

# CONSERVATION *Showcase*

## Economics, efficiency make conservation good business decision for valley farmer

It would be hard to find a more diverse farming operation than what you'll find at The Roy's Oasis Farms, near Prosser, Washington. On 1500 acres of irrigated farmland, fourth-generation farmer Brent Roy oversees the production of peaches, apricots, nectarines, apples, cherries, grapes and hops.

And at a time when many farm kids choose to pursue other career options "off the farm," Mr. Roy has remained – focusing on making his farm economically and environmentally sustainable.

With about 50 full-time employees, and as many as several hundred seasonal employees, maximizing a solid return on investment is a primary business objective.

"We're a for-profit business," Mr. Roy says. "With every decision, I think first about economics and then about how that decision affects our sustainability."

That practical, business matrix also drives his approach to conservation. Water efficiency, labor savings and energy and input savings

are all benefits Mr. Roy has realized by installing various conservation practices on his operation.

Throughout the past several years The Roy's Oasis Farms has been able to convert its less



*Brenton Roy is a fourth-generation farmer, pictured here in a hop field at The Roy's Oasis Farms, near Prosser. Mr. Roy, like many other Yakima River Valley producers has used NRCS programs to conserve soil and water resources and reduce nutrient and energy input costs.*

efficient rill irrigation systems into super efficient drip irrigation systems through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). And by combining fertilizer with the application of water through pressure regulated drip emitters, Mr. Roy is able to "target the root zone" of his crops – saving both water and fertilizers.

For Mr. Roy, it's all about targeting – water

*“The best part of the [NRCS] experience is the people are local and easy to work with.”*

Brenton Roy  
The Roy’s Oasis Farms

and nutrients where they belong, and pesticides only where they belong.

Despite having experimented with state-of-the-art soil moisture monitors, Mr. Roy says he still prefers the in-the-field manual method of testing soil moisture. “We want our managers in the field, seeing firsthand, what’s going on,” he says, “not sitting behind a computer screen.”

To ensure that his crops receive the proper amount of nutrients – neither too much, nor too little – The Roy’s Oasis Farms tests its soils annually and conducts plant tissue testing regularly. By using integrated pest management techniques, and by using new chemical sprayers with advanced technologies, Mr. Roy says he’s able to use “softer chemicals with better results – and less spraying.”

Rising diesel prices have given additional value to another conservation technique that has long been employed on the farm: Cover crops. In addition to controlling wind and water erosion, cover crops do not require frequent tillage.

“Where possible,” Mr. Roy says, “we till as little as possible. Like everyone else who’s dealing with the high cost of fuel, we’re consolidating passes, using smaller, more efficient equipment, reducing tillage – saving wherever we can.”

Mr. Roy says he’s had a good experience working with the agency experts who provided the financial and technical assistance to help him implement many



*NRCS Resource Conservationist, Amanda Ettestad (left) and District Conservationist, Chris Johnson, discuss issues related to conservation in hop production with Brenton Roy.*

of the conservation practices – practices that continue to provide a return on his conservation investment. “The best part of the experience is the people are local and easy to work with,” he says. Looking back, Mr. Roy is satisfied that he’s made good conservation investments on his farm. “I think we’re doing everything that makes good sense,” he says looking across the landscape. “If we’re not doing something that helps us adapt and is sustainable and economic – let me know, and I’ll get it installed right now.”

*Written and photographed by  
Ron Nichols, NRCS  
June, 2008*