

# Oneida Nation Farms – 40-Plus Years of Progress

Just 3 miles south of Seymour, WI, you can find one of the largest conventional cash crop farms in northeastern Wisconsin – Oneida Nation Farms (ONF). With more than 6,000 acres in production as well as beef and bison herds, the tribally-owned ONF is integral to the local community.

Oneida Nation Farms traces its history back to 1978 when it was known as the Iroquois Farm, which consisted of ~150 acres and 25 head of cattle. After starting very small and growing to ~2,500 acres by 2000, ONF now manages ~6,000 acres of cropland. “The farm consisted of crop land and non-crop land,” said Tom Swiecichowski, ONF Manager. “The crop land was good enough to farm, and with many tribal members and leaders wanting to have a return on investment in this land, ONF decided to run it ourselves.” Swiecichowski credits his educational background in animal science and ag business as being integral to helping him manage the day-to-day affairs.

They have many acres in various conservation and environmental programs in keeping with their commitment to take

care of the land. They are known for their minimal till and no till practices. “We work closely with our crop consultant, NRCS, and Oneida Conservation and Environmental Departments to comply with regulations on nutrient management and other programs enhancing the betterment of the land and air,” adds Swiecichowski.

In a typical season they plant ~2,000 acres of corn, ~2,000 acres of soybeans, ~1,000 acres of hay and grass, ~300 acres of wheat, and ~700 acres of pasture ground. Much of the hay and pasture is used for their 220 brood cows, as well as 220 calves. “We run our cows in two herds, a spring and a fall calving herd,” said Swiecichowski. “With selling our beef year-round, mostly in quarters and halves, this works better than only spring calving. This way we have more cattle finished year-round.” Their spring herd calves in April and May and those calves graze with their mothers all summer and into fall when they are weaned. The fall calves are born in September–October and are with the cow all winter and weaned late spring. “Our feed lot cattle are fed a TMR consisting of



forages and corn and, depending on their stage of production, we will push more finished corn.”

“We also manage 160 head of bison which produce 50 calves per year. We retain 15 for replacements and the remainder are sold.” The bison herd grazes May to November, then in winter are put in salvage pastures that get reseeded the following year. In winter months they are fed free choice hay and some corn silage.

The farm supplies meat to Oneida Food Pantry, Oneida Food Distribution, Oneida School System, Oneida Elderly care home, several Oneida restaurants, Oneida gas stations, Oneida and Menominee elder food boxes, and Oneida Beef and Bison market.

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They rely on a substantial amount of alfalfa and forages to meet the feed needs of their animals, and sell the remainder to neighboring dairy farms. “We either direct-seed alfalfa in the spring or wait to plant until the fall after winter wheat harvest,” says Swiecichowski. “We have two field cultivators and a high-speed disk with rubber rolls. It’s really important to have an optimum seed bed at planting.” Every 5 years, prior to planting, Swiecichowski soil tests on a 2.5 acre grid to ensure proper nutrients. “Generally, we apply ~300 lbs/ac potash, 150 lbs/ac calcium/sulfate, 100 lbs/ac DAP, and 7 lbs/ac boron after first cutting and an additional 200 lbs/ac potash after third cutting.” The farm also utilizes coated urea as well as nitrogen inhibitors to reduce leaching.

In terms of seed, ONF plants alfalfa at ~15 lbs/ac with hardy varieties to withstand hard Wisconsin winters and wet springs, and the inevitable field traffic that comes with harvest and clearing bales. “We’ll take 3-5 cuttings per year with the latest cutting depending on when we’re taking that field out of production. We always try to have some regrowth on our fields after fourth cutting, then take a fifth if we plan to take the fields out of production or if more feed is needed,” says Swiecichowski. “We’ll leave stands in for 3-5 years depending upon performance and how much forage we need at the time.” “Most of our hay is cut with a triple mower and disk bine. We allow it to dry then, if we’re selling it, the entity buying it will merge and chop with a self-propelled chopper and haul to their location for storage. If we’re using it, we’ll cut with a diskbine then, depending on whether we want dry hay or haylage, we’ll rake and let it dry for baling into large squares. On average, we have 5 tons DM/ac/yr.”

They are proud of their myriad of conservation practices, which include planting ~200 acres of winter rye for forage/cover crop each year, utilizing aerial seeding of annual ryegrass in tasseled corn as a cover crop in corn grain fields, and installing a large water and sediment control basin project along with a water treatment basin in one of their fields to prevent erosion and allow particulate phosphorus to settle out before leaving the treatment basin. Oneida Nation Farms has also implemented several acres of grass waterways in its most sensitive areas that present a resource concern to the environment. They have planted several acres of grass buffers along all of their navigable streams to prevent off-field movement of soil to the stream.

In addition to its membership in the Wisconsin and American Angus Association, Wisconsin and National Cattlemen’s Association, Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, Wisconsin and National Bison Association, and Wisconsin Soybean Marketing Board, ONF has been a member of the Midwest Forage Association and the Outagamie Forage Council for 15+ years. Swiecichowski credits MFA for its news, research, and the opportunities it affords him to interact with industry peers. “MFA and local council events for me are the best. It seems I can learn just as much from interacting with others as I do from the experts.” ☞

