

'I was numb at the time'

◀ **DAIRY** from A1 out of the barn. "It wasn't safe going in there, but they did," Seykora said. "They risked their lives," he said, adding some had to be checked out by paramedics for smoke inhalation.

Seykora, 44, said he wasn't thinking clearly when he got to the scene. "My priority was saving as many animals as I could," he said. "That's my livelihood. Twenty-three years of building genetics and to see it go up in flames."

After the fire began, about 50 people showed up at the farm to help out, according to Seykora. "They were protecting the other buildings and spraying the cows to keep them cool," he said, adding that at least 70 more spectators came out to see the fire.

"People bend over backward in a time of need," Seykora said. "That's the way it's supposed to be."

He said his greatest joy in dairy farming has been watching the progression of genetics in the cows. "I like to see the next generation better than the last," Seykora said, adding he loves to be outdoors and caring for the animals.

The dairy farmer said there are good days as well as bad days in farming. Last Thursday happened to be one of those bad days, Seykora said. But, he quickly added, "there will be better days ahead."

Seykora prides himself on the dairy operation he has developed since he came back home from college with a dairy science degree in 1993. His primary focus has always been treating the animals right and promoting a healthy product to feed the world.

Asked if he plans to rebuild, Seykora paused with emotion and said, "My heart says definitely, but everyone knows you have to use your head. It will take a little time to figure that out."

Seykora said it will be a family decision as he considers whether or not to rebuild. He said he knows it will be tough to start from scratch. But weighing on his mind is his son, Matt, who has expressed interest in returning home after college to join the family operation. Matt will attend Southwest State next fall.

Seykora said insurance would cover only a fraction of the cost it will take to rebuild, which he estimated would be as high as \$1 million.



STAFF PHOTOS BY RICK BUSSLER

It has been an emotional time for Brian Seykora ever since he lost his dairy barn and 8 cows Thursday night. While he had some insurance coverage, it's weighing on him heavily about whether or not to continue dairy farming, something he has loved to do since he was a kid, because insurance will not pay replacement value to rebuild.

Seykora said the Clover Glen Dairy Farm stepping up to help with milking will give his family time to make a rational decision. "It's letting us make the right decision for us."

A fellow dairy producer, Deb McDermott-Johnson, co-owner of Clover Glen, said she hopes Seykora will rebuild. "This industry

needs young men like (Seykora)," she said. "He's quiet and competitive and knows his cows. We know the quality of his work. He has been a benchmark for us. He sets the standard."

Meanwhile, friends and family have set up a Gofundme campaign to help the Seykoras with their loss. As of Sunday night, more than \$31,000

of the \$40,000 goal had been reached. Those interested in contributing can do so at [Gofundme.com/f/friends-of-brian-and-mary](https://www.gofundme.com/f/friends-of-brian-and-mary).

"He has a lot of pride and doesn't want help," said Scott Seykora, Brian's brother. "He works hard for everything he has. He has built up quite a farming operation."



At least 10 friends and family members helped Brian Seykora with milking duties Saturday night at the Clover Glen Dairy Farm near Claremont. Seykora's crew rounded up the cattle while Clover Glen's owner did the milking.



HELP THE SEYKORAS

[Gofundme.com/f/friends-of-brian-and-mary](https://www.gofundme.com/f/friends-of-brian-and-mary)

Goal: \$40,000

Raised as of Sunday: \$31,145



Brian Seykora takes a moment of silence to reflect on what has happened over the past few days with one of his dairy cows looking back at him. It has been a big adjustment for the cows after they were displaced by the fire and had to be moved to another operation on the eastern end of Steele County.



Dylan Wigham who works at Brian Seykora's dairy operation south of Owatonna looks away as the barn is engulfed in flames.