs and availability in making the best decision. For example, rejected malt barley was a good choice for the farm a few years ago.

If the cover crop can’t get planted in the fall, they will still plant the grain as early as possible in the spring. Through Chris’ efforts, research and experimentation, they have found that the soil protection isn’t just happening above the soil surface, but below ground as well. Triticale seeded @ 100#/ac provides multiple uses as chopped forage and a good nutrient scavenger, which is important considering the manure applications from the dairy.

When Chris is ”all done,” he’d like to look back and see that he left the land in better shape than when he got it ... by keeping the soil healthy.

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