



# CONSERVATION *Showcase*

## **CSP – It Worked for Me!**

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**Schuylkill County, PA  
2012**

Conservation is nothing new to Martin and Judy Hutira of Barnesville, Schuylkill County. Together they operate a grain and hay operation in Ryan Township. From the time Martin's father has operated the farm, conservation has been an integral part of this family farm. Although this once distinctive dairy operation is now a commodity crop operation, the family has never left conservation practices out of the operation.

The Hutiras, who were awarded the 2012 Conservation Farm of the year by the Schuylkill Conservation District, are utilizing a program that is helping them achieve and maintain the stewardship that's important to them as farmers and residents of their community.

In 2010, they signed up for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). CSP is a comprehensive working lands conservation program designed to protect and improve natural resources and the environment for generations to come. CSP provides payments for producers who historically have practiced good stewardship on their agricultural lands, and provides financial incentives for those who want to do more. In many ways, it was tailor-made for farmers like the Hutiras.

The Hutiras have been protecting the stream on their property through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) with 6 acres of a riparian forested buffer. Their farm sits along a stretch of Locust Creek and protecting the stream is important to them.

The Hutiras farm 322 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat, oats, and hay using no-till techniques. They've long used conservation practices on their owned and rented farms such as grassed waterways and buffer strips. They have worked with an independent Certified Crop Advisor to develop an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plan to minimize risks associated with weeds, insects, and disease as well as to analyze the environmental impacts of pesticides used on their operation. They have also developed a Nutrient Management Plan to effectively utilize poultry manure imported from another operation on their farm to offset fertilizer costs and do so in an environmentally friendly manner.

When they applied for CSP, the local NRCS office scored them based on what conservation measures they already had in place, and which ones they agreed to add in the future. Their no-till crop system, nutrient management and pest management implementation, and riparian forested buffer yielded a relatively high score in the "existing conservation" category.

The Hutiras were able to accumulate more points by agreeing to add other conservation measures. The two enhancements they selected were as follows: Improving the plant diversity and structure of non-cropped areas for wildlife food and habitat, and Plant tissue testing and analysis to improve nitrogen management. Since intensively managed agricultural land does not provide the habitat required for many species of birds and animals, they implemented a non-cropped area for wildlife. The Hutiras also decided to utilize an adaptive

nitrogen management technique called Corn Stalk Nitrogen Test to adjust nitrogen application for the following year. This test helps provide a thorough analysis of how nitrogen is being used by the current crop, giving a basis for adjustments to nitrogen rates. The end result is a more complete utilization of the nitrogen applied and less nitrogen remaining in the soil to be lost in the environment through nitrate leaching or soil emissions of nitrous oxide.

Overall, the Hutiras qualified for a 5-year CSP contract. There was a significant amount of paperwork involved, but the Hutira's say their experience with applying to CSP was positive overall. Martin, always a strong conservation advocate said, "All I can say is try to do your best at what you can, and think about the future. Think about your kids and grandkids. They have to live and eat where you are."

Submitted by Janette Leshner