



Conservation in Focus

Organic Dairy Farm Involves Entire Family

Above: Tim Servais, of Hamburg Hills Organic Dairy Farm, stands next to his dairy cows in a newly built freestall area.

Tim Servais, of Hamburg Hills, is a second generation farmer. His father bought the Vernon County farm in the early 1970's and started with 23 cows. Tim came back home at age 28 and began managing the farm, increasing the dairy cows to 90 and building a freestall barn. Tim now runs his operation organically and farms 1,250 acres, over 700 owned, and the remaining leased. Tim's farm is certified organic and he is also working on transitioning a recently acquired rental to organic. He now has around 250 cows at the dairy. Tim and his wife, Lisa, farm with the help of their two sons, Zach and Jackson, and a handful of employees. His daughter, Sabrina, is specifically interested in the cows on the farm. "I guess I always wanted to be a farmer, I have two sons who want to farm and currently help, and a daughter who likes farming too, she especially likes to show Jersey cows," said Tim.

Tim plants hay, corn for grain, and corn silage as his main crops, using the harvest to feed his cows. He also integrates cover crops, to help with soil health and erosion issues. "The farm didn't raise much when we first bought it; you couldn't get alfalfa to grow on it. We also had a lot of erosion and ditch issues," said Tim. "I've always been conservation minded, so I'm working on utilizing waterways and

contour strips on the farm, to combat erosion and fix some of the conservation issues."

Tim works with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). "My dad worked with NRCS and I kept on following through with conservation efforts," said Tim. Through EQIP, Servais installed fencing and grassed waterways, added access roads and cattle lanes, and installed a grade stabilization structure and water retention pond. He has also used EQIP for nutrient management, cover crops, and sinkhole treatments. "We've been working with Tim since 2002; we recently partnered to install an access road to gain access around a new freestall and to his feed storage area," said Tom Kreuzer, NRCS Vernon County Soil Conservation Technician. Tim has participated in CSP since 2011, enrolling cropland and pastureland on his farm. "Tim recently signed up for five more years of CSP, to further enhance his conservation efforts," said Sam Skemp, NRCS Vernon County District Conservationist. "I use cover crops, like winter rye, to combat erosion and help with weed suppression, since we farm organically," said Servais.

Helping People Help the Land



Left: Servais prepares a tractor to cultivate corn.

Below: A cattle lane installed with NRCS assistance.



Above: Contour strips, like the ones shown here at Hamburg Hills, help prevent sheet and rill erosion by slowing runoff and trapping sediment. Sediment, nutrients, and other contaminants are removed from the runoff as they pass through buffer strips.

Tim has also received assistance from NRCS in laying out contour strips. "We had many contour strips on the farm from when my dad farmed it. As we've acquired more land, we've worked with NRCS to lay out new contour strips on those properties," said Servais. "We recently marked out a couple hundred acres of contour strips at Hamburg Hills; we've also modified some of the existing contour strip widths and made them a bit wider and more uniform," said Kreuzer.

"I am grateful for the financial assistance, but also really partner with NRCS for the knowledge and technical advice, in helping engineer the projects we complete."

~ Tim Servais

Servais also works with NRCS to keep a current nutrient management plan for the organic dairy. "He has done nutrient management in the past; since he is organic, he tries to get most of the amendments from his cows," said Kreuzer. "We're so glad we went organic. The cattle are less stressed and are able to graze," said Servais. Tim continues to have success running his dairy farm organically. "Farming is a lot of hard work but there are rewards, I love this land, the animals and being outside," said Tim. "I want to make the farm nice and workable for my kids to run it in the future," said Tim.

Tim is enthusiastic about the relationship he's built with NRCS. He appreciates the financial help he receives from the programs, but really likes the readily-available technical assistance he receives. "I am grateful for the financial assistance, but also really partner with NRCS for the knowledge and technical advice, in helping engineer the projects we complete," said Tim. "The NRCS office is great; I've known Sam and Tom for a long time; they've been good when I get busy and forget about things; they'll call me with a reminder and offer so much advice; I really appreciate it," said Tim. NRCS plans to partner with Tim in the future to establish a grazing plan. "Tim's very progressive and easy to work with. He's always had conservation in the forefront and he's open for suggestions. He has some existing pasture we'd like to work together on, to rotationally graze, adding smaller paddocks, some fencing, and more, in the future; we're looking forward to the opportunity to help out," explains Kreuzer. Tim has recently added a new freestall and parlor to his operation, leaving further opportunity to utilize the land around the new structure for rotational grazing.



A new freestall barn for Tim's dairy cows at Hamburg Hills.

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

June 2016