

Hasenick's success built on technology and common sense

By JENNIFER VINCENT

THERE'S a sign that hangs in the Hasenick Farms home office that reads: "If you have nothing to do, don't do it here."

And that's no joke.

The crops are off, but the farm shop is bustling in January, as Dennis Hasenick, his son Marc and three full-time employees dismantle, clean up, repair, maintain and upgrade equipment to ready for spring planting.

The multigenerational farm has grown from 2,600 acres to almost 5,000 acres during the 25 years Dennis has been farming with his father, Don, and uncle, Dean.

The farm has changed with market demand. The dairy cows were sold and the farm transitioned to a heifer operation, and now it's mostly beef cattle and crops.

Dennis has been handling the day-to-day business of the farm — very successfully — for several years now, leaving his father and uncle the option to be on the farm when they want to be and not because they have to. That's the way they all like it.

A 2006 Master Farmer

Dennis practices strong environmental stewardship, closely watches the markets, looks for new opportunities, respects his employees and serves in

Key Points

- Hasenick helps grow multigenerational farm from 2,600 acres to almost 5,000.
- Farm practices, precision agriculture, no-till and crop rotation.
- Smooth transition of the farm maintained its integrity; Marc Hasenick is next in line.

several leadership capacities; he is a Master Farmer.

Nominated by parents

His parents, unbeknownst to Dennis, nominated him for the Master Farmer honor. "Dennis is a born farmer and steward of the land," says his mother, Clara. "The transition from older to younger generation has gone well, and had it not been for Dennis, the farm would most likely have met the fate of so many farms today."

Dennis' oldest son, Marc, 17, fully intends to work on the farm with his dad after going off to Michigan State University to pursue a bachelor's degree this fall. Youngest son, Andrew, 15, is leaning toward sports and computers, but who knows, Dennis says.

"Dennis is well-respected by his employees and does not expect more from them than he does of himself. He makes time for his family and sets a good example for his sons," says Don.

Since the late 1980s, the Hasenick



THE HASENICK family is now running the multigenerational farm (from left): Marc, Cindy, Dennis and Andrew.

Master Farmer Profile: Hasenick

DENNIS HASENICK

Age: 45

Wife: Cindy

Children: Marc 17, Andrew 15

Farm: Partnership with father, Don, and uncle Dean, 5,000 acres cash crops, beef cattle and dairy heifers

Location: Albion, Jackson County

Employees: three

Award nominators: Clara and Don Hasenick

Leadership:

- Springport Township Board of Review
- Chairman of Springport United Methodist Church Administrative Council
- Member of the FarmHouse fraternity at MSU
- Local FFA judge
- Member of Farm Bureau
- Jackson County Soil
- Conservationist of the Year 1999
- Member Springport FFA
- Agriscience Advisory Board

Farming smarter with precision ag

CROP production, Dennis Hasenick says, is an ongoing lesson. "I'm a student in the field. There is always something to learn. Precision ag has opened the door to understanding what's best for the crop and environment, and what's conducive to growth."

Although his son Marc is not yet a partner on the farm, he definitely has influence. It was Marc's idea to explore precision agriculture.

Marc, as a freshman, chose precision agriculture as his topic for FFA Greenhand Public Speaking competition. His eight-minute speech on variable-rate spreading and grid/zone mapping required a great deal of research. The more he investigated, the more both Dennis and Marc got interested. "As I listened to Marc, the more I became convinced it was something we needed to do," Dennis says.

Marc adds, "It doesn't pay to sit and do nothing." Although Marc wasn't exactly keen on public speaking, his FFA adviser Pat Henne said, "You can do this. You're going to do it," Marc recalls.

Marc completed his speech, enjoyed it and won the state title.

Plunging into precision ag

Dennis had always scouted fields and soil tested, but precision agriculture was taking crop management a step further. In 1997, yield monitors were installed. "The monitors were great, but we weren't fully utilizing that data," Dennis says.

The Hasenicks started soil testing in smaller production zones. "Some weren't bigger than a couple of acres," Dennis says. "But that allowed us to identify what we needed and where. The farm went to variable-rate application in the fall of 2003.

"Some acres may get zero lime, while others will need a ton or two."

The variable-rate applications are recorded as they are applied and downloaded to the computer in the office. Dennis' wife, Cindy, keeps the farm's books, with the help of Farmworks software. "She does an incredible job," Dennis quickly adds. "The Farmworks accounting program gives us the ability to know costs in various enterprises.

"I'm buying less total tons of product without a decrease in yield," he says.

The farm is averaging 153 bushels per acre of corn and "what we're doing has got to be better for the environment."

farm has just about doubled in size, with acreage all within about a four-mile radius of the Springport farm office.

His objective each year when he enters the fields is to farm every acre better than the previous year. "At the moment, our scale of operation has some efficiencies. I'm not sure we could maintain that if we were to double [in size] again."

Dennis is always interested in adding quality acreage to the operation, but adds that growth should not always be measured by "acres farmed." "Improving efficiency and productivity are important areas for growth in today's farm economy," he adds.

Finding the right market

Dennis has found a specialty market with nonbiotech corn. "All of our corn is non-GMO," he says. "We sell some to a brewery in Canada getting a premium anywhere from 25 to 40 cents a bushel."

But, that doesn't mean Dennis is against biotech. All his soybeans are Roundup Ready.

"It's just about finding what the market wants and getting the best price."

Marketing once consisted of taking your crop to the elevator and selling it. Today, a global market, forward contracts, price-later agreements and a host of government programs have elevated this component of the business to almost even keel with growing the crop. Dennis has been a student of the markets since he was 18 years old. At one time, he plotted commodity charts by hand, trying to stay in tune with market values.

He still stays current with supply-and-demand scenarios, but now he does that with the help of computers and the Internet.

He also attends a monthly marketing group meeting at the Anderson grain elevator in Albion. About a dozen producers attend the meeting to explore marketing potentials, he says.

Ability to market the crop is driving the urge to expand on-farm storage. The Hasenick farm currently has 250,000 bushels of storage and will be adding another 130,000 bushels in 2006. "I've never built a bin too big yet," he says.