

Barron County Success from the Field

New Partnership Boosts Soil Health Education

Background

The Farmers of Barron County Watersheds, (FBCW), hosted a field day, inviting the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Regional Soil Health Specialist, Justin Morris to demonstrate the NRCS Rainfall Simulator. The field day was held at Rainbow Valley Farm, which is a 100% no-till dairy farm operated by the Wohlk family of Almena, Wis.

The NRCS rainfall simulator demonstrates the difference no-till and cover crops can make in an agricultural system. Different soil samples of tilled and no-till fields are placed on the station table and a rainfall is simulated over the samples. After the rainfall occurs, participants are able to see how much water is infiltrated and how much runoff occurred on each different sample. The no-till samples with cover crops always fare much better for infiltration rates and show little to no runoff. The traditionally tilled fields with no cover crops show little infiltration and more runoff. Samples may also compare continuously grazed pasture and prescribed grazed pasture. Prescribed grazing shows better infiltration and runoff results than continuously grazed pasture. The rainfall simulator teaches farmers and field day participants the importance of practicing conservation for soil health.

Program Successes

The FBCW is a close partner with NRCS and is a grass roots organization that also promotes soil health and water quality in Barron County. Their events are led and attended by farmers and they consider NRCS a key partner in their efforts. According to Patrick Richter, NRCS District Conservationist, "FBCW is an active participant in the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Local Work Group process and has helped shape the program to support their effort." Providing technical assistance, educational materials, and field demonstrations, NRCS has helped the group get their message out.

"Having the Regional Soil Health Specialist demonstrate and explain how the Wohlk's operation is achieving a high level of soil quality was a real eye-opener," said Craig Hamernik, FBCW Group Leader. The Wohlk's have been no-tilling for 18 years, including alfalfa planting, which was the focus of the field day.



NRCS Regional Soil Health Specialist, Justin Morris, demonstrating the results of the rainfall simulator on a Barron County no-till farm.

The FBCW group is planning to continue with field days, field trials and winter meetings to promote local conservation. Local NRCS staff will continue to support those efforts in any way possible.

Interested in watching the NRCS rainfall simulator in action? You can view a video on the NRCS Wisconsin YouTube Channel here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rbSWey0pOg.

Interested in participating in your counties NRCS EQIP Local Work Group? Find out more information here: www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/wi/newsroom/pnotice/.

