Jorgensen’s Overhaul Gets Biological Results

Jorgensen Land & Cattle, located near Ideal in south central South Dakota, has been built on sustainability for the future since 1909. The family takes pride in prioritizing the long-term health and sustainability of their entire ecosystem.

“Our goal is to pass this operation on to the next generation and beyond,” said Bryan Jorgensen, who is a third generation managing partner of JLC. “We’re not fad followers. If something’s not sustainable, I’m not going to do it.”

Changes for long-term sustainability took shape in the 1980s. The family’s first step was a no-till farming system.

“There weren’t many no-till resources back then,” Jorgensen said. “So, we watched a few good people and listened to a few smart guys. It took a lot of our own engineering and thinking to get us where we are today, but we knew the potential value in the practice, and we stuck with it.”

When planting corn, Jorgensen relies on the roughly 120 pounds of available nitrogen provided by his ground’s 4 percent average organic matter. He knows the microbial growth in the soil has increased significantly over the past three decades, and he counts on the natural biology to release the phosphate tightly bound in the soil.
According to Jorgensen, the restoration of organic matter levels in the soil has allowed the family’s diverse operations to reach extremely high levels of efficiency. The 30-year process has also fueled Jorgensen’s passion for soil chemistry. He believes one of his greatest responsibilities is to inspire the soil to grow what needs to grow. That belief helped the family’s operation reach a major turning point in the mid-1990s.

Jorgensen was frustrated with the management of nutrients in their soils. He channeled his passion and intellectual research into a complete overhaul of the operation’s programs. Twenty years later, JLC’s crop program has flourished.

“We follow the same principles on the crop side as we do on the cattle side. We focus on efficiencies; we don’t outsource anything critical to our core,” Jorgensen said. “Frankly, our soils are much more robust and healthy for the direction we’ve taken.”

He continued, “Most all of the crops are seeded with small quantities of highly available liquid phosphate on the seed. But, as I watch my soil tests, I realize our phosphate numbers are actually going up even though I’m not using a blanket application of phosphate. We’re releasing those nutrients tightly bound in the system. We’re making our soils work rather than letting nature get lazy.”

Jorgensen has taken some flak for his approach, but the proof of his decisions lies in the soil.

“Every two years I analyze our base saturation to see how those chemistries are changing. From the time we started this program in 1995, everything has crept up in a very positive manner. The reason for that is diversity of rotations, no-till and reduction of nutrients we’re loading into the system,” Jorgensen said. “I don’t rely on anyone else telling me what we need to apply. We look at our soil chemistry, organic matter and CEC [cation-exchange capacity] levels; then we determine how much nutrient we need. Often times, it’s less than half of university recommendations.”

Through generations of strategic planning, hard work and faith, Jorgensen Land & Cattle has become a nationally recognized leader not only for their elite Angus genetics and national bull leasing program but also for their farm production and hunting businesses.

“Our family and businesses have evolved a lot over the years,” Jorgensen said. “At the end of the day, you’ve got to be passionate about what you’re doing.”

Background

Jorgensen Land & Cattle, located near Ideal, SD, has been held in the Jorgensen family since 1909, earning it recognition by the state as a Century Farm.

Today, Bryan Jorgensen and his nephew Cody are primary owners in the operation. Together, they handle the majority of day-to-day decisions; however, Bryan’s father Martin and Cody’s father Greg remain collaborative members of the family business.

Additionally, Bryan’s wife Brenda handles office management. The couple’s son Nicholas will return to the family operation in the spring of 2014.

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