

## Three Generations of Conservation on Happy Hill Farm

By Cheryl Panciera

Happy Hill Farm is a progressive beef farm in Crawford County, Pennsylvania, which runs 55 brood cows and 125 feeders a year. John Evans operates the family farm with his son, Mark. The father and son duo have worked on improving their operation since 2005, when they first worked with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to develop a grazing plan. At the time, they did not have any livestock on the farm, but they were interested in learning how to implement a rotational grazing system and how to avoid causing any environmental issues. They wanted to convert the fields to pasture, but they were highly erodible, showing signs of erosion and compaction from farming.

John and Mark farm over 100 acres of corn, soybeans, small grains, and hay. When they realized erosion and compaction became a concern in their crop fields, they decided to no-till their fields. They received a 2006 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) no-till contract to help them get started on the crop fields and improve the soil health. Practicing no-till not only helped control and reduce any erosion issues in the field, it also helped build up organic matter in the soil and improve the overall soil health of the fields. At the same time, they were also working on

getting a nutrient management plan (NMP) so they could manage their manure. They keep their NMP current and up to date.

In 2007, they brought beef cows to the farm and were able to convert cropland to pasture by installing fencing around the perimeter of the pasture, as well as interior fencing to divide the pasture into several paddocks. Water hydrants, a pipeline, animal trails, a stream crossing, and seeding the fields was all done through an EQIP grazing plan. Warm season grasses were planted in the pasture to improve soil health. They fenced out all the streams on the property, as well as a pond, leaving grass buffers along the edge to catch any potential runoff. By implementing

this grazing system, they were able to keep the cows out of the stream and prevent sediment and nutrients from washing into the stream.

After implementing the rotational grazing system, John and Mark needed a place to put the cows during wet weather and over the winter. They also needed a place to store manure while the animals were confined. In 2014, they received an EQIP livestock contract and utilized the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) program to install a roofed concrete heavy use area with gutters, downspouts, and underground outlets.

The Crawford County Conservation District and NRCS



***Interior fencing divides pasture into smaller paddocks for grazing.***

worked together to construct the roofed heavy use area and future manure storage facility closer to a water source. In 2019, they received another EQIP livestock contract to construct an access road, a manure storage facility, roof gutters, and downspouts.

John and Mark are always striving to further their education on grazing management by attending the annual Northwest Grazing Conference each year and other trainings that are offered locally. John serves as the President of the Ag Advisory Board for the Conneaut School District where he has helped proctor NOCTI tests in the last few years for ag seniors. Happy Hill Farm is continuously striving to be the best farm that they can be and is very deserving of Outstanding Conservation Farmer for the Year 2020 in Crawford County.



***Cattle feeding in the roofed heavy use area.***



***Three generations of the Evans family humbly accepted the Outstanding Conservation Farmer of the Year award in 2020 from the Crawford County Conservation District.***