



Helping People...

...Help the Land.



United States
Department of
Agriculture



Dream Becomes Reality for Beginning/Military Veteran Farmers



HUAP, Waste Transfer Lane and Waste Storage Facility



The Richer Family



The Waste Storage Facility was completed in September of 2018.

Five years ago, the Richer farm located in Daviess County, Indiana looked drastically different than it does today. Riddled with old, dilapidated buildings, overgrown pastures and crop fields in poor health, the land really didn't offer a whole lot of promise for a working farm. But all that changed when brothers Jon and Caleb Richer took over in 2013.

Shortly after returning home from his tour of duty with the Marine Corps, Jon got together with his brother Caleb, a recent Rose-Hulman graduate, and decided to build their 160-acre family farm back to what it was when their grandfather was living. They started by planting a corn and soybean rotation and soon added a small herd of beef cows and a freezer beef operation. But as young, beginning farmers, they knew they were at a disadvantage.

"Farming is a capital-intensive market," said Caleb. "As young farmers, you're really strapped for money up front when you're starting out."

The brothers enlisted the help of their Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) district conservationist to discuss several resource concerns that needed to be addressed on their farm such as manure storage issues, nutrient runoff, soil erosion, and muddy livestock areas. As a result, they learned about the technical and financial assistance programs that were available to them and were able to take advantage of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program's (EQIP) beginning farmer and military veteran initiatives, both which offer a reduced competition advantage for those that qualify.

"When you're not quite established and you don't have everything set exactly the way you want it, you have the ability to study things, ask older farmers what their opinions are, and develop your own operation," said Jon.



With help from NRCS, the Richers were able to install a heavy use area protection (HUAP) pad, a waste storage facility and a waste transfer lane to properly move the manure from the HUAP to the storage facility. With these new conservation practices installed, the Richers are able to effectively increase their herd size and grow their beef operation. In addition to their waste management practices, they are working with both the NRCS and the Daviess and Martin County Soil and Water Conservation Districts to incorporate cover crops onto their fields.

The Richers are already seeing the effects of these conservation practices firsthand on their land. Not only are they noticing a reduction in sediment and nutrient runoff from farm fields to their pond but something else incredible is happening just below the surface. Their soil is becoming healthier.

“When we first took over our farm, we probably could not have taken a shovel to the dirt and found one earthworm – the ground was hard; it had no tilth to it,” said Jon. “Our soil has so much more life now which is evident by the increased microbial activity and earthworms we are finding.”

Because of their new waste management system, the Richers are utilizing their cow manure more efficiently. They are applying one hundred percent of the manure that is produced on their farm, decreasing their commercial fertilizer drastically. Add cover crops into the equation and they are significantly increasing their soil’s organic matter and improving its health.

“To us, conservation practices are extremely important. We

see that there is a value in taking care of the land because if we don’t, it may not be here tomorrow,” said Jon. “We have a new generation coming along with my two sons and daughters. We hope they’ll want to be in agriculture one day and that it will be financially stable and that the soil will be there.”

The Richers admit that being beginning farmers is a tough job and would encourage anyone that is willing to get into farming to begin by shadowing an experienced farmer.

“Find an older farmer to shadow for a bit and walk in his footsteps,” said Caleb. “Set your goals. Write everything out - goals for the farm, where you want to see it go - develop a 5-year plan and revisit it every year. This will help you stay focused on where you want to be and help track how you’re growing.” Caleb.

They would also encourage new farmers to visit their local USDA service center and learn about the technical and financial programs available.

“We had a serious issue with nutrient management and NRCS took a project we would never have been able to afford as beginning farmers and made it very feasible for us to do,” said Jon. “It came down to filling out the paperwork and putting in a lot of hard work and if you’re willing to do those two things, you can make it happen.”

To learn more about improving your land with conservation practices and assistance available for beginning farmers or military veterans contact your county’s district conservationist.