

# MUNSON LAKES Advisor

SUMMER 2020 • VOLUME 19 • ISSUE 1

## Moving Forward



**Scott Erdal**

Allow me to introduce myself as your new general manager.

I grew up in a small town in southern MN. I developed a passion for the Ag industry in my early years when helping my grandparents out on their farm. I was involved with completing the daily chores and fieldwork when needed.

After graduating from Minnesota State University, Mankato with a degree in Business Management (and an administration minor), I went to work in the world of cooperatives. In recent years, I've worked at CHS, Inc., in business development, along with risk management.

I became general manager of Munson Lakes Nutrition (MLN) on Jan. 20, 2020, following the retirement of John Zander.

**Scott consults with Mark Dahlman, MLN's corn buyer.**



### A personal vision and goal

My vision is to grow MLN as a company and identify efficiencies we can take advantage of as we continue to manufacture high quality feed products. These efficiencies may come through strategic partnerships, organic growth or new business automations and internal advancements. All of the above will help us adapt to the ever-changing needs of our customers.

My goal is to build a rhythm where we anticipate the needs of our customers' feed demands. This will allow us to consistently hit delivery dates, develop cost-effective procurement strategies and maintain or improve your overall experience with Munson Lakes Nutrition.

The first step to accomplishing our goals was the installation of a new mash leg at the mill. The mash leg is the main artery that moves feed throughout this facility. What does this mean to you, our customers? It means our feed production will be more reliable and dependable — especially if you need feed in a hurry.

### Our COVID response

Safety has been always our first priority at MLN, whether it is the physical safety of our employees and customers — or the safety of the livestock for which we manufacture feed.

During the pandemic we have deployed several precautionary measures such as minimizing face-to-face interactions during feed deliveries, regular sanitizing of equipment, offer curbside pick-up and offer personal hand sanitizer.

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# Looking Differently at Your Farm

By Brian Yager, Chief Operating Officer



The last three years have been a rollercoaster ride for farmers. MLN continues to work with our customers the best we can, yet sometimes our hands are tied. We dare not run afoul of banking regulations. We must follow our credit policy and avoid the appearance of lending money to our customers, which we cannot do legally.

If you are experiencing financial difficulties, we encourage you to take advantage of all government programs. We understand pride sometimes gets in the way, but if it comes down to the survival of your family farm, consider asking for help.

I've also seen various farmers take a different look at the way their farms are structured. Instead of investing in everything themselves, I see farmers working together with neighbors by sharing equipment and farm responsibilities.

## Safety

MLN recently passed its HACCP inspection for the seventh year in a row. This should tell you the company supplying the feed to your animals is serious about making quality feed and is willing to go the extra mile.

On the employee side, we have just adopted an online safety portal called "Safety Made Simple." This portal is a way to track our employees' training online and make sure everyone has the best training available on the safe manufacture of feed.

We will be offering "Safety Made Simple" as a subcontract to our farm customers who also have employees. Call me at the Munson Lakes Nutrition Office if you have an interest in this training. ●

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## Our values will not change

Speaking of change — it's inevitable, and will hold true as we move forward. It's the natural progression of a business like MLN. How we handle change and the speed at which it comes to us depends upon how open and willing we are to accept it. As the ag industry evolves, we at Munson Lakes need to adapt and focus on the needs of our customers.

While we intend to make changes which will allow us to continue serving you, our values hold fast. They are as true today as they have been in the past. We remain committed to creating a quality feed product for our most valued business partners — you. I look forward to meeting and working with all customers, old and new. Feel free to call me directly at the Howard Lake Mill for a conversation. ●



# Limiting Risk, Locking in Margin

By Ted Radintz, MLN Sales Manager



We've witnessed a lot of disruption in the world. For our dairy customers, 2020 has been particularly disruptive. The price of milk has been so poor, it got me thinking about ways in which MLN can help reduce the uncertainty.

Our sales nutritionists can help you design least-cost rations. These rations may change frequently, depending on commodity pricing and availability. For example, earlier this spring we saw gas prices plummet and demand for ethanol was non-existent. As a result, ethanol plants didn't make dried distiller's grains, a key ingredient in some dairy rations. Other products took the place of the grains. Our sales team worked hard to find least-cost feed supplements to give our customers a chance at being profitable.

We do this all the time. It might not be COVID-19 next time — it might be something else. We're here to serve you and use our buying power to pass on to you and other dairy

producers the best feed solutions available. If you think you are alone, know that you have MLN as a partner.

In addition, we're offering customers more direct-ship ingredients options all the time. Also, we encourage our customers to look for ways to lock in margin, whether it's contracting feed or artfully marketing their product. Explore programs that limit risk of market volatility.

In short, be proactive in both your purchasing and your marketing. If we can take some uncertainty out of the dairy business by helping you contract and secure commodities, we'd love to talk with you. Call your MLN sales nutritionist, or contact me, Ted Radintz, at 1-800-543-2561. ●



# New Career: Raising Pheasants

Doug Starry was in mid-life as a construction worker in the underground utilities industry. It wasn't his dream job, driving to work in Minneapolis from his home in Maple Lake, MN every day, but it paid the bills.

Then, a friend and fellow construction worker quit his job to raise game birds. Doug wondered, "Could I do the same?" Could he give up a job he knew and start all over again? In the spring of 1997, he decided to try. While holding onto his construction job, Doug raised 3,000 pheasants from chicks. He fed them for 20 weeks to 2-1/2 pounds apiece, and he sold them to hunting preserves in Minnesota.

In 2000, Doug quit construction. He had embarked on a new career. He got most of his chicks from his friend's game farm until 2002, when he began hatching some of his own from breeding stock he'd carefully selected the previous year.

Today, Silver Creek Game Birds of Maple Lake, Minnesota, collects 250,000 eggs annually — employing the help of both family members and local high school students. Each year, the Starry family sells about 150,000 eggs to other breeders and keeps 100,000 eggs for themselves, incubating and live-hatching about 85,000. "Anything over 80% we're happy with and at 85% we're ecstatic," says Doug's son Scott.

Newborn chicks are moved each Thursday to pens with pans of feed and water. They stay there for three weeks. Then, they get moved to bigger pens with bigger feeders. At the end of five weeks, they are fitted with blinders so they don't peck feathers out of the other birds.

On the seventh week, the young pheasants are moved into pens with the ability to go in and out of the building, getting them used to the climate. At eight weeks, they're moved permanently outside to one of 100 pens with ground cover. Until week 20, they'll spend time in these outdoor pens with big range feeders and automatic waterers. Then, the adult pheasants will be sold to hunting preserves located from the Canadian border to the Iowa state line. The Starry family delivers all the birds themselves for greater ease and biosecurity.

Doug Starry brought his son Scott into the business full time in 2000. In 2013, Doug and Scott needed a third partner and brought Doug's son-in-law Will Christensen into the business. In a few years, Doug plans to retire, leaving Scott and Will to look for another partner.

Silver Creek Game Birds is truly a family enterprise. "Our kids are around and more than willing to help," says Scott, "and we employ dozens of high school students to collect eggs each spring and summer." This is one business that has benefited from COVID-19. Area students were more available to work when egg collections began in April.

"Routine is big around here, because you never know when something can go wrong," says Scott, mentioning things like waterers not operating properly or mink or fox making holes in the outdoor pens and killing some of the birds. "If you are in a routine, you can notice when something is off."

Because eating well is a routine that promotes weight gain and great plumage, Silver Creek Game Birds relies on Munson Lakes Nutrition to provide a stable 20% protein pellet for its adult birds.

"We try to constantly improve the pellet quality," says Doug Sawatzke, the MLN sales nutritionist working with the Starry family. "That takes a skilled mill operator to make sure the machine is running correctly."

"Feed quality is important to us," says Scott. "If the pellets crumble or are high in dust, it hurts us." At the height of their pheasant-raising season, the farm takes 40 tons of protein pellets per week. *NOTE: The Starrys sell the majority of their adult birds to hunting preserves in September, October and November.*

"Munson provides a quality feed we can depend on," says Scott. "We know we won't have an issue with it, and we know the birds will grow and develop feathers the way they should."

"Whenever there is an issue, Doug [Sawatzke] is right there for us," adds the elder Starry. "If he doesn't know the answer, he'll find someone who does."

The Starrys also appreciate the University of Minnesota which operates a poultry testing lab and employs game bird specialists they can call whenever they have a question. ●



Doug Starry (center) and family in front of Silver Creek Game Bird's egg incubator.



Scott Starry with 5,000 baby chicks, hand watered and fed. Each week, the family moves chicks to bigger quarters and brings in a new batch.



At five weeks, adolescent pheasants are fitted with blinders to keep them from pecking each other.



From Week 8 to Week 20, young birds grow to an average 2-1/2 lbs. in outside pens with ground cover, large feeders and automatic waterers. At this point, most are sold to in-state hunting preserves.

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 Howard Lake, MN 55349



## A Passion for Horses



**By Elise Quast, Manager,  
 The Country Store**

Like our new general manager, I want to introduce myself. Although I am not new to the Howard Lake Country Store (I've worked there six years), I am new to

the position of store manager. With Wade Serfling's retirement, I assumed the role of store manager on Monday, June 22nd.

A little bit about myself. I grew up in St. Louis Park and worked at a bakery after school. My earnings from that job allowed me to satisfy my passion to own a horse. I bought my first one at age 15. Now I have six. While in high school, I also worked five years for Hirschfeld's — a local decorating chain.

I knew I enjoyed retail, so six years ago, I joined the staff at the Howard Lake Country Store. Ever since, I have enjoyed sharing my passion for horses with my customers — and learning to care for and feed a wide range of other animals.

Currently, I live with my husband Eric and 1-year-old daughter Michaela, on a farm west of Dassel. Along with my six horses, we have two dogs, many cats and chickens.

### Serving customers traditional and new

What gratifies me, as an employee of MLN, is when a customer comes into The Country Store and has no idea what they're looking for. It thrills me to be able to identify the problem, find a solution, and see them walk out the door happy.

My goal is to grow The Country Store by servicing both the people who have been doing business with Munson for 40-50 years as well as those who are traveling or moving this way from Minneapolis. I want everyone to leave the store with a purchase (or the

answer to a question) that satisfies their need — and to know that, if we do not have what they want, we can get it for them. ●

**If you have a lifestyle animal you want to feed the same product every month, call Elise at 1-800-663-9177 and she will arrange to have it direct-shipped to you.**

Nick Atwood (left) program director for the Minneapolis pet food shelf "People & Pets Together" accepts a pallet of cat food and a pallet of dog food from The Country Store. Delivering this donation is Purina horse feed specialist Nate Dressel (center) and store manager Elise Quast (right). That's Thelma, the pit bull, in the foreground.



## OUR MISSION

Some things never change — even after 80+ 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.

## MUNSON LAKES NUTRITION DIRECTORY

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