First year: Peninsula Pride making its mark on improvements

By MaryBeth Matzek for PPF

Peninsula Pride Farms is making big strides toward its vision of clean, safe water and a thriving agricultural community in Kewaunee and southern Door counties.

About 100 people attended Peninsula Pride’s initial annual meeting on Jan. 25 at JW’s Place to hear what the farmer-led non-profit has accomplished since it was established in March 2016.

“Peninsula Pride has accomplished so much,” said Dennis Frame of Timber Ridge Consulting, a consultant for the environmental stewardship organization. “The farmers here were ready to step up and take leadership. They are definitely further along than other groups were at this stage.”

Peninsula Pride members represent 50 percent of the cows and acres in Kewaunee and southern Door counties and represent farms ranging in size from 60 to 6,000 cows, said Don Niles, owner of Dairy Dreams farm and president of Peninsula Pride.

“Our success has been a huge team effort on behalf of farmers and our advisers,” he said. “Our goal is to reduce phosphorus in the surface and ground water, improve soil health and make continuous improvement in our practices.”

Peninsula Pride capped its initial membership at 43 so the new organization would not get overwhelmed, Niles said. The group reopened membership and added seven farmers.

During its first year, the organization held two field days. The first one focused on determining soil depth — the region has karst bedrock, which has small holes making it easier for anything to travel from the soil to the groundwater below — and the second one focused on using cover crops.

Peninsula Pride also established a cover crop challenge program designed to reduce phosphorous loss per acre.

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Dan Brick of Brickstead Dairy in Greenleaf in neighboring Brown County, walked many local farmers through the cover crop process and shared what he has learned in the seven years he has used them.

“When you’re starting something new, there are a lot of questions and I did my best to answer them all,” he said. “Cover crops improve the health of your soil and I think farmers who started using them will continue to do so and more will follow since they’ll see the benefits.”

In its first year, Peninsula Pride received two $20,000 grants from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and $50,000 in community support donations in addition to the farm membership fees.

Frame said Peninsula Pride benefited from seeing the success of Yahara Pride Farms, a farmer-led conservation group in Dane County. “Peninsula Pride had a template of sorts to follow, but they took what Yahara Pride did and made it their own,” he said.

For example, contaminated wells are a concern in the area so Peninsula Pride created its Water Well program, which provides bottled water to families who have well contamination from E.coli regardless of the source. The group also covers the cost of a well inspection and assists financially with a filtration system if needed.

“That was something the farmers didn’t have to do, but they realized that being good community members means helping out your neighbors even if they had nothing to do with it,” Frame said. “Peninsula Pride really took ownership of water quality in the area.”

Niles said the group’s members want to strengthen the relationship between the ag community and its neighbors.

“On water quality, we have long-term plans, intermediate plans and we wanted something we could do right now to help, and the Water Well program allows us to do just that,” he said.

Looking forward to 2017, Niles said the group plans to continue its nitrogen use efficiency study and increase the number of farms participating in the cover crop challenge. Peninsula Pride will partner with other organizations, such as UW Discovery Farms, to determine the flow of nutrients with multiple field management practices, soil composition and manure types, and the Natural Resources Conversation Service Demo Farms Program to implement new stewardship technologies on four farms. He said a goal will be to hold four field days.

“We also plan to maintain our dual focus of ground and surface water,” Niles said. “We hope to divide our board members into two lead groups on those issues. We’re very excited about the future.”

Board election: At the annual meeting, Peninsula Pride Farms elected Don Niles (president), Lee Kinnard (vice president), Chris Schneider (treasurer), Nathen Nysse (secretary), Tony Brey, Duane Ducat, Nick Guilette, Craig Harmann, Sam Kinnard, Rick Paye, Zach Sutter and Mike Vandenhouten.

Konop honored with conservationist award

The Peninsula Pride Farms leadership recognized Tom Konop (left in photo), a retired dairy farmer and dairy conservationist, with a conservationist award at the group’s annual meeting. Group president Don Niles explains why: “Tom has always had the drive for proper conservation techniques and practices. It was without a doubt Tom’s persistent, gentle prodding of several of us that led to the formation of Peninsula Pride Farms. Tom remains very involved with PPF as a conservation adviser and still keeps driving us in the right direction.” Tom said he is proud of what the group is doing. “It has really grown beyond whatever I expected. It’s been a great thing for the entire community.”
Greetings to fellow Peninsula Pride Farms members. We are proud to share with you our second issue of the Peninsula Farmer. It wasn’t that long ago that we first came together as a group. During the past 15 months, we have gone from nothing to a group now including 50 farms.

Those 50 farms hold about 50 percent of the cows and 50 percent of the tillable acres between the Manitowoc County line to the south and Sturgeon Bay to the north. It is great to see that many different farmers pulling together with the same objective. We have all made a commitment to continuous improvement in our farming practices. We also all share the core belief that our peninsula can have both safe, clean water as well as a thriving farming community.

It is exciting to think of what a positive impact farmers representing 50 percent of the whole can have. It’s a little sobering, however, to think of the expectations for results that our community will have for us.

Part of the positive impact we can have will simply come about from a more focused mindset that we are developing. We also are creating change with our practices. Not only was it obvious to all of us that we had more cover crop acres this last winter, it was also interesting to hear from several non-farming people who noticed the difference.

As we develop more and better grass waterways and other conservation projects, the general public will notice those also. One aim we have for this year is to develop signage to highlight best management practices that residents can see from the road.

That is one of the simpler things we plan to do this year amid some major projects.

Last month, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection announced they are setting up a network of demonstration farms in our area in cooperation with Peninsula Pride. We were proud to work with the agencies to include four of our member farms. This will be a major undertaking, with a great opportunity to develop new practices and equipment for future use throughout the area.

We are also already starting into the UW Discovery Farms tile water sampling program. We will have seven farms, with multiple fields included, researching the movement of nitrogen into tile lines. This will allow us to look at numerous cropping, tillage and nutrient combinations and measure their potential effects on ground water.

We also plan on working with several different partners to assess the potential for pathogens to travel from dairies to wells. Very little is actually known about this, and we can develop information to use far beyond our borders.

There’s a lot going on in farming. We are proud to be working together with an eye toward the future of the next generation of farmers and the opportunities they will have.

Take care, and have a great summer!

- Don

Hitting the ground running
By Don Niles, PPF chairman

How far we’ve come, where we are headed

First-year accomplishments
- Established as dues-paying 501c3 organization
- Fifty members with 50 percent of cows and acres in area
- Dual focus: ground and surface water
- Collected data on nitrogen use efficiency with UW Discovery Farms
- Held field day to demonstrate depth to bedrock and sensitive field identification
- Held field day to demonstrate use and benefits of cover crops
- Established Cover Crop Challenge program; budget of $60,000
- Launched Water Well program to assist with E.coli well contamination
- Received two $20,000 grants from state Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
- Received more than $50,000 in community support donations
- Created member newsletter, website and Facebook page
- Organized first annual meeting

Work plans for 2017
Research projects:
- Nitrogen and phosphorus loss to tile drainage systems, with UW Discovery Farms
- Nitrogen use efficiency to improve understanding of nitrogen loss, with UW Discovery Farms

Outreach, education and communications programs:
- Pathogens in the environment

Potential projects:
- Natural Resources and Conservation Service Demonstration Farms
- Mapping of sinkholes and depth to bedrock mapping
- Field days and events
- NRCS Demo Farms kickoff (LDMI, cover crops, nitrogen use)
- Composting
- Continuation of Water Well

Community service programs:
- Conservation evaluation
- Evaluate phosphorus reductions from new practice implementation
- Soil vantage
- Conservation assessment
- Yahara Pride Farms evaluation, assessment and certification
Demo farms program comes to Door, Kewaunee counties

By Jim Lundstrom, Peninsula Pulse

Ever since an April 2012 runoff event that turned the waters of the City of Green Bay a disturbing murky brown, government agencies and farmers in the Fox River watershed have been working to reduce farm runoff through innovative field technology that is used on participating demonstration farms and shared with other farmers not in the demo program.

Last month, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) announced that they have entered an agreement to launch a new demonstration farm network in Kewaunee and Door counties, with four farms already on board to become demo farms.

The program is being set up in cooperation with Peninsula Pride Farms.

“That’s been a really successful program. That’s why I’m interested in participating in this,” said Tony Brey, a 32-year-old, fifth-generation farmer on Cycle Farm in Southern Door, one of the four designated demo farms, all of which are Peninsula Pride members. “I’ve seen the success this has had, not just for the participating producers but others they brought in.”

Brey and his younger brother, Jacob, bought the farm from their parents, Bill and Clarice Brey, last year. Both young farmers are proud graduates of the University of Wisconsin-Madison agriculture program.

“We want to show some other management practices and bring in the public and other farmers to see what we’re trying to do for conservation and better management practices,” Brey said. “Some of it is experimental. Some of it’s going to work and some of it might make you scratch your head and say, maybe I have to do something different next time. That’s what we’re signing up for.”

One of the successful practices used in the Fox River watershed has been to plant winter cover crops.

“We’ll definitely be doing more work with cover crops and different variety of species, to have a living, growing crop in the winter to reduce soil erosion and keep the nutrients in place,” Brey said.

“One of the challenges of cover crops is how to transition into the next crop, and still have a successful corn crop in the summer.”

All the practices used on the demo farms will be data-driven, Brey said, with results meaningful to the area where the testing is conducted.

“Practices that work in southern or western Wisconsin may be different here with our climate and a little shorter growing season,” Brey said. “The goal of demo farms is to spread them out around the state for different challenges and opportunities. That’s why they focused on Door and Kewaunee counties. I think there’s going to be a lot of good sharing of information and a lot of good coming out of it. It’s great that it’s coming to this area.”

In an announcement of the new demo farms program, State Conservationist Angela Biggs said the collaborative effort will also address the effectiveness of current conservation systems used to reduce nonpoint source pollution.

“Demonstrations will be conducted to showcase the effectiveness and adaptability of conservation practice systems that reduce erosion, sedimentation and nonpoint source pollution and that also provide education and technology transfer opportunities for the public, farmers, land managers, agribusiness, environmental organizations, natural resource agencies and research entities,” she said.

“The network aims to demonstrate to farmers and the public that the right combination of traditional conservation practices and other new, innovative technologies functioning on the landscape can produce viable and sustainable economic and environmental benefits.”

From left: Jacob, Lauren, Moriah, Tony, Alexa and Evan Brey. Cycle Farm is one of four PPF demonstration farms.
Choosing the right cover crop
By Jamie Patton, agriculture agent for Shawano County, University of Wisconsin Extension

The interest in cover crops is increasing across the state. While they’re not a new practice in our agronomic arsenal, many of you are contemplating how to best incorporate covers into your crop management systems.

Like any big decision, my advice is to first ask yourself some questions to help define your next step. Questions like… What is your cover cropping goal? Do you want to reduce erosion? Build soil organic matter? Reduce compaction? Scavenge nutrients? Provide forage? Or a combination of things?

Different goals require different cover crop species or species mixes. Grass species, due to their prolific root systems, are often used for erosion control and to build soil organic matter. Brassicas can have significant fall growth, which can help with late season erosion control and can also provide forage. Legumes are thrown in a mix when we want to add nitrogen to the soil system. In addition to helping us target cover crop species, our cover cropping goals also help us set a bar for what we consider a cover crop “success.”

After which cash crop are we going to use cover crops? While there are dozens of cover crop species available, our choices for cover crops species that will be successful are wide open following winter wheat, become fewer after corn silage and narrow to a limited field of species following soybeans and corn grain.

How are you going to seed the cover crop? What equipment do you have available? I think many agree getting the seed in the ground (seed-to-soil contact) is optimal, particularly in coarser textured soils. Drilling of cover crops is my first choice, but if drilling is not an option, broadcasting with light incorporation can result in good stands in the right situation.

Surface broadcast applications without incorporation, by ground or aerial equipment, may work better in moderate to heavy textured soils where the seed has better access to soil moisture, particularly when rain events aren’t timely. If seeding cover crops into a standing crop, timing of seeding is key, as young plants will need to access to adequate sunlight to begin photosynthesizing shortly after germination. Talking with crop consultants, agency personnel and Extension agents in your area will help identify successful seeding methods for your operation.

What herbicides have you used in the year (or two) prior to planting the cover crop? This may be one of the most important questions you ask yourself, particularly if you plan on using your cover crop as forage. Herbicide carryover can compromise your cover crop stand and/or make it ineligible for use as feed. Be sure to thoroughly read the herbicide labels and understand any planting or feeding restrictions.

How are you going to terminate the cover crop? For many, selecting species that (usually) winterkill can relieve some of the anxiety of trying covers for the first time. If you would like the cover crop to continue to grow over winter and into the spring, be sure you understand the spring management and termination requirements. Pay particular attention to the suggested timing of termination in regard to cover crop growth stage and any potential allelopathy effects of the growing covers.

Do you apply manure in the spring and/or fall? If so, consider your options for manure application method and timing. Will you be applying the manure before or after the cover crop is established? With new low disturbance applicators, farmers are successfully knifing manure into standing covers. Others are surface applying manures to standing covers.

If applying manure in the fall, selecting cover crop species that will scavenge and hold nutrient over winter is beneficial. Once you’ve considered these questions, then selecting cover crop species for your farm becomes a bit easier. You’ve probably noticed I have avoided giving specific species recommendations, as I am a firm believer in considering all aspects of the system before making a final decision on species. As a general guide, the Midwest Cover Crops Council has an online selection tool that can help you narrow species options (mccc.msu.edu).

Talking with your peers and advisers is key to selecting a species or set of species that will work for you. Talk with those who have tried cover crops and been successful or have encountered challenges. As knowledge is often best gained through experience, build upon the experiences of others. But no matter what you do, when trying cover crops for the first time, start with a limited number of acres. Success breeds success, so start small, determine what is going to work for your farm and build from there!
Positive impact: 
Dairy farming plays key role in keeping 
Kewaunee County economy and communities healthy
By MaryBeth Matzek for PPF

A host of factors play into whether a community is considered healthy. Things like access to and quality of medical care, the environment, the economy and quality and length of life. Kewaunee County continues to rank among the healthiest in Wisconsin, most recently second in annual state health rankings.

In the economic area, the county’s agricultural community is vital. Agriculture accounts for more than $80 million in economic activity each year. Of that, an estimated $65 million is driven by dairy farming, said Jim Smidel, a member of the Kewaunee County Economic Development Corp.’s board of directors.

“Dairies and agriculture are a big part of the economic engine in Kewaunee County,” said Smidel, who is an assistant bank manager and ag banking officer at Investors Community Bank and owns a small dairy farm with his brothers. “The dairies contribute taxes, create jobs, help support strong infrastructure and use local businesses.”

RIPPLE EFFECT

Kim Kroll, an owner of Rolling Hills Dairy in Luxemburg, sees the positive economic impact firsthand.

“Our family farm supports so many community businesses, such as implement dealers, veterinarians, hoof trimmers, the feed mill and other businesses that provide us with other services or items we need for our farm,” Kroll said. “The construction industry is also very busy in Kewaunee County as many farms are investing in their properties and making improvements.”

When driving through Luxemburg, Kroll sees many small businesses that her dairy directly supports. “Our farm is family-owned and we are proud of being able to economically contribute to the area,” she said. “Without farms, many businesses in Kewaunee County would be hurting. We don’t have a lot of big industries here so the dairies are really a top job producer.”

In addition to several family members, Rolling Hills employs 25 full-time and two part-time employees. Smidel said farmers also pay taxes on their properties, which help fund local schools and government services.

“There are a lot of misconceptions out there about dairies and the role they play in the local economy,” he said. “Some people think they don’t pay a lot in taxes because the land is charged at a lower rate, but that is not true. Farmers pay taxes on the improvements they make on their farms.”

PROVIDING JOBS

Agriculture is the third largest employer in the county behind local government and the county’s three school districts. About 2,300 jobs are directly tied to agriculture, said Jennifer Brown, executive director of Kewaunee County Economic Development Corp.
In recent years, the county lost two large employers when Dominion’s Kewaunee Power Plant and Algoma Hardwoods Door Factory closed, but the county’s dairy employers remain strong and inject money back into the local economy, she said. The county’s unemployment rate ranks among the lowest in Wisconsin.

This summer, dairy farming will bring in even more to the local economy through Farm Technology Days, which is hosted by Ebert Enterprises Inc. Thousands of visitors will descend on the county to see the latest in farm equipment and technology, and they will bring money to spend for lodging, food and fuel.

“We are also encouraging those visitors to see other places in the county, whether they are ag-related or not,” said Smidel, who is also working with the Farm Technology Days Committee. “Kewaunee County has a lot to offer and we want them to see that.”

**Health Rankings**

Among 72 counties in Wisconsin, Kewaunee finished second in overall health outcomes.

- **Life expectancy**: 1st
- **Social and economic factors**: 6th
- **Physical environment**: 10th
- **Quality of life**: 11th
- **Clinical care**: 18th
- **Health behaviors**: 26th

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- Tony Brey, Cycle Farm, PPF demo farm

Dates to remember:

- July 11-13 - Farm Technology Days, Kewaunee County. Hosted by Ebert Enterprises, Algoma
- July 11-13 - Midwest Compost School, UW-Stevens Point
- Aug. 22-23 - Manure Expo, Arlington

Watch your email for PPF field day information!

More info at peninsulapridefarms.org