



PROFILES IN soil health

Russell Wire

Stephenson County Illinois

Acres: 100

Crops: Corn and pasture forage for cattle herd

Planting: All No-Till

Covers: Radish and Ryegrass



5th Generation Improvements

Russell Wire, now 28, lives in Northwest Illinois. At eight years old, he knew he liked agriculture. Through a 4-H project, he raised some of his Dad's and a friend's beef cattle and grew those cows into a herd of 40. His family farming history dates back to 1850, making Russell a fifth generation farmer who now rents ground from his parents and is building his own sustainable operation.

Since 2005, Russell has worked 40 acres as pastureland and since 2011, he's grown corn on another 50 acres. His latest endeavor? To include cover crops on those acres, providing more forage for his herd, preventing erosion, and improving soil health.

"Before I put cover crops in, I researched it and talked to a lot of people, including specialists. A lot of people are watching me to see how it works," Russell said.

He sought guidance from specialists at USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, or NRCS, to help make decisions and plans for successfully growing and managing cover crops. NRCS staff answered his specific questions and offered the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) as a way to establish and pay for on-farm solutions.

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program that promotes agricultural production and resource protection. In turn, Russell agrees to apply the practices and management techniques he's selected and scheduled in his EQIP contract.

Late summer 2012 was Russell's first year planting cover crops. He opted for a mix of annual ryegrass and tillage radish. He likes the fact that he is able to do something different for a conservation solution that will sustain his operation.

Russell used a no-till drill to seed the radishes. While soil temperatures are key for success, 2012's droughty



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conditions threatened good seed germination. Luckily, a late September rain saved the day and he was able to grow a good, healthy cover crop.

At the same time, Russell allowed forage on his pastures to grow to a height of about 20 to 24 inches. This made high moisture haylage available for the herd.

Because of the pasture's location, he uses his cropland to grow hay instead of using it for livestock grazing. He cuts the forage when it's ready then bales it for later use.

According to Russell, the best part about cover crops is it gives him better soil health. With deep taproots that burrow down into the subsoil up to 30 inches, soil biodiversity explodes. He's also happy to see fewer weeds due to the annual ryegrass' dense foliage.

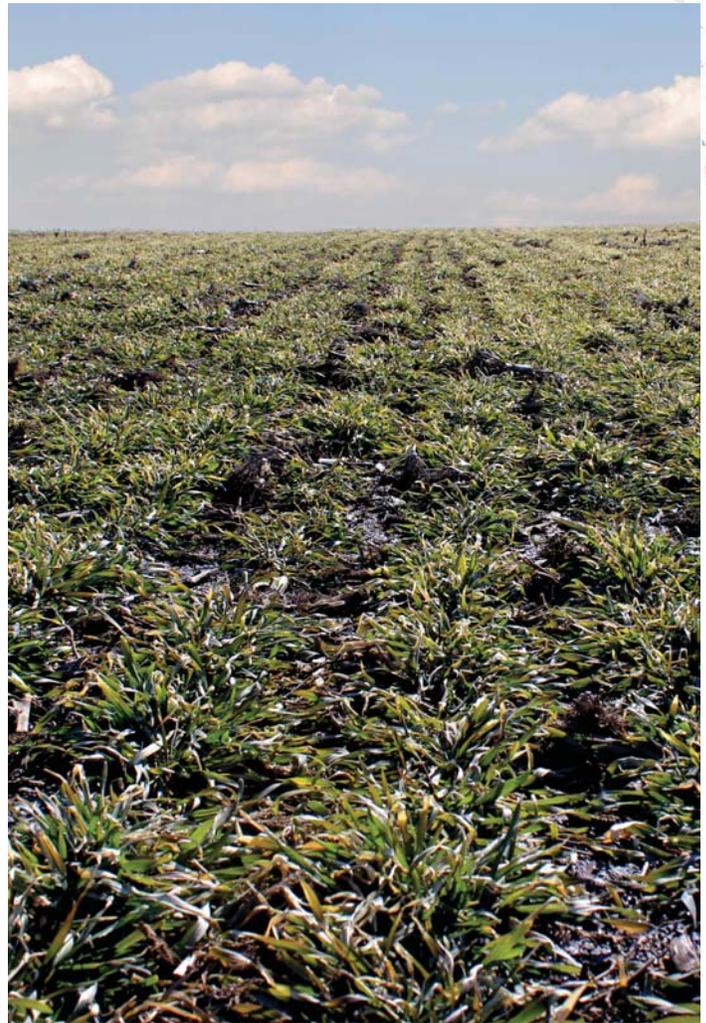
He's also found the radishes effectively break up soil compaction. They also bring valuable nutrients back to the surface for other crops to use.

Russell is pleased with all the rewards he's found with his new techniques. He can watch his cover crops grow, provide quality hay and feed for his cattle, and hold erosion back.

“We went from using between 15,000 and 20,000 gallons of fuel to half that.”

- Russell Wire, landowner

“It is exciting to see young farmers like Russell taking an interest in farming and be willing to try new practices. Cover crops offer another great tool for conserving our soil,” says Jim Ritterbusch, NRCS District Conservationist in Stephenson County.



Russell Wire, a northwest Illinois farmer found cover crops to be an excellent option for his operation. His cattle herd enjoy grazing quality forage and his soil health is improving as well.

For more information on cover crops and other ways to improve soil health on your farm, visit: www.il.nrcs.gov or call your local NRCS Service Center.

Want to unlock the secrets in YOUR soil?

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