

CONSERVATION *Showcase*

Grazing, Soil Health, Pasture Field Day at Lakeview Farm

Sally Barnes, NRCS Soil Conservation Tech.



The view of cattle grazing at Jeff B. Stoltzfus' Lakeview Farm in Kirkwood, Pennsylvania paints a very pastoral picture. Jeff and his family own and operate about 125 acres in southern Lancaster County and their cattle provide milk to Natural by Nature, a Newark, Delaware dairy that operates in an ever-growing niche market of organic, grass-fed products. The Stoltzfus family has worked closely with the USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for many years and they were kind enough to open their farm up to the public on October 5th for a grazing, soil health, pasture walk field day learning experience.

There are so many partners that are knitted in to the success story of the Stoltzfus' farming operation and we were lucky enough to have many of them represented at the field day. Pennsylvania Certified Organic was joined by Natural by Nature, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), Lancaster Farmland Trust, the Lancaster County Conservation District, and the Penn State Dairy Extension team, as well as NRCS.

As managers, it is so easy to focus on the above-ground production in pastures, while paying little attention to what happens below ground. The soil is a very dynamic resource. It's a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans, and throughout the day we wanted to show how good pasture management leads to good soil health. Jeff has a milking herd of approximately 80 cows and, if managed efficiently within a grazing system, they can be used to improve soil health.



A sound intensive grazing system is vital to a profitable organic dairy operation. Vital to meet the nutritional needs of the dairy cattle. Vital to optimize forage yields and productivity. Being organic can present some challenges in the installation of Best Management Practices on the farm such as fence and watering systems. However, there are many opportunities to be taken advantage of as well, such as increasing plant diversity and rotational grazing.

Typically, we associate an organic operation as being heavily reliant on tillage, but at Lakeview Farm this is not the case. Through an intensively managed system, Jeff is very conscientious of minimizing soil disturbance, keeping the soil covered, maximizing the living roots and increasing diversity. His healthy pastures are a testament to his skill and management strategy.

There are many factors that contribute to the productivity of a grazing system, but one of the most important is water, more specifically available soil moisture. At the conclusion of the pasture walk, attendees were treated to a real “seeing is believing” demonstration of the NRCS rainfall simulator. This tool aids in the visualization of the potential for greater rainfall infiltration on pastures with a high level of grazing management. Through the comparison of differing pasture samples, put under the same high- intensity/short-duration rainfall, it was very clear to see that pasture condition and soil health determine how much rainfall is captured for forage use versus how much runs off as a lost resource.

As attendees witnessed at Lakeview, focused management above ground carries healthy benefits into the soil below.



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