

Meet North Dakota Producers

Messer Family



The Messer brothers and parents farm/ranch/dairy in southwestern North Dakota

What makes your operation unique?

Jerry: I farm in partnership with my dad and my mother and three other brothers. We have a diversified operation that consists of a dairy herd, a beef herd, crops and a feedlot. I think the most important thing is that each one of us, although we each have a separate enterprise that we're in charge of, understands that everything we do, we do together. For each one of us to try to do this on our own, it would be too hard and too much of a financial burden on each one of us, so we decided to do it together. That way, we can stay diversified and as the markets go in and out, we're able to survive because we have the ability to be in all the other markets besides just one.

What is a typical day like?

Jerry: There is no typical day here. Every day just brings new challenges. We understand that the most important thing is to get the cattle fed, get the milk cows milked, get the baby calves fed, and make sure everything is comfortable and fed well so that we can move on with the rest of the day. After that, it's about marketing our commodities and getting those commodities sold – either by selling them to the elevator or taking the cattle to the livestock ring or wherever they need to go. There's a lot of time spent on that. The other part is that we spend a lot of time planning what we're going to do for the coming days or for the coming years as far as doing our budgets, making sure that we understand where we need to be with our fertilizers and how we need to farm and how we need to dairy and beef.

How do you work with the local community?

Jerry: As far as other sectors of industry, we're very integrated. We work with corn because we need corn as a feed base. We work with all of our feedstocks that we need. We raise just about 100% of our feed for all of our livestock on the farm. We bring in distillers and canola meal as our protein supplements. Right now we sell corn to the ethanol plant in Richardton and we buy distillers back from them to feed as a protein supplement to our cows. We sell canola to the crushing plant and we bring canola meal back to use as a protein supplement for our cows. So it's very important that we work with each other because we need each other. It's not just about selling one commodity but it's about the ability to use those commodities and extend those commodities so that they have more value after they've done their crushing or they're done making ethanol out of them.

Why is agriculture important?

Jerry: I think the important thing is that the base of everyone's food supply comes back to the farm, I don't care who you are, where you live or what you do. Consumers are going to have choices. Our goal is to make sure that they understand what we do and how we do it, so those choices are educated decisions. We have to find ways to communicate more with the consumer that allows them to give us permission to do what we're doing and I think we've found lots of ways to do that.

What is your favorite part of farming/ranching/dairying?

Jerry: I think my favorite part is watching our kids grow up and watching what they did as they left the farm, understanding that even though not all of our children will come back to the farm, each one of them took a part of the farm with them to whichever occupation they're going to. Another favorite is just watching the farm grow. We enjoy what we do. If I get up in the morning, I enjoy feeding the baby calves, because I know that they're my next generation of cows that I'm going to be milking and that's very important so I enjoy that. I enjoy working with my brothers, most of the time (laughs). It's a freedom that I think a lot of people don't understand. To be able to get up in the morning and do what you want to do, rather than doing what you have to do, it makes a big difference.