

There's More to Bos Haven Farms than Meets the Eye!

Although the owners of Bos Haven Farms are very proud the farmstead was among the inaugural winners of the New York Dairy of Distinction award in 1984, they are equally gratified with their conservation recognitions that date back even farther.

Located in Millbrook, this picturesque Dutchess County Dairy is owned by Tim and Carolyn Marshall. Tim readily talks about the conservation and environmentally important aspects of the farm that have been incorporated over the decades.

“Since 1966 – more than 40 years ago – our farm been the host site for the District’s Conservation Field Day, which has given hundreds of local fifth and sixth grade students a hands-on opportunity to learn about farming and conservation practices,” said Tim. “And in 1978, the Dutchess County Soil and Water Conservation District honored our dairy with its Cooperator of the Year Award.”

The original 258-acre farm, with 50 cows, was purchased by Tim’s grandfather Stanley Benham in 1946, and has been continuously operated as a dairy farm ever since. Tim’s father, Don Marshall, eventually took over the operation and expanded the size of the farm to 482 acres and increased the milking herd to 150 head. In 1963, the farm was incorporated under the name Bos Haven Farms, with Tim taking an active role. Don continues to live on the property and participates regularly in farm operations.

More than 50 years ago, the farm, which is located in the Wappinger Creek and Sprout Creek Watershed in the Hudson River region, began strip cropping. Benham signed up for a conservation plan in 1953 that was primarily soil and water based, aiming to prevent soil erosion and protect water quality. The farm originally had a lot of stone walls that were gradually disappearing and it was determined that creating diversion ditches would be beneficial.

The second phase of the conservation plan was implementing crop rotation of field corn, hay and alfalfa, as well as instituting a nutrient management program that specifically addressed spreading manure to fit the needs of the crops. “Back then we were concerned with the loss of nutrients and our affect on water quality,” remarked Tim. “We were wanted to be sure our farm practices wouldn’t impact another farm or someone’s well, or even the Hudson River.”

Tim explained that before implementing a nutrient management plan, they had a terrible system for spreading manure. “It took too much time and effort and wasn’t maximizing the

value of the manure,” he said. “With nutrient management, you need to know the value of the manure and fertilizer costs. Better managing manure helped cut fertilizer costs – and at the same time was the right thing to do.”

Over the years, the management team focused on better understanding the value of environmental conservation to their business. Thirty years ago, the Marshalls diverted milk house waste from the creek that runs through the farm into a newly constructed slurry store, a considerable \$25,000 investment at the time. “Our conservation practices have been incorporated based on good business sense, as well as environmental impact.”

In more recent years, Bos Haven Farms has been a recipient of state funding for water quality improvements based on their participation in the county's Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program of Tiers 1-5.

In 2004, operation of the dairy portion of the farm was taken over by Brian Donovan, a young local farmer. The Marshalls are very enthusiastic about the dairy operation remaining a key component of Bos Haven Farms. They demonstrated their commitment to the ongoing dairy operation by investing in the construction of a new silo and shade green house for the cattle in 2005. The dairy operation now includes 150 milking cows and 130 replacement heifers, producing more than two million pounds per year. Tim continues work the farm, raising crops and hay on the on the farmland that is not being grazed.

While Bos Haven is not regulated as a CAFO, Tim feels all farms should be environmentally focused. He utilizes the valuable resources and personnel of his local Water and Soil Conservation District and is very pro-active, frequently calling for input in anticipation of changes. Notably, the farm was presented with the Goodyear Award for Outstanding Stewardship from the National Association of Conservation Districts.

“Tim’s always thinking ahead,” said Myra Lawyer of the Dutchess County Soil and Water Conservation District. “We pick his brain as new regulations are being developed. He’s very knowledgeable and truly cares about conservation, both as a responsibility and a business concern. Additionally, Tim has always been open about what he is doing and willing to take the time to talk to other farmers so they can understand what he’s done and how it impacts the environment.”

Next on the farm’s agenda is a grant through the ACP Program from the USDA Environmental Protection Fund for improvements to the barnyard in order to change the feeding system and incorporate better manure handling. The plan calls for new concrete and gutters, adding height

for security of a nearby stream, relocating milk house waste pumps and upgrading equipment for getting manure to the slurry store. “We worry about heavy rain storms washing manure and feed toward stream,” Tim said.

The Marshalls, although not actively involved in the dairy operation of the farm, want to see their land remain active in agriculture. “It’s important to the environment to keep soils and farms in production. Agriculture is a better use of open land. Farming preserves the community’s character, helps lower costs of municipal services, and, if farmed responsibly, is good land conservation,” added Tim.

Currently, the Marshall family is exploring enrolling the lands’ development rights with the local Dutchess Land Conservancy.

This article is part of a series by the New York Center for Dairy Excellence where farmers describe experiences with agricultural environmental management. The NYCDE is a nonprofit initiative that promotes profitability among the NY dairy industry. For more information, visit, nyfvi.org.