



Majestic Views on a Contour Farm

Dairy Farmer Promotes Sustainability

Above: Ron Abing (left), Majestic View Dairies, LLC., and Joe Schmeltz, NRCS Grant County District Conservationist, view a new freestall barn for heifers.

Ron Abing and his wife, Terri, started farming in 1983 as part of a 50/50 partnership with John Haskins, a family friend. The farm is now known as Majestic View Dairies, LLC., located in Lancaster, Wis. Farming runs in the Abing family; Ron's father and grandfather also owned dairies. "We've never done anything other than farming in our family as long as I can remember," said Abing. Ron, Terri, and his two daughters, Sarah and Amanda, operate the large dairy with the help of some long time staff they know like family. "It's truly a family business and we love it," said Ron.

Abing has always had dairy cows; he tried hogs for a while in 1980, but decided cows were for them. "Terri and I started our operation with 60 cows, and then, in 1993, we expanded the dairy to 100 cows. We continued to grow from there," said Ron. The Abings farm is 4,000 acres: 3,000 tillable, 900 in woodlands and pasture, and roughly 100 in building sites. They also have 1,100 cows and raise their own heifers, which are out to pasture 6 to 7 months of the year. The Abings also open up their farm to local schools and the public, throughout the year. "We believe it's important to expose younger generations to farms and dairying," explains Ron. Ron is also an advocate for conservation, explaining to all visitors the importance of taking care of the land.

Ron has always been conscious of erosion and the difference contour strips can make in controlling it. "I grew up with

contours on the home farm; it's 100 percent contour strip-ping and we were used to always farming that way," said Ron. No-till was not popular when his father farmed, but now, he practices no-till and farms contours on many of his properties. "We plant corn into sod ground and soybeans into corn stubble; we no-till all those acres; we try to practice as much of it as we can," said Ron. He also uses cover crops to increase soil health. "We've done a lot of winter rye over the years as a cover crop and we still do," said Ron. "In feeding our livestock, we produce all of our hay, high moisture corn, dry corn, and corn silage," said Ron. Majestic View produces enough corn and alfalfa to take care of the dairy and then some. They sell their beans and a portion of their corn.

"I never remember not knowing NRCS," said Ron. He remembers many of the old programs his father used through the Soil Conservation Service, now NRCS; this is where his conservation land ethic started. In 1979, Ron and Terri applied for their first mortgage through the USDA Farm Service Agency, to start farming. They also worked with NRCS in the same joint office. "Ron has addressed a number of resource concerns on his farm over the years with the help of NRCS; he implemented 21 contracts under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), utilizing 17 various practices to address resource concerns; he's a willing landowner and knows the difference good conservation planning and implementation

Helping people help the land



Left: Contour strips on the farm. Right: New concrete manure storage installed with the help of NRCS.

makes," said Joe Schmelz, NRCS Grant County District Conservationist.

"Manure handling would be the number one resource concern NRCS has helped us address," said Ron. With financial and technical assistance from NRCS, he installed a manure storage structure adjacent to a new freestall barn for heifers.

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"We needed to build a concrete manure storage, and the cost sharing and technical advice we received from NRCS helped the whole plan and project come together successfully," explained Ron. Abing has also worked with NRCS to build a satellite manure storage. During the summer, when the main dairy manure storage gets close to the freeboard line, he can move some of the manure into a satellite storage at a different farm. "The satellite storage is just the right size to spread on the local fields in that area and not haul any manure out; it covers the corn and bean grounds on the surrounding farmland," said Ron. Abing has also worked with NRCS to repair ditches and reshape waterways on his farm. "Conservation is so important; do we have ditches and washouts everyone once in a while? Yes, but we will do everything we can to prevent them; we've reshaped waterways, put in cover crops, practice some no-till, and more; my ultimate goal is to have no topsoil loss; we're currently working on greatly minimizing the loss," said Ron.

Ron is a true farmer at heart and enjoys that his family loves it too. "I love the challenge of growing crops every year and being outside, the kids and grandkids being so involved and our family being around the dairy all the time. It is truly a family business we are all passionate about," explains Abing. Ron appreciates how accessible the local NRCS office employees are. "The NRCS office in Grant County is top notch. They are very up on everything and I can always get answers," said Ron. Abing realizes the importance of conservation planning and



Above: Heifers in their new home, a freestall barn built with an adjacent concrete manure storage.

implementation to keep land productive. "Conservation plans help me stay ahead of the designing and planning and NRCS always provides new ideas, advice, and solutions, we haven't previously thought about. The information we get is priceless and the cost sharing is too," said Ron. Ron wants to continue the dairy and keep it healthy and happy for future generations of his family.