



District 4 OYDC

Dan and Sarah Minnis

Taking over the operations of a multi-generational family dairy farm can be a humbling experience for the current owners. Knowing the history, the challenges and the successes spanning their farm's 150-year history helps keep things in perspective for Dan and Sarah Minnis.

"I never think of this as 'my farm'," Dan says. "I'm just in charge of it for this generation."

Dan's mother, Kathi, is a history and genealogy buff that has strung together the generations and legacies of the farm, creating a story of how the Minnis Farm weathered wars, the depression and the constant changes of the dairy industry. Dan knows the stories and understands the legacy of the farm. His understanding of the past gives him patience in making the changes

and advancements in the farm.

"We want to expand and maybe build a new milking facility but we are not willing to take on a lot of debt to do it," Dan says. "We are adding barns as the herd grows and hope to eventually put in a new parlor. I don't want to put in a new parlor and barns and then have to buy a bunch of cows to make it cash flow."

Dan started working with his father, Larry, on a regular basis during his senior year of high school. He continued to work on the farm while he attended MSU. After completing a Bachelor's Degree in Animal Science in 2000, Dan became a full-time employee. Shortly after that he and his parents formed an LLC for the farm.

"My dad has been good about

letting me try new things and make some changes, but he still holds veto power," Dan says.

Since 2000 the herd has grown from 80 cows to 200 and they have added several new buildings. They have been able to maintain a steady growth rate by improving their breeding program and using sexed semen. They have also made changes in their feeding program swapping baylage for haylage and incorporating BMR corn.

A major focus for Dan has been improving over all cow health and milk quality. Moving the cattle from a tie-stall barn to a freestall barn with sand bedding was the first step in improving cow comfort.

"With better barns we are seeing better cow health, especially with the fresh cows," Dan says.

In addition to the freestall barns, they also built a transition barn for the young stock. The varying locations of the Minnis barns reflect the stages of growth the family has gone through. The “main farm” is only 40 acres and holds the milking facility and freestall barn. The young stock are on two other pieces of property they own nearby.

“We have cattle in four different townships,” Dan says. “But its all we have ever known so it doesn’t bother us. We are used to driving between places.”

The next step for the Minnises will be a new manure management system, currently they are using a daily haul program, but as the herd grows it will be more difficult to use only daily hauling.

“We are always changing something. We seem to pick a problem and start working on it,” Dan says. “But it usually happens that fixing one problem creates a new one, so there is always something we are working on. But that’s what keeps it interesting. Dairy farming isn’t always easy – if it was everyone would do it!”

The Minnis farm is part of a small pocket of dairy farms in the Dansville area. Having dairy farm neighbors, including family members, is something Dan and Sarah really appreciate.

“We are always helping each other out in the fields, or with the cows. It is good to have people around to work with.”

Dan’s sister, Erin Graf is married to a dairy farmer and Sarah also grew up on a dairy farm in Dansville. “I guess dairy farmers like to stick together,” Dan says.

Sarah also helps with her father’s farm books and works at a local hospital. Her dad, Kevin Cavanaugh, is a four-time winner of the MMPA Top Quality Award.

“I think our quality went up just having Sarah here,” Dan jokes.

Dan and Sarah are the parents of two young girls, Cassa, 16 months and Raegan, 6 weeks.

The Minnises are members of the MMPA Ingham County Local and District 4. Dan is a delegate for the local.



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