

Growing Conservation!

There is more than a grazing plan on Larry Wilkinson's farm.



Brian Pillsbury (L), NRCS Grazing Lands Specialist and Larry Wilkinson inspecting the yearling cattle on this grazing paddock.

On a beautiful spring day in Wisconsin, a trip to Larry Wilkinson's farm depicts that special "something" about Wisconsin. The farm is nestled in the Baraboo Hills, a unique landscape of rolling hills and deep valleys, the perfect setting for a rotational grazing system. Larry started farming in 1994 with his dad and has operated his own dairy farm since 2000. In 2006, he expanded his operation from 30 cows to 100 cows and he moved his herd up the road to a new free stall barn and swing parlor that he built on some land he purchased.

His present farm consists of 300 crop acres and 150 acres of pasture for grazing cows. His first grazing plan was developed in 2000, with the help of Brian Pillsbury, NRCS Grazing Lands Specialist.

Larry's conservation plan includes pasture and cropland practices including managed grazing, forage planting, fence, watering facility, cattle lanes, nutrient management and transition to organic farming.

He recently applied for the Conservation Stewardship Program and was accepted in June 2012. Currently, he is making the transition to become certified organic on his new farm, which takes three years of crop management and one year of livestock management according to standards of the USDA National Organic Program.

When asked about his experiences working with NRCS, Larry says "Oh, they are good! They help solve problems, they help with my plans. NRCS helps me make wise land use decisions."



New technology for milking pumps will save on electric bills.

Larry had one other project that he shared during a trip to his original farm. Larry is retrofitting the original barn and feeding operation so he can “test” organic farming with a portion of his herd before he makes the transition with all the cows at the new farm. He designed and constructed a small milking operation to accommodate 48 cows. He is using state of the art milking pumps that are energy-efficient. His feeding operation for this smaller herd will be automated, with feed dispensed directly from the silo. He is setting it up to be an easy one-person operation so that he can concentrate on implementing organic herd health and nutrition techniques.

Once he has refined this small organic system, he sees the potential for a possible “dairy farm apprentice” to operate it and learn as well as build some equity in cattle to acquire his/her own dairy farm in the future.



Farmer and engineer, Larry designed and is building this milking parlor, as he pursues converting this part of his operation to organic.