

Door County Success from the Field

Raising Awareness for Soil Health

Background

During the 17th Door County Festival of Nature, participants were able to tour the Brey Cycle Farm in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. Brey Cycle Farm is part of the Peninsula Pride Farms and is one of four farms in the Door-Kewaunee Demonstration Farms Network, funded through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The farm is owned by Tony, Mariah, Evan, Alexa, Jacob and Lauren Brey. The goal of these demonstration farms is to showcase the implementation of new techniques and equipment and to demonstrate new technologies in agriculture.

Program Successes

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Brey Cycle Farm were able to demonstrate the importance of soil health and a few of the new techniques and equipment being used by the demo farms. The informative tour started with a plot seeded with triticale. Here, Nathen Nysse, Brey Cycle Farm's crop advisor, explained the benefit of having a good cover crop without tillage to improve soil health. The combination of no-till and the cover crop helps keep nutrients added through manure in the soil. Jacob Brey continued by explaining some of the new equipment the farm is currently using to apply manure without disturbing the soil. Following a brief explanation of how the farm cares for calves and cows, participants were shown the NRCS's rainfall simulator.

Through the visual demonstration, participants were quickly able to distinguish the differences of both runoff and infiltration between various types of plots typically used by farmers. After the participants noticed the differences, NRCS employees Betsy Doolittle and Laura Watson explained how reducing runoff and increasing infiltration are crucial to the health of the soil. Laura explains, "The rainfall simulator does an amazing job at showing how tillage and lack of vegetation prevent infiltration, while cover crops, diverse crop rotations, and no-till are key in building a healthy soil system."

Future Plans

Brey Cycle Farms, with the help of NRCS, will continue to innovate through the use of new techniques and equipment to better improve their soil health.



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Nathen Nysse shows participants the fibrous root structure of triticale and explains the benefits to soil health.



The NRCS rainfall simulator is shown after two inches of rain. The front buckets represent runoff, while the back buckets represent infiltration. The plots from left to right are conventional tillage with no cover crop, till with cover crop, no-till with cover crop, continuously grazed pasture and rotationally grazed pasture.

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