



The Wiese Family of Manning, Iowa:

Steeped in the
Hereford Tradition;
 Long on
Operating Efficiency;
 Huge on
Improving the Land

For more than a century, the Wiese family, Manning, Iowa, has farmed and raised Herefords on the gently rolling hillsides of west central Iowa.

“We started producing registered Hereford cattle back in 1912,” says third-generation owner and operator Gene Wiese, who now shares the family-owned operation and workload with wife, Jean; daughter, Helen; and son, David, along with David’s wife, Diana, and their three boys — Chance, Shayne and Trey.

“From the very start, we’ve built our reputation on producing top-quality beef cattle that are both efficient and

profitable,” Gene says. “We maintain a very active, focused and aggressive management program. Our goal is to develop highly productive cattle that do well — on forage and in the feedlot — with a minimal amount of maintenance and input.

“We try to stay up-to-date on the many issues and facets of the beef industry and, hopefully, we’re a piece of the puzzle contributing to the solution. Over the years, we’ve learned a lot from our customers, cooperator herd owners, American and foreign students, and visitors, all of whom have helped us

Gene Wiese, Manning, Iowa, stands by his Vermeer baler. In the background are black baldie progeny of one of Wiese’s bulls that he markets both locally and nationally.

focus on what’s really important in the beef industry.”

Herefords have been the cornerstone of the Wiese family’s breeding program since the beginning. “We have a long history and tradition with them and they’ve worked well for us,” Gene says.

He notes that the difference between winning and losing in the beef industry often shows up in the efficiencies realized and the opportunities missed over time. So the Wieses spend a lot of time and energy looking for the right genetic traits, researching the best tools and practices, maximizing their forages, and developing a solid conservation and land management program.

Forage management

Forage is the Wieses’ principle crop and, Gene says, the quality and care of it is critical and directly related to cattle productivity and efficiency. Several of their pastures have been in grass since 1904. Their rotational grazing program has been in place since 1982. Plant diversity and weed management, also important parts of their pasture care

program, are achieved primarily by interseeding legumes and grasses.

“We’re always evaluating our pastures for plant population, diversity, vigor, number of legumes and usage. It helps us determine fertilization, interseeding, weed management and herd rotation,” Gene explains. “We go through the same basic exercise when we evaluate our equipment needs and processes. For example, there are two ways to cut, rake, bale and store your hay — one is the right way; the other way can be very costly and wasteful.

“Cutting at the right stage. Baling at the right moisture level. Storing our finished bales properly. When you think about it, the process of harvesting hay really isn’t rocket science. In fact, it’s pretty simple, but it requires a certain level of discipline, timing and good management practices.”

Equipment choices

Typically two people assist with putting up hay. The Wieses bale anywhere from 1,200-1,500 acres a year, and throughout the year they harvest everything from mixed grasses to corn stalks.

Gene’s son, David, who is the operations manager, adds, “We take a lot of pride in the quality of the forage we produce. That’s our main crop. So at every stage of the harvesting process, we look for ways to increase efficiency and still produce a higher-quality product. Even something as simple as raking and preparing the windrows makes a difference in the end.

“For example, we now have a twin bar basket rake (Vermeer R2300 Twinrake) that makes these nice box-style windrows that can be adjusted hydraulically to the pickup width of our baler. Now, that may not sound like a big deal, but it gives us a highly efficient, large-volume process, and the added bonus is the integrity of the windrow that makes our baling process that much easier. Obviously, we could get by with a cheaper rake, but the question you need to ask yourself is what you’re sacrificing when you do.”

Last year the Wiese family

purchased a new baler (Vermeer 605M). “It was a major upgrade to our haying operation, primarily because it is much easier to operate and several of us could run it,” Gene explains. “Plus, it does a great job in different crops and conditions without slowing us down, especially with the net-wrap system. That makes a big difference when you wear as many hats as we do throughout the year.

“Today, efficiency is everything. You just can’t afford to waste the time, inputs or the opportunities you have. And, stewardship is also a big part of it. It’s not just a virtue anymore; it’s an important factor in our long-term success.”

Stewardship practices

“Ours is a generational farm, and we take it very seriously,” Gene says. “Improving the land for the next generation is an important challenge for all of us, because it enhances our quality of life and that of our community. Soil conservation and land fertility are top priorities. We were an early adopter of contour farming, and we now have more than 32,000 feet of terraces on acres that, at one time, were considered highly erodible.”

The Wiese farm is a study in “best conservation practices.” The family utilizes a sod-based rotation for their minimum-till cropland. Crop sequences are rotated with meadow. Land with the least amount of slope is considered tillable for crop production but not

when it’s adjacent to a stream. Filter strips are used extensively. Pastures surround all of their streams and ponds. Contouring, strip cropping, field borders, and the extensive use of grass outlets and waterways have helped substantially in decreasing erodibility and increasing fertility and productivity.

A tree planting program began with the development of the Wieses’ first pond in 1964. Since that time, more than 300 trees have been planted annually for more than 15 years in an area of Iowa that had been virtually treeless.

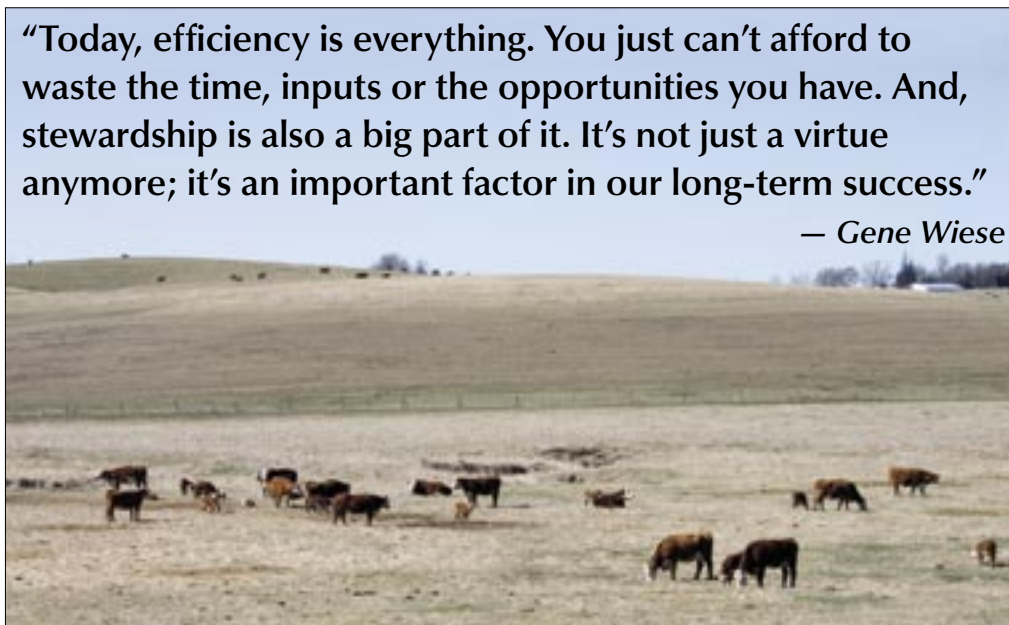
In 1993 the Wieses started a nursery of 600 trees to create a source of deciduous and coniferous trees to be transplanted in shelterbelts. “We feel areas devoted to fish and wildlife habitat contribute to the beauty and diversity of the rural landscape,” Gene says.

The Wieses have also intensified their manure management program. And they’re currently working to address other environmental concerns such as water quality, water conservation, feedlot dust suppression and livestock comfort.

“Caring for, developing and improving the environment is a part of our heritage,” Gene says. “We’re very proud of the work we’ve done. It’s a legacy we take very seriously. We’ve always been sensitive to the value of our natural resources and we’re all personally committed to the goal of continued improvement of our resource management program.” **HW**

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— Gene Wiese



Early calving females in the Wiese calving pasture on an early spring day