

CONSERVATION *Showcase*

Field Day at a Plain Sect Dairy Farm Lancaster, PA 4/9/14

On April 9, 2014 over 60 people gathered on a beautiful day for a Soil Health Field Day at Raymond King's farm in Caernarvon Township, Lancaster County. The majority of attendees were Plain Sect farmers, but there were also some seed dealers and various agency representatives from the EPA, at least two different Conservation Districts, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board, Penn State Extension and NRCS. There was a Soil Health demonstration by NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Wendy Coons, with two volunteers dropping the soil clods into the water. More importantly, there was an open discussion of soil health concerns. Most farmers in that valley already use no-till planting methods and rye as a cover crop. Since conservation practices were already being installed on many farms in that area, it seemed like a great location to talk about advancing soil health to the next level, especially with diversity.

Stream Buffer Discussion at 4/9/14 Field Day



Cover Crop Walk 11/13/13



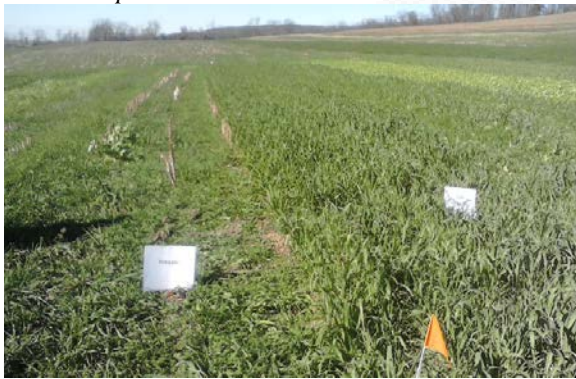
The group then moved outside where Jeff Graybill with Penn State Extension spoke about the cover crop test plots, which were planted last fall with the help of Dennis Eby with the Lancaster County Conservation District (LCCD). Raymond's young son, Levi, had helped with the planting also. He ran the shop vac with a generator in order to suck the seeds out of the small grain planting drill after every 100-foot row was planted with the different cover crops and diverse mixes. A cover crop walk was held last November to look at and discuss the growth of the various cover crop test strips at that time. Over 30 people attended that event, which included a mini soil health demonstration and open discussion after the cover crop walk.

Wendy Coons began working with Raymond King a few years ago when he wanted to address barnyard runoff and was also looking for ideas for manure storage. He knew that a

manure storage with 4-6 months of capacity would help him to get through the winter without spreading, but he was still thinking about various designs, such as liquid storage or a dry stack pad. Raymond had plans to build a new barn in 3-5 years, so he wanted to make sure the new storage was installed in the correct place according to his new barn plan. His crop fields were already in great shape, with no-till, strips, and also a diversion already installed several years ago.

Also on April 9th was a riparian buffer presentation by Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) Technician Ashley Spotts. Participants walked down to the small tributary that runs through Raymond's pasture. Two years ago he enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). A riparian buffer with diverse tree species was planted, including small shrubs near a road intersection so that visibility would not be hampered by trees. The first year he even noticed three blueberries in the CREP plantings!

Cover Crop Test Plots 11/13/13



Slake Test Results at Cover Crop Walk 11/13/13



John Chibirka with Rainfall Simulator 4/9/14



Cover Crop Walk 4/9/14



Matt Knepper with the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board reported that last October, Lancaster County became the first county in the nation to preserve 100,000 acres of farmland! Raymond's farm is included in those preserved acres. Raymond had invited his veterinarian, Gary Van Dyke, to the field day, and Gary was so impressed with the map of preserved farmland in the county that he asked to take it to the next Caernarvon Township meeting, where he is a township supervisor.

It was only a half-day event, so by noon, we had a final soil health discussion inside and also drew names for the door prizes: a 50 lb. bag of tillage radish seed that was donated by Steve Groff of Cover Crop Solutions, an Agronomy Guide that was donated by Penn State Extension, and in my humble opinion the most comprehensive cover crop book on the market, *Managing Cover Crops Profitably*, donated by NRCS. The Plain Sect farmer who won the 50 lb. bag of radish seeds had rode his bicycle there! Needless to say, he left the bag there to pick up at a later date.

The encore after door prize distribution was a rainfall simulator demonstration outside. NRCS Soil Scientist John Chibirka explained how the rainfall simulator showed infiltration and runoff rates of five different types of cover: a well-managed pasture, a pasture with poor cover, long-term no-till with cover crops, long-term chisel plowing and also a rototilled garden plot. It was an “ah-ha” moment for the manager of a partner agency. They were so impressed with the demonstration that they are going to propose a grant to buy another rainfall simulator for NRCS, since we only have one of them.

Submitted by Wendy Coons, Soil Conservation Technician

