

Waupaca County Success from the Field

A Dedication to Conservation Farming

Background

Dan and Ruth Boerst, owners of Dairy-Licious Farms in Manawa, purchased their farm in 1982. The farm is located only a short distance from the Little Wolf River, so their farming activities have a direct impact on the health of the river. Soon after they began farming, they started working with NRCS and the Waupaca Co. Land Conservation staff on projects to conserve soil and keep surface water clean. Now, with plans to transition away from dairy and move towards beef production, they have embraced new ways of farming that come with conservation benefit as well.

Conservation Successes

Dan and Ruth's first conservation project was the installation of grassed waterways in the 1980's. In the mid 1990's, they built a manure storage structure to manage the nutrients from their growing dairy herd. In 2012, they installed a series of water and sediment control basins on land that drained directly into Bear Lake, which is in the heart of what is now the Bear Lake National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI). Around that time, Dan started experimenting with soil health techniques such as cover crops, companion crops and low disturbance tillage. They installed another series of water and sediment control basins on the home farm in 2018. They recently restored a wetland and plan to pair that with pollinator habitat next year. "Dan and Ruth are always willing to work with conservation and extension staff to install new practices, host field days, plant test plots and conduct studies on their land," said Lisa Neuenfeldt, District Conservationist.

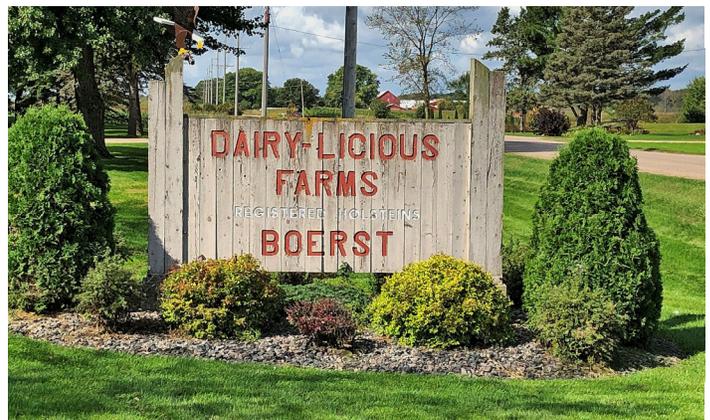
The dairy operation included an exercise lot that was contributing runoff to a nearby waterway. This year, instead of installing an expensive barnyard system, the lot was downsized and part of it, along with an additional 20 acres of cropland, were converted to rotationally-grazed pasture where they now graze heifers. Ruth rotates the heifers daily and says she enjoys seeing her animals on grass. An additional benefit was pollinator habitat. "The pasture was just humming with bees this summer," Ruth observed. If the new grazing system is a success, they may consider expanding it to a beef grazing system as they transition away from dairy in the coming years.

Demo Farm Future

Because of Dan and Ruth's conservation efforts, the Boerst's were chosen in 2019 to be a Demonstration Farm as part of the new Upper Fox-Wolf Demonstration Farm Network, funded through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. They have already hosted two field days in the summer of 2019 to highlight cover crops and soil health and will probably be hosting many more to come. They are a prime example of how one farm's conservation efforts can have an impact on an entire community.



Dan and Ruth Boerst, owners of Dairy-Licious Farms in Manawa. A group of heifers can be seen grazing in the background.



Wisconsin Natural Resources Conservation Service

