



Farmers Improving Soil Health

NEWS YOU CAN USE ~ May 31, 2017

A monthly collection of recent news, upcoming events, and articles of interest



Meet Your Board Members

Dean James, *No-Till Alliance Vice-President*

My name is Dean James of Danville, Pennsylvania. I am employed as a farm manager for Don Cotner Farms. We raise corn, soybeans and hullless barley. Our main enterprise is 400,000 layers that we make our own feed for and market the eggs from. We have been no-tilling corn for more than 40 years. Our cover cropping has continually increased over the past 10 years, planting green on many of our 1100 acres. Much has been learned over the years, and covers are highly valued for many reasons.

We started using cover crops in order to keep the soil and nutrients from leaving the field. Covers keep our soils on the farm and give us an avenue to spread the manure; utilizing the many natural benefits the manure provides. Soil health has been an added advantage to our cover crop use. With a switch to planting shorter season corn and soybean varieties, we have been able to plant our cover crops earlier.

In our area, thin soils are our biggest yield limiting factor. Big covers have allowed us to keep soil temperatures down and moisture from evaporating. Yield increases have resulted.

This year plans are to use our Kinze planter with interplants to seed cover crops. We have seen the value that mixes provide in cover crops, especially legumes. Because clover provides a good source of nitrogen and diversity to our fields, our goal is to find a clover variety that will reliably over-winter after a crop of soybeans.

Alliance News

Outreach through Participation - Updated

The Alliance Board of Directors has recently begun to more formally track the participation of board members in events related to no-till, cover crops, soil health and related topics. Outreach is essential to the mission of the Alliance and presents a great opportunity to carry our message.

Between December 2016 and March 2017, **board members either hosted or were invited to participate in 22 different events, reaching over 2,000 individual farmers or other stakeholders.** Interestingly, this reach went beyond Pennsylvania as it included 3 other states and a Canadian province. This demonstrates the high regard others have for the Alliance and the experience and knowledge we can bring to these discussions.

The Alliance is interested in having one or two "mini-field day" type events in conjunction with Stroud Water Resources Center this summer or early fall in eastern Lebanon or Berks Co. If you would be interested in hosting or helping to coordinate such an event, or know someone who might, please contact Jay Howes at jhowes@pennag.com.

Upcoming Events

June 7

The **Chiques Creek Watershed Expo** will be held on June 7 from 6 – 8 p.m. at the Manheim Farm Show Complex. *(The PA No-Till Alliance will have an exhibitor's booth at the event.)*

June 22

The **Penn State Planting Green Field Day** will be held on June 22 from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. at Joel Myers farm in Center County. (Event is part of the RCPP project.) Lunch included. Various folks have been involved in research plots the past two summers - the field day will share the results of the study to date.

June 29

A **'Farming for Success' field day** will be held on June 29 at the Southeast Agricultural Research & Extension Center (SEAREC) in Lancaster County. Stay tuned for further details in future newsletters.

July 27

Mark your calendars now for the Alliance's always popular and informative **Soil Health Field Day**, to be held on July 27 at Board member, Jeff Frey's beautiful farm near Willow Street in Lancaster County. This can't miss event for no-till and cover crop advocates will feature an interesting and informative program including a well-known keynote speaker and several farmer panels on timely topics. Watch for more information in future newsletters.

December 7

Mark your calendars now for an all-day **Soil Health and Water Quality Program** that will build on a similar successful event in 2016. Event to be held at Shady Maple Banquet Center, East Earl, Pennsylvania.

Ag Articles of Interest

Patrick McDonnell Confirmed As Secretary of Environmental Protection

Last week, the Senate voted unanimously to confirm Patrick McDonnell as the 8th Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection since its formation in 1995. He has served as Acting DEP Secretary since May 20, 2016.

Secretary McDonnell formally took the oath of office on Thursday morning, with Secretary of the Commonwealth Pedro Cortes presiding, and his wife Colleen and four children supporting.

Prior to serving as Acting DEP Secretary, Mr. McDonnell served as Director of Policy for the Department, where he oversaw the agency's regulation and policy development processes. In addition, Mr. McDonnell ran the State Energy Office and was charged with coordination of renewable energy and energy efficiency issues.

New Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC) for Partnerships at Pennsylvania NRCS

Susan Marquart has been selected as Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC) for Partnerships at Pennsylvania NRCS. As ASTC-Partnerships, Susan will serve as a state coordinator to promote and foster conservation partnerships and cooperative relationships with NRCS to enhance efforts to address natural resource conservation issues.

Susan will oversee an annual \$4 million NRCS budget of technical assistance agreements, as well as the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

Susan started at the NRCS state office in 2010 as a Natural Resources Specialist, after serving as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD) for 14 years.

Susan started in her new role this week.

Grow Your Soil Water

Weatherproof your soils against drought by improving organic matter and cover crop roots. While even a single year of cover crops can provide a benefit, no-till consultant Dan Towery emphasizes that real water storage benefits come with a sustained combination of no-till and cover crops over time. He breaks them into multiple factors:

1. Cover crops improve aggregate stability of the soil, allowing a hard rain to percolate, rather than run off.
2. Eliminating tillage also eliminates the loss of 1/2 to 3/4-inch of moisture with every pass.
3. No-till and cover crops increase organic matter by 1/10 percent of organic matter each per year, which increases water storage capacity by 5,200 gallons per acre per year.
4. Corn roots only access about two percent of the soil; however, in healthy no-till soils, mycorrhizal fungi hyphae serve as root extensions into macro and micropores, increasing soil contact by a factor of about 20 times.

[Read more.](#) (Source: *Corn + Soybean Digest*, April 5, 2017)

USDA To Measure Financial Health Of American Farms

On May 22, farmers and ranchers across the nation began being contacted as the National Agricultural Statistics Service conducts the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS I) screener. ARMS I identifies farm operations for inclusion in the subsequent ARMS II or ARMS III projects. This short and important survey will identify a small, but representative sample of farmers, in order to better understand the current financial state of U.S. agriculture.

Participation in ARMS is so important because government and agricultural leaders use the information needed to make sound decisions that impact the future of farmers, their families, their businesses and their communities.

In an effort to obtain the most accurate data, we will reach out to over 100,000 producers nationwide, including more than 2,400 in the Northeast. ARMS is a multi-phase program, beginning with a screening survey in May 2017 and another phase during the winter.

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