

## Nutrition Key to Robotic Success

"If we don't do this, we're going to regret it for the rest of our lives," said Lori Dockendorf one morning to her husband, Steve, as they debated whether to build a new barn and install robotic milkers. For three years, the couple had studied robotic milking systems and toured 10 robot farms in Iowa, Wisconsin, and southern Minnesota. Now it was time to make a decision.

After milking with family for several years, Steve and Lori moved to this farmstead north of Watkins, MN, and began dairying on their own in 1994. "This was my great-grandfather's farm that got sold out of the family name for a generation," says Steve. "My dad, Earl, bought it back two years before we moved to this site."

Starting with 50 cows in 1994, Steve and Lori raised their family and built their herd until they were milking 100 cows in a facility designed for 68. Four years ago, they began to investigate the emerging robotics technology.

"Milking cows takes a big physical toll," observes Steve. "Lori and I wanted to create a situation where we could reduce the labor and continue dairying as we get older." They also wanted to create opportunity for their kids to milk and still have a life off the farm. "Kids growing up today have so many more opportunities and activities to choose from," says Lori. "Robotics reduces labor so they can be away from home more and still milk cows if they want."



One of two Lely Astronaut milking machines that service the Dockendorf's 120-head milking herd.



Steve and Lori Dockendorf in their new warm, slatted-floor, cross-ventilated barn.

Robotics appeals to the generation in which their son Jeff, 20, daughter Kayla, 18, son Tyler, 14, and son Brad, 11, are growing up. "Everything in robotic milking is computerized and their generation has lots of interest in that," says Lori. But if their children have no interest in dairying, Lori and Steve would have a very salable farm.

So this past summer, the Dockendorfs built a new 94' x 168' barn with the capacity to house and milk 120 cows using two Lely Astronaut robotic milking machines. "Our two older children helped us build the barn before going off to college," says Steve.

The barn is five rows wide with a slatted floor over a manure pit. The slats are scraped every hour by a robot. "It's a warm, cross-ventilated barn with curtains on the south side, 57" fans on the north side, and a flat ceiling to help move the air," says Steve, noting that there is not as much space to heat with the insulated flat ceiling, and good ventilation keeps the barn fresh, even over a manure pit.

The barn was designed specifically for the robotics. "We'd never have built a five-row barn unless we were putting in robots," comments Steve. The design keeps the barn short so the cows are close to the milkers. The facility also features single-row feeding, with just one foot of bunk space per cow.

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“But with a robot that pushes up the feed every hour on the hour, that single-row design works well,” says Steve.

## Pellets are the key

The Dockendorfs began milking robotically in the fall of 2011. Touring other barns, they learned that much of the success of robotic milking is due to good nutrition. So they looked for a nutritionist with a good reputation and experience working with robots. They’d heard a lot of good things about dairy consultant Jeff Thorpe, and even before moving into their new barn, they decided to switch to Jeff and Munson Lakes Nutrition. “The investment was big, and we needed to make a smooth transition,” says Steve.

Steve says that the cows’ visits to the robotic milkers are all about the pellets fed in the robots. “There is a fine line between balancing the partial mixed ration and the robot feed,” he

explains. “Everyone has a different idea about how to balance it, and that’s where the nutritionist comes in.”

The herd did, in fact, make a smooth transition to robotic milking in August 2011, and Steve attributes this to the counsel of their Munson Lakes nutritionist. “All the feed for the cows comes from Munson and the pellets are the key,” he states.

Now that their new barn is up and running, Steve has another goal—increase production. “We’ve been as high as 85 pounds of milk per cow per day,” he states. “It may take a while, but I think 90 is possible.” He’ll rely on Jeff Thorpe and Munson Lakes Nutrition to help him meet that goal. “The harder you push the cows, the more fussy the nutrition will be,” says Steve. “If Jeff takes care of the nutrition, we’ll manage the cows and make this happen.” ●

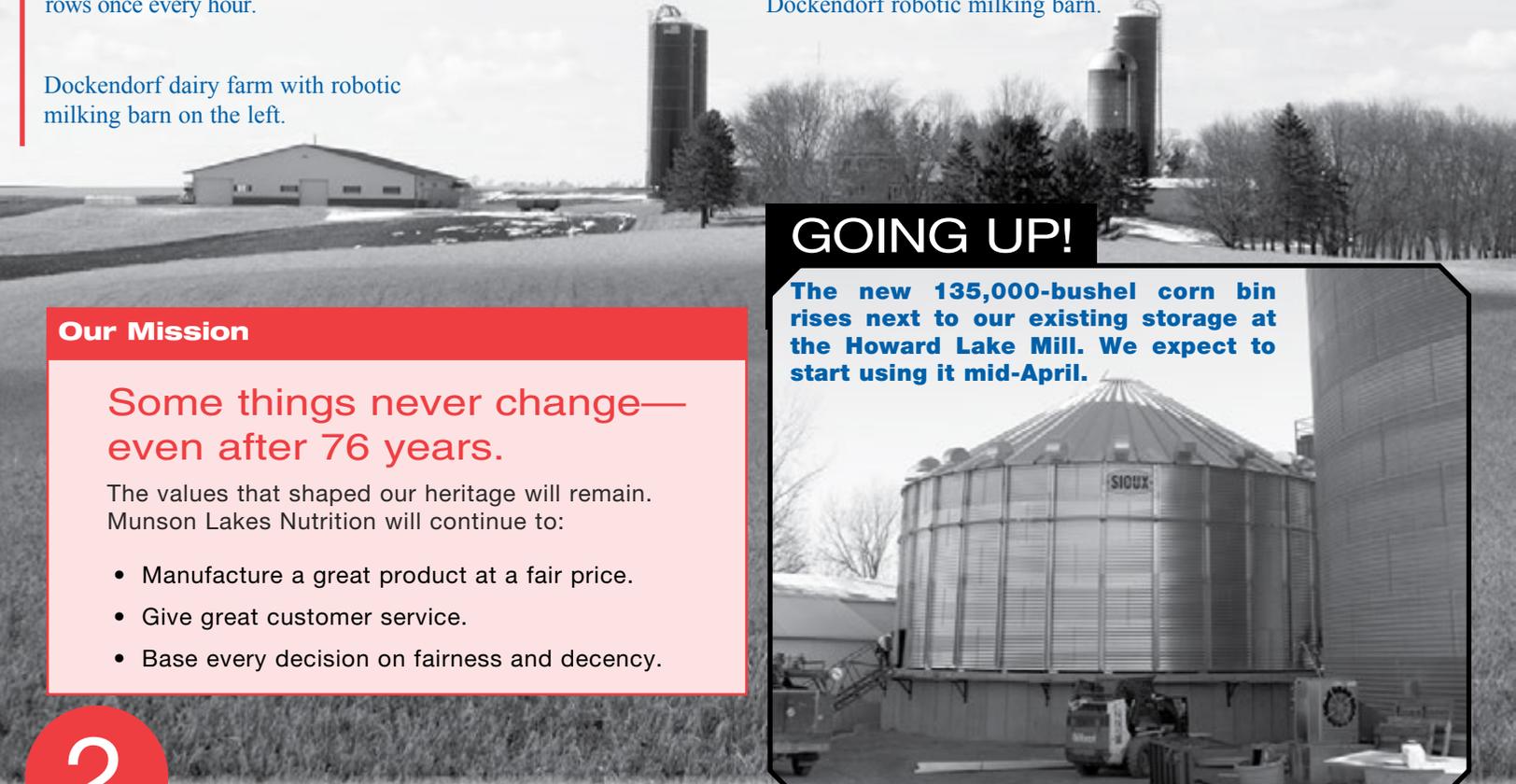


A robot (left foreground) scrapes the barn’s slatted rows once every hour.



Munson Lakes driver Ken Loebertmann delivers pellets to the Dockendorf robotic milking barn.

Dockendorf dairy farm with robotic milking barn on the left.



## Our Mission

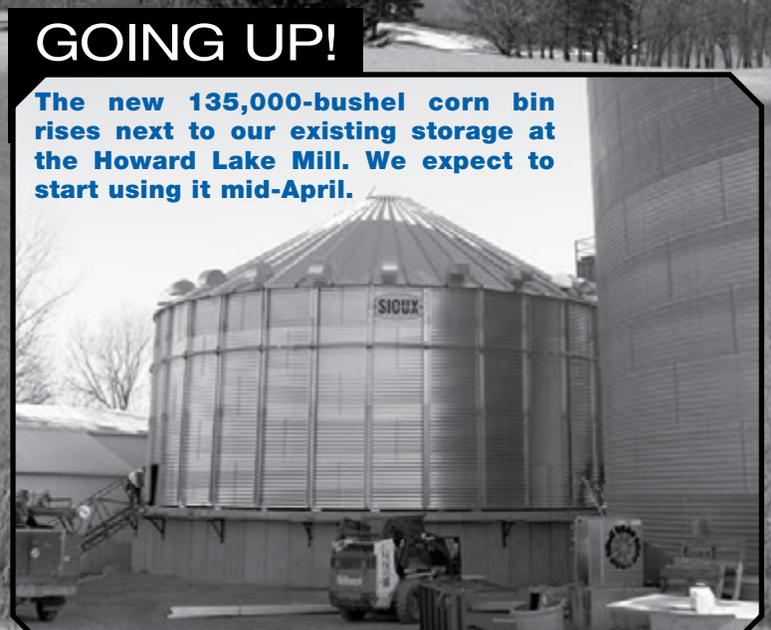
Some things never change—even after 76 years.

The values that shaped our heritage will remain. Munson Lakes Nutrition will continue to:

- Manufacture a great product at a fair price.
- Give great customer service.
- Base every decision on fairness and decency.

## GOING UP!

The new 135,000-bushel corn bin rises next to our existing storage at the Howard Lake Mill. We expect to start using it mid-April.



## MLN Recognized Nationally

For the fifth consecutive time, Munson Lakes Nutrition (MLN) has been recognized for its growth by Land O'Lakes Purina. The No. 1 feed brand in America recognizes 150 feed manufacturers and dealers across the country with gold, silver, or bronze CHC Awards.

MLN ranked 8th in 2006, 5th in 2007, 12th in 2009, 18th in 2010, and 15th in 2011. In March, for the second year, MLN will receive a double gold CHC Award, which means MLN earned double the points necessary to earn a Gold Award.

"The strategy of Munson Lakes Nutrition has always been to employ people in manufacturing and distribution who are highly

service-oriented, together with a team of nutritionists who are wise about using new technology," says Scott Gottschalk, Land O'Lakes Purina territory sales specialist.



"They impact the producer's bottom line in a positive way and the producer, in turn, increases their business with Munson Lakes," continues Scott.

"Of the top 15 feed manufacturers in America, only four are located in the Midwest, and Munson Lakes Nutrition is the No. 1 growth account in Minnesota," states the territory specialist. ●

## Others Make Job Worthwhile

Matt Olson has spent the last few years on the mixing floor of our Howard Lake mill. Recently, he began checking corn samples and processing grain tickets with his new position in the grain department. "This takes my full time right now," says Matt, who is also in charge of housekeeping at the mill. "The mill is a nicer place to work when it's all clean, and keeping it dust-free is very important to everyone's safety," he explains.

Matt came to work for MLN five years ago. Before that, he had worked part-time at The Country Store, but he began mixing and manufacturing feed full-time in 2007. According to Matt, the best part of his job

is working with his fellow employees. "I get along with all of them," he states.

"This is a good facility, and we stand behind everything we make," states Matt, referring to the mill and its staff.

When asked what he'd like to do, Matt says he is just fine working for Munson Lakes Nutrition on into the future. "They're nice people to work with, they treat you right, and it's just two miles from home."

Matt lives with his wife, Chrissy, and six-month-old son Hunter on the north side of Howard Lake. ●



Matt Olson

## ClariFly® Broadest-Spectrum Fly Control

By Ray Munson

Our customers reported good results last year from using calf starters and milk replacers containing ClariFly® Larvicide.

ClariFly prevents development of house, face, horn, and stable flies in the manure of treated calves. Horn and stable flies are



ClariFly works to eliminate flies in calf hutches, one of the insect's most attractive breeding grounds.

among the most damaging and difficult to control, but ClariFly offers the broadest spectrum of any larvicide.

The stable fly has one of the most painful bites of any bloodsucking insect. It's jagged, piercing mouthparts saw into flesh, mainly the legs and flanks of your cattle.

ClariFly works to prevent nuisance flies from developing into breeding adults that spread disease and irritate your calves to the point of affecting nutritional intake. As a feed-through in milk replacer, it interrupts the fly's life cycle rather than through direct toxicity.

In calf starters, ClariFly works to eliminate flies in calf hutches, one of the most attractive breeding grounds for all flies and one of the most productive development sites for house flies in particular.

ClariFly fly control should be started early in the spring, 30 days before flies appear. MLN will offer milk replacers and calf starters that will include ClariFly during the spring and summer fly season. ●

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## Care and Feeding of Aging Horses

By Katie Fleming, Lifestyle Production Specialist, Howard Lake Country Store

Maintaining the optimal health of your aging horse takes special care and proper nutrition. A well-thought-out senior horse management program is essential to keeping your senior companion more comfortable and active. Here are some areas of concern:

- **Dental problems** — Clues your horses may have a dental problem include weight loss, spilled feed, wads of partially chewed hay (quidding) or feed dropping from the mouth, or undigested grain in the manure.
- **Digestive disorders** — As horses age, there may be a reduction in saliva production. With the relatively small size of a horse's stomach (1-2 gal.) and reduced absorption in an aged horse's digestive tract, it becomes difficult for high bulk feeds such as hay and whole grain feeds to be properly processed. More feed and hay may pass through undigested.
- **Poor hair coat** — Hair coat quality and skin condition often decline in aging horses, becoming dry, shaggy, and dull. The patented high-fat Purina® Amplify® nuggets contain a proprietary blend of plant oils, flax seed, and rice bran for an optimal fatty acid profile. Through the balanced nutrition and fatty acid profile, Equine Senior® horse feeds help promote healthier coats, skin, and hooves.
- **Lameness** — Older horses may have a variety of lameness problems due to wear and tear, improper hoof care, inadequate nutrition, environmental stresses, and deteriorating health. The older a horse gets, the more easily the legs and hooves are affected by changes in routines and surroundings. Studies show that inadequate nutrition can lead to lameness. In addition, it has been suggested that phosphorus can be poorly absorbed in older horses.
- **Respiratory problems** — Many horses suffer respiratory problems as they grow older. Older horses often develop allergic respiratory diseases. Molds and dust from grains and hay can further aggravate their condition. Creating a mash may also help alleviate dust that can aggravate respiratory problems.

- **Higher protein requirements** — As horses age, they begin to lose muscle mass and experience reduced digestion of crude protein. Older horses need a higher level and quality of protein to compensate for the reduced function of the digestive tract. Equine Senior® horse feeds are formulated with high quality, highly digestible 14% protein, which helps provide all the essential amino acids needed by aging horses.
- **Increased blood sugar** — Research indicates some older horses suffer from glucose intolerance due to pituitary tumors. Grain diets containing glucose and other soluble carbohydrates may complicate this. The solution may be a higher fat and digestible fiber diet. Equine Senior® horse feeds have more calories from fats and fibers and less from sugar to help provide a diet lower in nonstructural carbohydrates. This may help manage blood sugar levels in your aging horses.



Concerned about any of the above? You may reach me at 952-356-9036. ●

**SENIOR FEED PROMO**

**At The Country Store  
 March 19-24**

**Equine Senior® Active  
 and Equine Senior®  
 \$2 off per bag**