

CONSERVATION *Showcase*

Conservation, dedication, all part of successful Whatcom County dairy

To be successful in farming today producers need to be business professional, marketer, scientist, and conservationist all rolled up in one. To survive in today's competitive markets, producers must incorporate all of these aspects into their operations and adapt quickly to changing market conditions and challenges.

For some operations, pressing business concerns sometimes push conservation activities to the back burner. But the operators of Veen Huizen Farms, LLC in Whatcom County are among a growing number of farmers and ranchers who have made conservation an integral part of their operation.

Veen Huizen Farms consists of a two-family partnership with Jason and Debbie VanderVeen and children (Jordan, Shane, Lacey, Brooke) along with David and Becky Van Weerdhuizen and children (Lane, Lindy, Kelly, Tessa). "Translated from Dutch 'veen' means peat and 'huizen' is home. Combining them is 'home in the peat,'" says Debbie VanderVeen.

This is more than a definition to Veen Huizen Farms, it is part of their mission statement in managing their 700 acres and 1300 holstein cattle in northwest Washington. "Good

healthy soils produce great milk," Debbie VanderVeen says.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helped Debbie and Veen Huizen Farms reach their conservation goals through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) by providing technical and financial assistance for their



Jason, Brooke, and Debbie VanderVeen stand amid a newly planted buffer strip on their farm.

nutrient management system. EQIP is a voluntary program that provides assistance to farmers and ranchers who face threats to soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land.

Veen Huizen Farms collects, stores, transports, and applies the nutrients (manure) to their fields based on soil tests and crop needs. A manure injector is used for precise application. The injector forces manure to be inserted into the ground reducing the

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Jason VanderVeen

potential for runoff, odors and atmospheric loss. “Veen Huizen Farms was the first in the county to implement this application method,” says NRCS Resource Conservationist John Gillies.

Debbie’s husband and business partner, Jason VanderVeen, says EQIP was a perfect fit for their “proactive approach to nutrient management.”

Filter and buffer strips were planted in the spring of 2001 to keep the nutrients in the fields and out of the waterways (drainage ditches and creeks). Grass filter strips were planted on over six acres of crop fields adjacent to the waterways to provide additional filtration.

Before the installation of the filters, according to Jason, spring time erosion would fill the drainage ditches with six inches of soil. “Now, with the filter strips and buffers in place the ditches are not filling with sedimentation and are running cleaner,” he says.

And while Jason is now a fan of conservation buffers, he’s also pragmatic in his assessment of their management. “The buffers need to be trimmed and maintained every other year to keep vegetation from taking over,” he says. “Operation maintenance on the buffer and filter strips takes special efforts, but the benefits out weigh any negatives.” After noticing the improvement to their soil and the increase in the wildlife the buffers support, Veen Huizen Farms is

sold on their value. “I have seen more eagles, beavers, and rabbits,” Debbie says. “The wildlife appreciate the filter and buffer strips.”

Computer technology has helped Veen Huizen Farms to manage, track, and care for the herd and the land. Jordan VanderVeen, son of Jason and Debbie, assisted NRCS’s John Gillies in developing a computerized record keeping system used to track soil tests and irrigation water applications.

Jason and Debbie VanderVeen and David and Becky Van Weerdhuizen have always invited others to the dairy farm to see what is being accomplished and to learn first hand about the multitude of environmental and regulatory issues dairies face every day. From state and county legislators, to elementary and college students, to other dairy producers, thousands of citizens have learned about the challenges and rewards of operating a productive dairy, and how “milk is made.”



Jason and Debbie VanderVeen review their conservation goals with John Gillies, NRCS resource conservationist.

And thanks to the environmental stewardship of Veen Huizen Farms, the conservation expertise of people like John Gillies – and a little help from the EQIP program – visitors can also see how “conservation is made – with loving care.”

Kelly Sprute, NRCS Washington
August 2005