

Racine County Success from the Field

Cover Crop Success Cultivates Forest and Wildlife Conservation



Background

Jeff Rice, a Racine County, Wisconsin, farmer utilizes all the opportunities that his land offers him. He farms corn, soybeans and wheat, while also raising pheasants, mallard ducks, partridge and quail for hunting. Jeff also leases his land for bird hunters in the fall and allows mentoring hunts for turkey in the spring. Jeff has partnered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service for several years to improve his soil and water quality, while also creating wildlife habitat on his farm. He is quite happy with the conservation outcome.

Highlights

In 2017, Jeff started partnering with NRCS through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). He focused on improving his cropland by adding cover crops into his operation. He was so pleased with the results, he decided to utilize the CSP on his forestland. “This is my first year in the CSP Nonindustrial Private Forestland program and I can tell a difference all ready,” Rice explains. Jeff has also started brush management and creating additional habitat by creating snags and brush piles. In the 28 years he’s been on his farm, clearing out the brush and opening the woods has allowed more birds than ever before, access to the wood lots.

Jeff also recently applied and was accepted into the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Through EQIP, he is adding additional acres of cover crops and no-till to his operation. Additional bonuses Jeff sees are, the cover crops provide cover for the birds during hunting season and he has noticed increases in wild birds, beneficial insects and improved soil structure. Jeff has also seen a great improvement in weed reduction from no-till. There are no new weed seeds being brought to the surface through tillage. Jeff has been able to reduce the amount he spends on chemicals because the cover crops and no-till have greatly reduced weed competition.

Future Plans

The biggest benefit from the NRCS partnership Jeff sees are the opportunities to learn about the benefits of the different



Top: Grass sorghum with a clover cover crop establishing underneath. Bottom: Clover seeded into a cereal rye cover crop.



conservation practices. “I have seen the benefits and learned so much just by working with the NRCS staff,” he said. Jeff looks forward to continuing the partnership with NRCS by continuing to implement conservation practices on his land for years to come. NRCS looks forward to continuing the conservation partnership with Jeff as well.

