A History – and a Future – in Organics

How many discussions of soil health start with a love story? This one does! A love of horses brought Fred and Judy Brossy together. The simple story of boy meets girl while riding the range, doesn't capture their personality and energy, that when united led to a farm legacy in Lincoln county on the scenic Little Wood River.

After managing the farm for 22 years, in 2005, with assistance from the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, the Brossy's were able to purchase the farm by placing a conservation easement on it. That easement will insure that it stays a farm forever. It is complete with an old one-room stone schoolhouse and features a unique stretch of river that supports an impressive riparian zone in the otherwise desert landscape.

Top: Fred and Judy Brossy (at left) with Cooper and Ahnna Brossy with baby Fiona Brossy. The tractor is a Farmall Super C.

Above: Fred and Judy Brossy in cover crop field.

It was on this farm that Judy helped initiate the Blaine and Lincoln County Farmers Markets. Both Fred and she became heavily involved in
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So Why Organic?

As with any relationship, the Brossys' philosophy of farming stewardship and service evolved with time. They started with conventional farming techniques and moved into organic practices. The organic philosophy has now become a way of life and a career.

The family's formal goal is "To pursue an active lifestyle in agriculture by producing healthy food for a Healthy, Sustainable America." In addition, they believe that their agricultural operation must be financially, socially, and environmentally sustainable.

To help reach that goal, Cooper plans to build on his parents' 20-plus years of organic experience. Currently, they have 304 acres in cropland production and 1,140 acres in grazed range, which they lease out as they only own a few horses now. Additionally, they have 408 acres in non-grazed range set aside for wildlife use.

Barbara Farm is currently producing dry beans for seed and consumption, soft white wheat; alfalfa for their local dairies; a variety of small vegetable seeds and potatoes, which are distributed across the United States. They had a record crop of potatoes in 2016, and their current variety is Yellow Melody.

Live and Learn

The Brossys, however, are not content to rest on the successes of the past. For the 2017 growing season, they are trying some other crops — Ornamental Sunflower, Bachelor Buttons and vegetable seed (squash) for seed companies.

Fred speaks of going beyond making farming a sustainable operation but as a means to actually regenerate our resources. Techniques such as cover crops will increase the soil's organic matter and keep CO2 out of the atmosphere. By using the sun's energy to keep the food chain cycling, all kinds of life benefits.

Caring for the Soil

The Brossys' operation applies compost every year for nutrients and organic matter on as many acres as possible, depending upon their rotational needs. Cover crops follow grain using simple mixes of peas, brassicas and grains. If the beans come off early, cover crops are planted. Cooper says he definitely wants to "keep living roots in the soil as long as possible to support the microbes that encourage new life." He notes that utilizing a diverse crop rotation, including cover crops, is a means of bringing balance to the operation's production. It prevents disease problems, cycles nutrients in the soil profile, and drives different energy flows in the soil environment.

Challenges

WEEDS! They use plenty of steel (tillage) to control weeds in the cropland. They also use crop rotation to moderate the impact of the weeds. In addition, the Brossys have supported the Lincoln County Bio-Control/Bug Crew. Thanks to their efforts, there has been weed reduction, especially with the spotted and diffuse Knapweed, on the rangelands. The Canada thistle along the Little Wood River remains a consistent foe.

Another challenge they face is using their current equipment to deal with amount of cover crop residue generated. They are looking at different tillage operations, and ultimately aim to implement a no-till approach.
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Brossy, Idaho

Fred Brossy and Justo Beltran custom mixing a cover crop seed mix.

On the Horizon

The long term goal of a no-till system will increase organic matter in the soil. That improvement in organic matter will increase the soil’s water storage capacity to help moderate effects of low water years for the farm. The family’s shorter term goals include looking for ways to reduce the amount of tillage they have to undertake. A reduction in tillage would reduce a lot of costs for them in terms of time, soil disturbance and fuel.

In addition, the Brossys are always on the lookout for a more diversified crop rotation that will help them achieve their financial and environmental sustainable goals.

The Brossys are also looking to expand their existing pollinator habitat plots to attract a diverse array of beneficial insects to their operation.

Fred, Judy, Cooper and family's commitment to the health of their farm and their family are deeply rooted in their understanding of the importance of their soil’s health, and has given them a history and a future in the organic arena. And that love story continues ...

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