

Daren Schuerman has always felt a responsibility to take care of the land. He understands that if he takes good care of the land, the land will take good care of him. This is one of the philosophies he uses when making decisions that impact his operation. Daren and his wife, Kim, started working on the farm in 1983 with his father, who had been working on the farm since Daren's grandfather moved to the area from Nebraska in the 1930s. At that time the operation consisted of a small herd of dairy cattle and a rotation of corn, wheat, oats, and alfalfa. Cattle were on the farm until the 1960s when the decision was made to move on from cattle. When Daren took over the operation in 1990, he knew what had been done on the land for the previous 60 years, and he knew that there were ways to improve the operation that would not only help their bottom line, but also help them be better stewards to the land.

While sugar beets were added to the family's operation in 1975, they didn't begin utilizing cover crops until the early 1990s. After years of witnessing how erosive the sugar beet ground was after harvesting, Daren knew he had to do something to keep the soil on his fields. To accomplish this, he began planting cover crops on his sugar beet fields to protect them from the harsh Swift county winds. The way the cover crops reduced wind erosion on these fields was immediately noticeable. "It just made sense," Schuerman said, when detailing the decision to begin incorporating cover crops into their operation. While he started by planting cover crops in the spring prior to sugar beet planting, he thought there was a way he could do better.

Over the last six years, Daren has been seeding rye in the fall after sugar beet harvest. If the weather allows for germination and growth of the rye prior to the snow flying, he can get added protection over the winter. "I don't like to see the ground blow. The road ditches and snow shouldn't be black every year," Schuerman said, while voicing his concern over the visible soil erosion he sees each winter. "It's a lot easier to lose soil than it is to create soil," he said. It is this mentality that led him to begin using no-till on some of the acres they own and operate. What he has found works well is using his 24-row no-till planter to plant soybeans into wheat stubble from the previous year and no-tilling corn following sugar beets, when the rye cover crop is established. In addition to these techniques, Daren is also not tilling his soybean ground after harvest, allowing the soybean residue to provide added overwinter protection, and keep his valuable top soil where it belongs, in the field and out of the ditch.

Schuerman Family Farm has incorporated cattle in their operation for over 15 years now. Cattle came back on the farm in 2003 after a 40-year absence. The reason? Daren and Kim's children got involved in 4-H. So, they started small and built up their herd to the 80 cow/calf pairs that currently reside on the family farm, and they don't plan on stopping there. By utilizing the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Daren was able to get cost share to add additional fence for rotational grazing paddocks as well as the ability to add pipeline so the cattle had a water source in each paddock. He has also rented the no-till drill from the Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District to interseed grasses into his pastures to increase plant diversity and improve the forage value for their cattle.

The Schuerman's have big plans for the future and leading the charge for those plans is a member from the 4th generation in the Schuerman family, Jordan. Jordan, 23, has been working on the farm his whole life and recently graduated from South Dakota State University with a degree in Agriculture Science. Daren and Jordan have been brainstorming on how they can continue to improve the soil health on all the acres they own and operate, and they have some great ideas. Some of the changes they hope to incorporate soon include utilizing variable rate fertilizer application, applying the right amount of fertilizer in the right spots on their fields. They have also been discussing strip tiling rather than using conventional tillage on the acres that aren't already being no-tilled. Finding a way to incorporate cattle into their operation has also been a concept they plan to test out. "We want to plant 80 acres of cover crop close to the homesite one fall and then hopefully get some good growth before turning the cattle loose on it and having them graze it down during late fall and early winter," Daren said. The added

forage and benefit of the manure on the field are the motivators behind this concept, which will increase soil fertility and save time and money. The Schuerman's also hope to add more cattle to the operation, and possibly begin grazing cover crops on a larger scale.

The Schuerman's value a sense of community, which is evidenced by their current and previous involvement with the Six Mile Grove Township Board, 4-H Livestock Board, 4-H Advisor, Church Council, and being a member of Pheasants Forever. Daren values this community mindset and takes an optimistic view on life and farming. He understands that not every year will be the best year ever, and that every now and again you'll have a fall like 2009, when they were harvesting crop into the middle of December. Daren's mindset through it all has been improving the land, which he has done since he started working with the farm, increasing organic matter and soil structure over the years by incorporating many agricultural best management practices. His driving force? "I want to leave the land in better shape than when I started," he says, and that is a mentality he hopes to pass on to the next generation.