

Midwest Messenger LIVESTOCK

ROUNDUP

AI trailer offers hands-on learning

By Benjamin Herrold
Iowa Farmer Today

Randy Dreher did not plan to teach other people how to do artificial insemination. It was just something he did for his cattle on his farm in western Iowa, near Audubon.

"I've been AI-ing cows for about 20 years," Dreher said.

He said a few neighbors would ask him how to do it, and he worked as a semen sales representative for a company.

Then a friend from Dreher's days in FFA and 4-H reached out asking Dreher to teach a course at a local community college. While teaching the course, Dreher brought in a tech to teach the students artificial insemination. There was one chute and one cow, so students had to take turns.

"I thought, I enjoy teaching the courses, but we need to find some way to give more students a hands-on experience," Dreher said.

He had the idea to build a trailer with stalls for 10 cows so several students



Photo courtesy of Randy Dreher

Randy Dreher has a trailer he takes to colleges and sale barns to teach people how to artificially inseminate cattle.

could work on their skills at the same time.

"That way everybody could work at the same time at their own pace," Dreher said.

He takes the teaching trailer to different locations, teaching both students and non-students, with events at community colleges in Iowa, at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Missouri, as well as at sale barns.

Dreher said there seems to be strong demand to learn. He remembers one event at a sale barn when he had 40 people interested in taking the training. The mobile trailer and the ability to take the training courses to where people are is important, Dreher said.

"A lot of the (current artificial insemination courses) are six hours away," he said.

It is not just younger people looking to take the training course, Dreher said.

"I've been surprised how many people in their 50s and 60s have been taking the courses," he said.

Dreher has a cow-calf operation and does some cattle backgrounding on his farm.

"I enjoy the process of education," Dreher said. "I've worked really hard to make sure the content is relevant. It's fun to watch a student who has struggled figure it out."

For more information, call Dreher at 641-740-0193.

Beyond tradition: South Dakota couple finds opportunities to improve land with regenerative ranching

Caden and Jori Smiley ranch near Redowl, in western South Dakota's Meade County, carrying on a lifelong connection to agriculture.

Both involved in the conservation community, Caden grew up on his family's ranch in the same area, while Jori spent much of her childhood helping at her grandparents' place near Lead.

When Caden returned to the family ranch around 2016, he took over full responsibility for managing the ranch. After the West River Grazing School, hosted by the South Dakota Grassland Coalition, which is supported by a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Cooperation Agreement, they

soon realized there were opportunities to improve their land, and they were eager to get started.

That new perspective led them to work more closely with NRCS field office staff to restore productivity to their farmland, advancing soil health and improving plant diversity. Together, they identified next steps for enhancing water resources on the property and collaborated on a comprehensive, producer driven grazing plan.

"Helping producers like the Smileys build soil health and achieve their regenerative goals is what makes this job meaningful," said Cody Skogen, local soil conservation technician. "The Smileys

understand the importance of soil health and what it does not only for the ground they run on, but also the product they produce."

Living in the Sulphur Creek area, water is a limited resource.

"Sulfur Creek is notorious for water not being desirable. Other than a couple weeks in the spring, you don't want cattle drinking it, and it is difficult to cross," said



Submitted photo

Caden and Jori Smiley

TRADITION
CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Kernel processing for quality corn silage

By Ben Beckman
Nebraska Extension

High value silage depends on maintaining chop quality throughout harvest. Do you know how to reliably monitor your silage quality?

Energy from corn silage comes in a large part from starch in the grain itself. After consuming, the outer seed coat impedes starch digestion. To counter act this, many modern choppers are fitted with a kernel processor, that physically crushes or damages the grain and stalks, improving digestibility. Correctly setting these rollers is critical. Too close and machine wear increases, too far apart and the kernels aren't broken and digestibility is decreased.

To achieve high-quality silage, catching any problems with the processor as soon as possible is critical. To do this, grab a 32 oz. cup and at least once an hour during harvest, grab a sample from the pile.

Next spread the sample out on a flat surface like a card table near the pile and go through the kernels. Count all the kernels that are ½ or greater in size. You can also put the sample into a bucket of water. The kernels will sink to the bottom and stalks and leaves will float. Skim/drain off the top layer and again count any kernels that are ½ or greater in size.

For both methods, the goal is to have 2 or fewer whole or ½ size kernels in your count. Anything over that and word can be passed to the chopper to adjust the processing.

For those who don't have access to a kernel processor, keeping chop length short can help accomplish similar results. Shortening chop length to 3/8 inch for machines without a processor will do more kernel damage and maintain similar fiber particle size. For those whose priority is not particle size, mostly beef producers, dropping down to ½ inch chop length will damage even more kernels and provide the additional benefit of helping get a better pack.

Seeding fall forages

By Ben Beckman
Nebraska Extension

If grazing is one of your goals for a fall cover or forage crop, planting date matters. Every week we wait now means less growing season and less fall production. While seeding early is best, some species handle later planting dates better than others.

For fields available now through the end of August, oats or spring triticale are good options for fall forage. Brassicas like turnips or rapeseed can also be added. These winter-sensitive species generally produce lots of high quality fall growth. These forages typically need 40 to 60 days of growth before grazing. Later-maturing forage varieties can help keep small grains vegetative and maintain quality longer, making stockpiling for winter grazing an option.

As planting moves into September, especially following corn silage, cereal rye or winter triticale become better choices. Fall production may be lower, but these crops survive winter and provide spring forage. A simple oats and rye mix can split the difference—oats provide fall growth while rye comes back next spring. If spring forage is the priority, avoid grazing winter-hardy species too short this fall; leave about four inches of growth to protect spring forage potential.

After later corn or soybean harvest, expectations need to change. Rye can still establish, but most of its forage value will come the following spring.

Before planting, check herbicide rotation and grazing restrictions from the previous crop.

If grazing this fall is your forage goal, the sooner we can get seed in the ground, the better.



Adding grass to thinning alfalfa

By Ben Beckman
Nebraska Extension

Do you have a thinning, low-producing alfalfa stand but aren't quite ready for a complete reseeding? These stands can sometimes be rejuvenated by interseeding grasses to increase hay production in subsequent years or convert the field to pasture.

Most alfalfa fields begin to lose stand and production potential after several years of hay production. When this occurs, interseeding a grass can help maintain hay yield and quality. Orchardgrass is the most common interseeded grass into alfalfa, but endophyte-free tall fescue, smooth or meadow brome, festulolium, and wheatgrasses also can be used. If the field will be used as pasture, a mixture of grasses may work well, but select species that fit your soils, moisture conditions, and grazing goals.



Tri-State Neighbor photo by Janelle Atyeo

A freshly rolled bale of alfalfa sits on a field west of Dell Rapids, S.D.

Whether irrigated or dryland, interseeding following a mid-August to early September hay harvest can provide good establishment conditions. Dryland establishment carries more risk because timely moisture will be needed for germination and seedling growth. Seeding

should be done as soon as the August or early September harvest is complete.

If the existing alfalfa is relatively thick, another cutting may be needed once the alfalfa begins to form a full canopy. This keeps sunlight reaching the new grass seedlings below.

Seeding rates vary depending on the grass species and thickness of the existing alfalfa. With orchardgrass, for example, as little as 3 pounds per acre may be adequate in a relatively thick alfalfa stand, while up to 6 pounds per acre may be appropriate in a very thin stand.

Next spring, evaluate how well the new grasses have established. If seedlings still seem weak, cutting hay early can open the canopy and provide more sunlight for continued grass development.

TRADITION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Hanna Hostutler, Faith Service Center District Conservationist.

Luckily, the Smileys have existing waterlines near their property. With financial assistance from NRCS, they plan to drill a well to bring water to the site while utilizing the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Aside from water, another element of their conservation plan to improve soil health and forage quality with NRCS involves introducing virtual fencing and cross fencing, with the average collar starting at around \$90 per head for the initial investment, then a yearly fee after that. Due to living in a remote area with minimal cellular service, they invested in satellite e-collars for practicality. In addition, cross fencing has allowed them to rotate their cattle every one to three days using polywire, which ensures livestock stay on fresh forage while also shifting their calving dates to better match natural cycles.

They're working to move away from the mindset of "this is just how we've always done it" and instead seek ways to improve each year, Jori said.

"Caden is the big-picture person, always thinking outside the box," she added.

Their efforts are already regenerating the land. The Smileys have documented increases in both plant and wildlife diversity across their pastures, which is a trend they hope will continue.

"It's encouraging to see that diversity coming back," Caden said. "It's fun to see the wildlife and birds we have coming in."

With a plan and continued partnership with NRCS, the Smileys are focused on restoring their land and ensuring it remains productive and resilient for the next generation of ranchers.



Submitted photo by Samantha Alice Photography

"The Smileys understand the importance of soil health and what it does not only for the ground they run on, but also the product they produce," soil conservationist Cody Skogen said.

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- 40 blk hfrs (PO) 1025
- 40 blk hfrs (PO) 950-1000
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