



GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE



Taking Matters Into Their Own Hands

A growing family farm focused on raising a healthy and sustainable food source.

When you grow up as the only brother in a sea of sisters, you'll do almost anything to get out of the house. For Carry Zeigler, that meant spending a lot of time with his grandfather on an 80-acre beef cattle farm at a young age.

"I have five sisters so anytime I could get out of there, I did," said Zeigler. "Many days grandpa would pick me up on the way to a hay sale or if he needed help around the farm and I was more than happy to go."

Carry enjoyed working with his grandfather around the farm. He was happy to spend time away from his sisters but more importantly, he was excited to be outside getting dirty and learning new things. Throughout the years of working with his grandfather, Carry started to develop a passion for the business, but the farm was sold while he was still young. It wasn't until nearly 25 years later that Carry decided to start farming on his own.

"About a decade ago, my wife developed some health issues that led us to believe different eating habits could impact our health significantly," said Zeigler. "We didn't believe we could trust food sources in some respects."

So, they decided to take matters into their own hands. Carry and his wife Rachelle started their 40-acre organic operation with a few pigs, chickens and grass-fed/grass-finished cows. They knew what they fed the animals, if and when an animal got a shot and everything else that happened from the day they received the animal on the farm until the day it was processed.

As their friends and family caught wind of what they were doing, the Zeigler's



PROJECT DETAILS

Location: Huntertown, Indiana

Watershed: Western Lake Erie Basin - St Joseph
04100003

Focus Area: Nearshore Health

Time frame: 2019

NRCS Investment: \$113,053

Land Use: 138.6 acres Pastureland

Conservation Practices: Permanent Fencing, Forage and Biomass Plantings, Low Intensity Prescribed Grazing, and a Watering System which consists of Heavy Use Area Protection, Pipeline, Watering Tanks and a Well with Pump Plant

Indiana, November 2019

SUCCESS STORY: TAKING MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

found a need to expand their operation. They started looking at a farm just three quarters of a mile from their home. After several years and regular conversations with the landowner, Carry and his family made the move to their new homestead – Lone Tree Farms.

Lone Tree Farms is situated on 190 acres of previously conventionally row cropped, rolling fields. When the Zeiglers first obtained the land, they quickly noticed their soil’s health was a problem. Fields were riddled with erosion causing large ravines and water holes throughout the property and they had a difficult time getting anything native to grow. The ground had been overworked and had taken a toll on their soil’s health and local wildlife habitat.

Zeigler researched how to improve his pasture and learned that pasture health and soil quality are interdependent and improving forage would require him to assess his pasture holistically— assessing plant and animal productivity, soil health, water and air quality.

“I’ve learned as I looked into the grazing process and how forage restoration works, that I needed to use the plant life and my animals to restore the soil and rebuild microbial life to jump start the forages again,” said Zeigler.”

He knew he had to address these issues if he wanted to have a successful operation. He heard about USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through word of mouth from some fellow farmers but fearing that they catered to a more conventional farm operation, he was hesitant to approach the agency. After going over some figures, he quickly realized it was not financially possible to execute his dream without some assistance.

“I didn’t have the understanding or financial wherewithal to realize this farm could really become what we dreamed,” said Zeigler.

Zeigler enlisted the help of his NRCS



Fencing installed in 2019



Zeigler Herd grazing in paddock

district conservationist to discuss his plan of action. As a result, he learned about technical and financial assistance programs that were available to develop and carryout a conservation plan and was able to take advantage of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funding. The Zeigler’s desire of a farm dedicated to the stewardship of the land was becoming a reality.

“NRCS has helped us take what was a dream to a vision to a probability,” said Zeigler.

Over the past year, Zeigler has worked closely with NRCS field staff and a Purdue Extension grazing specialist to develop and implement a long-term conservation plan that addresses the erosion concerns on his pasture, builds soil health and brings wildlife back to the area.

The district conservationist explained why targeted funds like GLRI can help farmers like Zeigler install conservation practices that can benefit the entire watershed area by keeping his soil and excess nutrients in place and out of nearby streams and rivers.

Practices include permanent fencing, forage and biomass plantings, low intensity prescribed grazing, and a watering system for his herd which consists of heavy use area protection, pipeline, watering tanks and a well with a pump.

“The NRCS team has been super helpful. They are quick to respond, they are creative in thinking through things and they will give you options,” said Zeigler. “They really helped

capture my goal and vision and really gave dimension to the final product.”

Lone Tree Farms currently has nine paddocks they use for rotational grazing for a herd of over 40 calves/ cows. While the farm is still too new for them to notice any real soil health improvements to date, native plants are starting to thrive, and wildlife is returning to the area. Future plans for Lone Tree Farms include expanding the pasture area to increase their herd size and to incorporate a multi-species grazing operation but making sure their soil is healthy is their number one priority.

“Throughout this process we’ve educated ourselves a lot on the conservation side of things which really led to why we are doing it this way. For healthy food, you have to have healthy dirt.”



Contact Us

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