



PROFILES IN soil health

Villwock Farms
Edwardsport, Indiana
4,000 acres
Crops: Corn, Soybeans, Seed Soybeans, Seed Wheat
Planting: 100% No Till
Covers: Wheat, Experimenting with other cover crops



The Soil Health Journey Continues

With over 30 years' experience no-tilling, and nearly 30 years planting cover crops, the average producer might be tempted to sit back on their heels. Add to those accomplishments time spent serving as a Soil and Water Conservation District supervisor, over a decade as Indiana Farm Bureau President, and countless soil health field days hosted, and one might think they've done all they could in conservation farming.

Not Don Villwock. In spite of all of the conservation and soil health practices he has implemented on his 4,000 acre operation in Knox County, Don insisted, "I think there's opportunity to do more, and that's what we're trying to do. We learn something every day." He emphasized the importance of experimenting with different methods, trial and error, and an attitude that

"no-till and cover crop practices are a journey, not a destination."

Don began his shift to conservation practices in the 1970s by no-tilling double crop soybeans into wheat stubble. He explained that since the beginning, no-till offered multiple advantages for his operation. "For me, the tipping point that got me started in no-till was the bottom line. In the 70s, we were running on small margins and no-till allowed us to reduce our machinery costs and labor force, while still maintaining the same yields."

Not only has Don been able to maintain yields, but he has also won awards in the National Corn Yield contest on more than one occasion. In addition to the economic benefits, his conservation practices have brought him attention from landlords who specifically seek out no-till farmers.



USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

But the no-till journey has not been free of bumps in the road. When asked about challenges along the way, Don said, "Planting corn after corn was a particular challenge. It takes extra management, but row cleaners helped us to establish great stands so we could achieve maximum yields." For Don, improvements in technology over the years have helped overcome yield problems that might have been associated with no-till in the past.

For the past ten years, Don has worked closely with Barry Fisher of the Natural Resources Conservation Service to incorporate conservation practices on his farm.

"Barry is practical, pragmatic, and his experience on the land sets him apart," explained Don. "He's been with us every step of the way on the no-till journey."

"No-till and cover crop practices are a journey, not a destination."

- Don Villwock, landowner

Don draws upon his experience working with Barry in giving advice to other farmers interested in adopting no-till and cover crops. "I always encourage others to start slow, experiment, and just give it a try."

True to his words, Don continues to experiment with new ideas constantly in his operation. "Just last week we sent a soil sample to a Cornell University lab consultant to analyze the complete soil profile. We'd never done that before, but now we want to take it to the next level. The more we learn, the more we can continue to improve."

To learn more about using conservation practices on your operation or improving the health of your

Natural Resources Conservation Service



Don Villwock checks the **health of his soil** in one of his fields in Edwardsport, Indiana.

soil, visit http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/in/home/?cid=nrcs144p2_031079. Or visit the national soil health page at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health/>.

For NRCS assistance, contact your local USDA NRCS field office by visiting: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>.

Want to unlock the secrets in YOUR soil?

Go to: www.nrcs.usda.gov



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**