

## The Family Farm of the Future

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It's an early February morning, before dawn's first orange glow. The cows don't wait for the alarm and they don't care if it's Sunday. Marcel Steen is up and out the door. His herd needs to eat, now. Boots crunching across the frozen lawn, his breath a cloud, Marcel is comforted by the knowledge that his hungry herd will soon be satisfied and he doesn't even have to flip a switch.

But it wasn't always that easy.

Dairy farming is a way of life for the Steen family; when Marcel was just a boy his father moved the family from The Netherlands to Canada, where he felt his sons would have a better shot at following the farming tradition. Marcel remembers feeding time in those days – the sweat building under his collar despite the frosty air as he delivered wheelbarrows of feed to the impatient cows. Stomping in and out of the barn, his feet kept time with the squeaking of the unloader.



Today, Marcel and his wife Annika operate Celmar Dairy in Norwich, Ontario. Annika also comes from a dairy family and has an Animal Science degree.

“She handles the breeding and deals with the calves and I do the maintenance and feeding and deal with the cows,” says Marcel. “Together, we plan to grow this operation to a 200-cow dairy facility.”

There was a time when the demands of a milking operation precluded living a balanced life – or having a life at all. The daily grind of feeding and milking – not to mention putting in the silage – left precious little time for anything else. The Steens, however, have improved their quality of life with the help of Harvestore® systems.

Knowing that what comes out is only as good as what you put in, the Steens thought long and hard about the quality of their feeding operation. Marcel looked at bunker storage systems but had concerns about moisture, spoiled feed and storage loss so he began looking into upright storage. Marcel made the decision to go with a Harvestore storage system with Harvestore® XL unloaders. He turned to Ontario Harvestore, which delivered and installed two 28' x 106' upright storage units and a 20' x 80' unit manufactured by CST Industries and two XL 400 unloaders with industrial gear boxes. The high moisture corn structure has a cone bottom and uses an auger unloader designed by Ontario Harvestore.

Speed is important, and the race against time starts with getting the forage and grain into storage, which the Steens are doing more efficiently than ever. Marcel and his dad built a blow deck uploading system which allows the trailers to dump their load and get back in the fields quickly. When it's feeding time, the Harvestore XL unloader moves the forage and grain faster than other systems thanks to its industrial-grade gearbox, larger conveyor chain paddles and cutter chain hooks and independent advance and speed controls.

What happens from there is just as important. Marcel knew from years of experience that traditional storage systems fall short when it comes to preserving the integrity of silage or haylage. As a result, his cows were eating too much frozen feed in the winter months. The Harvestore system keeps feed dry by keeping out moisture, oxygen and volatile gases.



The Family Farm of the Future

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“Feeding half forage, half water to cows doesn’t lend itself to providing adequate energy for cows that already require 15-20% more because of the cold weather,” says Gary Folkema of Ontario Harvestore Systems. “You’ll never escape that no matter how much you automate a bunker or a bag or a conventional storage system.”

The Harvestore storage system is unequalled when it comes to feed quality. In fact, cows fed alfalfa haylage stored in a Harvestore produced more 3.5% fat-corrected milk than cows fed alfalfa from a plastic storage bag or concrete bunker. That translates to greater return on investment in the form of more, and better, product, and more profit.

“Having a winter like this with a lot of snow, we’re seeing consistent feed,” says Marcel. “We’re not dealing with frozen silage or frozen unloaders or having to warm up equipment. The feed is ready to go and it’s always the same temperature.”

The Harvestore system preserves grains like they just emerged from the field; there’s no variance depending on weather conditions. That translates into freshness, something Marcel can detect with his nose.

“The biggest difference is the scent of the corn. It’s just a sweet smell,” says Marcel, with a smile. “The goal was to go whole corn – to try and preserve the whole kernel as much as possible. Now it’s coming out as it went in.”

If anything should go wrong, Marcel knows he can call the folks at Ontario Harvestore, like service manager John Janssen.

“You can call our number 24-7 and talk to somebody, and we’ll be down there to help,” says John. “Marcel is very pleased with the warranty, which is backed by Ontario Harvestore and CST Industries, the manufacturer.”

Marcel says the labor-saving automation of the Harvestore system gives his family “100 percent flexibility” – including more time for family activities. And they no longer have scheduled chore times.

“Even if we’re not here everything will run,” says Annika. “The cows are fed, the milking will get done. We still have our work to do every day; we just do it when we get to it.”

This is the family farm of the future. The Steens and their partners at Ontario Harvestore are proving that today’s dairy farmer can have it all!

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i U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center, 2005