

# GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE



## Going Beyond the Dollar

**NRCS and SWCD provide technical assistance to the northern Indiana Amish community.**

Indiana has the third largest Amish population in the nation. Although communities are spread throughout the state, the largest population is found in northeast Indiana. The Amish continue to use more traditional farming methods handed down from their ancestors, such as horse-drawn equipment including plows.

Resource concerns on Amish farms are very similar to those found on modern conventional farms, but because this group is often reluctant to participate in government programs they are not typically seeking assistance from NRCS or other conservation partners to address these concerns.

As with any non-traditional customer, it can be difficult for staff and partners to reach out through our typical avenues. Because of the dense population of Amish within the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) watershed, the Adams County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) entered into a contribution agreement with NRCS to hire an outreach specialist. The role of this outreach specialist is to build relationships and work directly with Amish farmers in the Western Lake Erie basin. Funding for this project is made possible by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.



## PROJECT DETAILS

**Location:** Decatur, Indiana

**Watershed:** Western Lake Erie Basin

**Focus Area:** Amish Community

**Timeframe:** On-going

**NRCS Investment:** \$200,000 in GLRI CTA

**Land Use:** Farmland

**Conservation Practices:** Conservation Technical Assistance, Cover Crops, Soil and Manure Tests, Manure Management, No-till

## SUCCESS STORY: GOING BEYOND THE DOLLAR

We have been successful in reaching Amish farmers by holding field days and pasture walks on Amish farms and also working one-on-one with the landowners. Amish farmers value our technical assistance, and as they become more familiar with our assistance we are seeing an increase in the adoption of no-till and other soil health practices. The Amish community want to be good stewards of the land and are very open to learning about conservation practices and receiving information on how to implement them.

"I have found the Amish are open and receptive to technical assistance once we have made a connection and have developed a relationship," said Darrell Brown, Amish Outreach Specialist and retired NRCS employee.

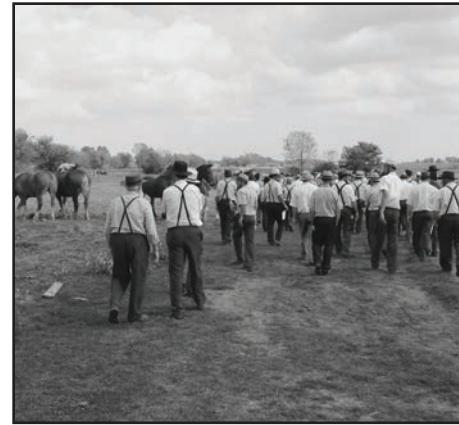
NRCS and Adams County SWCD work together to provide these farmers with soil maps and aerial photos of their land; assistance with soil and manure samples; cover crop seed recommendations, no-till and seeding equipment, demonstration areas, and other information to address resource concerns.

"Most of the Amish farmers we have worked with have either never tested their soil or it has been many years since they sampled. Fewer have manure tested," said Brown.

The conservation partnership staff works hard to help make the connection between what the soil tests show about nutrient levels in fields and the nutrient levels of the manure applied. They stress the economic value of the manure applied and the economic cost of spreading manure when soil tests show it is not needed. They also discuss the environmental issues related to over applying



**Left:** Adams County SWCD Highboy seeder available for rent.



**Right:** Amish men attending pasture walk in northern Indiana.

phosphorus.

Many of the Amish farmers in Adams County have confined feeding operations that fall under the minimum number of animals required for permits. These facilities do not have adequate manure storage nor do they have enough acreage or the proper equipment to apply the amount of manure that is generated. Because of this, many of the facilities are required to have the manure hauled off-site. Two community lagoons are being constructed to accept this excess manure. The lagoons will be operated by custom applicators that already have their commercial applicator's license. This will allow for the manure to be applied at the appropriate time and at the appropriate rate, eliminating many resource concerns caused by the facilities with a lack of storage.

Recently, the Adams County SWCD purchased a horse drawn no-till drill and highboy seeder that is loaned out for use to the Amish communities. This interaction provides the opportunity to build strong relationships.

To reinforce why conservation is important, the SWCD developed

a publication that explains what a watershed is, how and why to test soil and manure, tools to manage nutrients, and the issues with E coli and pesticides. A second publication highlights the importance of manure management, including information on soil testing and interpreting results, water quality issues and solutions, nutrient removal, and manure application restrictions.

Indiana NRCS and the Adams County SWCD are committed to continuing to find new, innovative methods to reach the Amish communities and provide technical assistance for their natural resource concerns and land management goals.



### Contact Us

Rebecca Fletcher, 317-295-5825  
Chad Douglas, 202-720-0699

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