

Four-Family Organic Dairy Operation

Four first cousins - Travis, Adam, Michael and Josh Tranel - along with their families and other cousins, blended four separate operations into a single large organic LLC dairy 7 years ago.

One key operating philosophy of Tranel Family Farms, a 2,000-acre, 600-cow dairy near the southwest Wisconsin town of Cuba City, is to provide a family-sustaining job for any family member who wants to farm. Josh Tranel, herdsman for the operation, says the multi-family structure has delivered a number of advantages and benefits compared with sole-ownership.

"Simple economies of scale mean that we only need one milking parlor, one calf and heifer-raising system and one set of machinery," Josh says. "We've also learned that it's more productive to have a central place to work where family members are able to specialize in jobs they enjoy and are good at. And fortunately, we all get along with each

other and enjoy working together."

Another advantage with the large family workforce is that it's easier to schedule an afternoon off or a family vacation. "We've also found that cousins working together has proven easier than siblings working together, maybe because, with cousins, there is less of a pecking order of who is in charge than with brothers," Josh says.

As a USDA-certified organic dairy, Tranel Family Farms relies heavily on pasture. The operation has more than 200 acres of intensely-grazed pasture divided into 32 individual paddocks that allow cows to be moved onto fresh grass as often as every six hours.

The mixed breed dairy herd includes Holsteins, Red and White Holsteins, Brown Swiss, Jersey and Milking Shorthorn. "Our breeding plan is to gradually introduce more Jersey and Jersey-cross genetics so we're working with smaller cows and maximizing



Merging their family farm operations together into a large organic LLC dairy has worked out well for 4 first cousins - Travis, Adam, Michael and Josh Tranel - along with their families and other cousins.

the fat content in our milk," Josh says. He reports that milk production is approaching 70 lbs./cow. All milk is sold to Organic Valley Coop in La Farge, Wisconsin.

As an organic dairy, a lot of emphasis at Tranel Family Farms is placed on preventive health and cow comfort. The farm's sand-

bedded free-stall barn is equipped with misters and curtains and cows walk on a recycled asphalt lane to pasture to promote foot health in the herd.

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Walk-Behind Converted To Power Wheelbarrow

"It moves firewood around with ease and works great for a variety of other jobs," says Mark Yax, Solon, Ohio, who converted an old 2-wheeled David Bradley walk-behind tractor into a 3-wheeled powered wheelbarrow.

He started with a 2-wheeled 1962 David Bradley Handiman tractor he bought for \$50. It's designed to accept several different attachments including a mower, rototiller, cultivator, edger, and a counterweight, which all came with the tractor Yax bought. The Briggs & Stratton engine had a stuck exhaust valve and a stuck points plunger so he repaired them, and the original solid rubber tires were worn out so he replaced them with lugged 4 by 13-in. pneumatic tires, building new wheel rims to fit the tractor's axle.

He already had a 6 cu. ft. wheelbarrow, and used 1 by 2-in. steel tubing to make

a detachable frame that's bolted to the bottom of the wheelbarrow and also to the tractor. The frame is hinged, allowing the wheelbarrow to be flipped forward in order to dump the load. "The hinge pins can easily be taken out to remove the wheelbarrow from the tractor," says Yax.

He fabricated a steel bracket for a 13-in. caster wheel that bolts on in front of the tractor the same way the attachments do. He also bolted a rear hinged kickstand onto the wheelbarrow handles. "The kickstand flips down to keep the wheelbarrow from falling over backward due to an unbalanced load," says Yax.

He says his powered wheelbarrow works great for hauling firewood because he doesn't have to bend over when lifting the wood out. "It'll pull 400 lbs. of wood with no problem, so I can stack the wood way higher than the

wheelbarrow's rim. The wheelbarrow has a high center of gravity, but we have mostly level ground so it's not likely to tip over even with a heavy load of wood. However, it might not be stable enough to haul something heavier, like cement. The tractor has a reverse gear, which makes it easy to maneuver in small spaces."

He says that even the previous owner was happy how things turned out. "Before I bought the tractor the owner was offered \$15 for its scrap value, but he didn't really want it scrapped out because the tractor was his dad's pride and joy," says Yax. "He's glad to know the machine will still be around for a while and still working."

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Mark Yax uses his 3-wheeled power wheelbarrow to move firewood around with ease.

New Equipment Cleans Up Orchard Fruit

Owners of medium-size orchards interested in cleaning up fallen fruit quickly should check out the Austrian-made Huemer Fruit Harvesting Machines. Made of stainless steel and other quality materials, the equipment is designed to last for years and is available through Ruralistic, a Nebraska distributor.

Craig Dick, president of the company, needed a harvester for his own acreage that had about 10 acres of apple trees.

"In my research I didn't find anything like it. Other options were for just a couple of trees or designed for large acreages," he says. From \$2,200 to \$4,200, Huemer models fit mid-size operations. The equipment works on soft-skinned fruit including apples, peaches, pears, apricots and plums.

"It has very few moving parts. A rotating drum with spikes rolls over the fruit and punctures it," Dick says. The fruit drops into a 3-gal. bucket.

Because it is punctured, the fruit needs to be used within a day or fed to livestock. Customers include cideries, as well as an orchard owner who sells fallen apples for livestock feed.

"The nice thing is that the metal parts where the fruit touches it are stainless steel.



Walk-behind rotating drum with spikes rolls over fallen fruit and punctures it. Fruit rolls down a grate and drops into buckets. A 3-pt. mounted tree shaker (right) with a pto shaft and cable is used to drop old fruit off trees.

So it cleans up well and you can sanitize it," Dick says of the harvester.

At the top end, Huemer offers a 55-in. wide harvester with 3 buckets that can be pushed with a compact tractor.

All the harvesters come with 2 sets of buckets and a 2-year warranty. The handle of the push models can be adjusted in 3 positions, and the tires are similar to bicycle tires.

"I've been blown away about how simple



and well they work," Dick says. "I cleaned up about a 1/2-acre in 30 minutes."

Through the end of 2020 he is offering discounts for pre-orders for 2021. Check out YouTube for videos of the Huemer harvesters in action (Ruralistic Huemer Type 1500 and Type 800).

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Arrowhead-shaped wood piece magnetically attaches to wagon chute, diverting feed into 2 streams that drop into buckets.

Magnet Helps Fill Buckets Without Spilling Feed

A homemade "magnetic diverter" lets Craig Schnoor, Maquoketa, Iowa fill 2 buckets at a time out of a gravity wagon, without spilling any feed.

He cut an arrowhead-shaped piece out of a 2 by 6 board and countersunk a round speaker-type magnet into one side. The assembly magnetically attaches to the chute and sets flush with the bottom. It diverts the feed into 2 streams that drop into the buckets setting underneath. The magnetic assembly can be easily stored by sticking it anything metal, including the wall of a machine shed.

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