For nearly four years now, Peninsula Pride Farms has been providing incentives and encouragement to farmers in southern Door and Kewaunee counties to continuously improve practices that protect and improve water quality.

Those efforts are making a difference, and they’re making PPF President Don Niles proud.

“We’ve been progressing every year,” Niles, a dairy farmer in Casco, said. “It’s especially exciting that we hit the 10,000-acre mark with cover crops this year, which is a first for us. That’s double what we had just a few years ago.”

That milestone, coming despite an extremely wet year, was just one of the highlights shared Feb. 13 at PPF’s 2020 conference and annual meeting.

Peninsula Pride Farms’ 57 members and supporters have plenty to be proud from 2019:

- Used five cost-share programs: cover crops (6,996 acres), split application of nitrogen (10,278 acres), shallow bedrock determination (348 acres), harvestable buffers (16.8 acres) and low-disturbance manure application (new in 2019)
- 17 members implemented at least one new conservation practice
- Continued in-depth analysis of member practices
- Joined the Dairy Strong Sustainability Alliance to gain support and services
- Hosted four events: 2019 annual meeting, a farm tour by Gov. Tony

Peninsula Pride Farms hits 10,000-acre mark for cover crops

Group reviews 2019 successes, looks ahead

By Mary Hookham for PPF

Over 90 PPF members, partners and community members attended the 2020 PPF Conference & Annual Meeting on Feb. 13 at the Kewaunee Co. Fairgrounds.
Annual meeting (continued from page 1)

Evers, a manure management meeting and a field day
• Launched the group’s first member conservation practices survey and a membership brochure
• Distributed three editions of the group’s newsletter
• Posted QR codes around the area that take visitors to the PPF website for information about water quality practices
• Board member Nick Guilette was honored as the first-ever Certified Crop Adviser Conservationist of the Year in Washington, D.C.
• Niles participated in a panel discussion at the Wall Street Journal Global Food Forum in New York City to share what farmers are doing through PPF

Niles is especially proud of the ever-increasing cover crop acreage in the group. About two-thirds of those acres are cost-shared, he said. This means one-third is being paid for entirely by farmers.

“The purpose of our cost-share is to help reduce the risk of trying a new practice, and once the new practice is something familiar with the farm, they can often go on without cost-share, and that seems to be the way it’s working,” Niles said. “It’s creating the seed for future projects and that’s very encouraging for us to see.”

As the group looks to the future, Niles is excited about continuing the successful programs and working with open-minded farmers.

Specific plans for 2020:
• Continuing to explore methods to better track reductions in the risk of nutrient and sediment loss to streams and rivers
• Exploring development of outreach materials to educate farmers and residents on the effectiveness of conservation practices
• Continuing cost-share programs, member conservation practices survey and analysis of member practices
• Hosting more educational events and field days
• Continuing to work closely with the farmers and partners in the Door-Kewaunee Watershed Demonstration Farm Network

“I see a committed group of agricultural people that are learning every year for the last four years,” Niles said. “I see our confidence building. I see that our willingness to try new things is increasing, so all that’s very encouraging.”

Annual meeting moments
Greetings once again to members and friends of Peninsula Pride Farms.

After the trials of 2019 it is refreshing to write this to you with planting well underway and, for many of you, completed. The challenges we faced last year seemed to go on without end, but we are still here today moving forward.

To get an idea of how deeply 2019 affected those of us making their living in agriculture, I asked a group of 10 people at a recent PPF meeting what they personally found the most stressful to deal with. One choice was the COVID-19 pandemic that set the entire world back; the other choice was the weather of 2019. Without batting an eye, they unanimously picked 2019. That puts it in perspective.

This year, we can all start over. Part of the mission of PPF is to put the information and tools into the hands of our members that are needed for us to continuously improve our farming practices. This year many of our efforts will go into undoing the damage of last year. Washouts and deeply rutted fields are just two of the challenges left over from a year ago.

To deal with these unusual types of problems the PPF board of directors is talking about a couple of unusual programs. We, too, are trying to continuously improve.

Some great news for 2020: because of the confidence The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has in our members, they are providing an additional $10,000 for a new, “innovative practices” cost-share program. This program will provide financial support to reduce the risk of implementing creative conservation practices. TNC is providing this gift above and beyond their annual gift of $10,000 to our established cost-share program, and they continue to be one of our major supporters.

These additional funds will be available to members who implement innovative practices on their farm and members who participate will still be eligible for our established cost-share program.

More information on this new program will be coming soon, so watch your email, PPF’s social media channels and our website for information.

In addition to the new cost share for innovative practices, we will be offering “Conservation Conversation” events in lieu of traditional field days to feature one or more practices our members are doing. These will be short, one-hour field days held on the third Tuesday evening of each month, starting June 30. Watch your emails, our website and social media for further details.

Enjoy what is left of spring, and we look forward to hearing what you are up to!

- Don

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**Annual conservation practices survey: A look at the numbers**

*By Steve Richter, agricultural strategies director, The Nature Conservancy*

Members of Peninsula Pride Farms complete a survey each winter to gauge interest in soil health practices. It’s an annual recap of the number of farmers using conservation practices on their fields and a tally of total acres of each practice. In this article, I’ll share some highlights from 2019. In your next newsletter, I will talk more specifically about how the practices farmers are using are keeping soil and phosphorus from entering our waters.

I first want to say that it was great to see the progress that member farmers made in 2019 trying new practices and increasing the acres of other conservation practices, as well as the robust attendance figures seen at field days and winter meetings. Congrats to all of you who hosted or attended an event and/or used conservation practices in 2019! One take-away I had from reviewing the numbers is that more farmers are using conservation practices, and the total number of acres increased.

Peninsula Pride farmers saw a 18,154-acre increase in nutrient management plans and a 3,129-acre increase in the use of low-disturbance manure injection from 2016 to 2019. There were more than 77,000 acres under nutrient management plans and over 8,000 acres were planted with no-till in 2019. The 10,219 acres of cover crops planted by Peninsula Pride members in 2019 is a boost of 5,935 acres from 2016. One other practice really taking off is the use of splitting application of nitrogen fertilizer. More than 25,000 acres were planted this way in 2019, an increase of over 10,000 acres from 2016.

It’s great to see so many farmers completing the annual survey. The numbers demonstrate the effort farmers are making to improve soil health and reduce soil and nutrients leaving fields.
Demo Farms Network forges ahead with soil health, water quality work

PPF member farms participate in local-state-federal partnership

By Mary Hookham for PPF

Four forward-thinking northeastern Wisconsin farmers are helping to blaze a trail to better water quality by using innovative conservation techniques and helping promote them to other farmers.

As part of the Door-Kewaunee Watershed Demonstration Farm Network, the farmers and their friends and neighbors are seeing measurable water and soil quality improvements.

The network is a partnership between Peninsula Pride Farms (PPF), the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, and the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. The program encourages the use of cover crops, no-till practices, alternative forages and low-disturbance manure application.

The farmers in the network are members of PPF. They spoke about their experiences during a panel discussion on Feb. 13 at PPF’s 2020 conference and annual meeting.

“(The goal of the network is) really to facilitate looking at new practices and allowing farmers to show other farmers innovative practices for addressing water quality and soil health,” Barry Bubolz of the NRCS said.

“This demo network is an acknowledgement that a soil health system is the path to achieving water quality improvements,” he said.

The farmers shared how they are planting multi-species cover crops and learning about what crops to plant in various conditions, when to plant those crops, useful termination strategies, nutrient management and equipment set-up for planting and harvesting.

“Even one year of cover crops and then no-tilling into that is better than doing nothing at all,” Derek Ducat, who farms at Deer Run Dairy in Kewaunee, said.

Some of the network’s farmers are using triticale, which provides higher protein content for summer heifer feed. Others are using no-till sorghum-sudangrass, which picks up and retains nitrogen and phosphorus, helping the process of nutrient recycling.

“No-till is great for soil health and I think in the long run it's going to improve our bottom line,” Duane Ducat, Derek’s father, said. “Not only does it cost money to run over that property with equipment, but it just also goes against soil health.”

Jacob Brey of Brey Cycle Farm in Sturgeon Bay is seeing positive results from low-disturbance manure application on his farm. He plans to use the technique more often.

“This gave us a great opportunity to get some manure out in September,” Brey said.

The low-pressure manure application system helps minimize smell. As people drive by the fields where manure is applied, their perception of farming in general is improved, said Aaron Augustin of Augustin Farms in Kewaunee.

“The manure goes down onto the ground instead of on the plants, so the fields look better from the road,” he said.

Kinnard Farms in Casco is the fourth member of the network.

Peninsula Pride Farms President Don Niles said he is proud of his group’s efforts and especially those of the demonstration farm participants.

“These are the farmers that tend to be the most experimental, creative and willing to try new things,” he said.

Kowols, who works for DoorCountyDailyNews.com in Sturgeon Bay, Wis., has also noticed that agriculture seems to be treated differently than other industries at times.

“When other industries expand, the public is excited, but when farmers grow their businesses, the public questions the cost of that growth,” he said.

Kowols explained that knowledge is power in his profession. After learning about new technologies like robotic milkers and bark bed liners, he feels better equipped and more confident to do his job. He is more easily able to find the multiple layers in the topics he's writing about and be more in touch with farmers. Positivity, accuracy and understanding are keys to the work, he said.

“In a negative story situation, we try to find a positive spin. Or we ask, ‘What did we learn from this?’”

Kowols, who is also a sales representative, continues to meet new farmers to learn about the latest farm practices. He strives to spread the word that media is not the enemy of the agricultural community.

“We are not trying to get anybody,” he said. “We just want to get the story right the first time and assure farmers that they can trust us.”
Sign up to watch and report weather conditions on your farm

From UW-Extension

How heavy was the rainfall overnight? How much snow fell during the latest snowstorm? How bad is the drought this year? Join over 500 fellow volunteers across Wisconsin who report precipitation online to ensure measurements of snow, rain and hail is available for your area.

The Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network or CoCoRaHS is recruiting volunteer weather observers to help the National Weather Service and others determine the impact and severity of each storm.

Everyone can participate – young, old, and in-between. The only requirements are an enthusiasm for watching and reporting weather conditions and a desire to learn more about how weather can impact our lives.

All you need to do is sign-up, attend an online training, and then you are ready to start measuring weather in your own backyard. Volunteers can measure:
- snow using a yardstick or homemade snowboard
- rainfall and the water content of snow using a 4” diameter rain gauge
- hail using a ruler or homemade hail pad
- ice accretion using a ruler

You’ll be amazed at what you learn as you become more aware of the variable weather that impacts you, your neighbors, your state and our entire country. Plus, you’ll help ground truth weather events, providing valuable information for improving weather forecasting models.

The data you provide will help shape forecasts of river stages and flood levels on local rivers and can help inform National Weather Service thunderstorm or flash flood warnings just to name a few examples.

Join your fellow Wisconsinites who report rainfall, snow fall and weather facts.

Register today at: cocorahs.org/application.aspx.

For more information, contact:
Kevin Erb, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension, 920-391-4652, kevin.erb@wisc.edu.

PPF members share, learn at National No-Till Conference

By Barry Bubolz, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service Area Great Lakes Restoration Initiative coordinator

Farmers and local conservation partners took a winter road trip to attend the 28th Annual National No-Tillage Conference. The three-day event, which took place in January, offered an excellent opportunity for attendees to hear about the latest technology, science and equipment related to the conservation practices of no-till and cover crops.

Demonstration Farms and PPF members included Tony Brey, Brey Cycle Farm, Derek and Duane Ducat, Deer Run Dairy, and Aaron Augustian, Augustian Farms. Partners Nathen Nysse, Jeff Polenske and Matt Brugger from Tilth Agronomy and myself also attended. It was a great chance to network with over 900 other farmers and ag professionals from across the United States.

Aaron Augustian, from Augustian Farms presented during one of the breakout sessions on the topic of “Building a More Sustainable, Profitable, No-Till Dairy Operation.” He highlighted the efforts the farm has undertaken to transition their farm to utilizing the soil health practices of no-till, cover crops and low disturbance manure application.

Derek Ducat of Deer Run Dairy facilitated a roundtable for “Planter Setup for John Deere owners” to share tips and advice on planter set-up for no-till and cover crops systems.

The conference allowed attendees to gather information and ask questions on many different topics. Presentations ranged from “How and Why of No-Till Planting Green”, 60 Inch corn, Understanding New Soil Health Soil Tests, Regenerating Soil Microbiomes, No-Tilling Hemp, Comprehensive Approaches to Soil Health, Interseeding cover crops, Beneficial Insects, and much much more.

It was a unique, one-of-a-kind experience to hear from the best farmers, agronomists and researchers in one location. From the general sessions to “classrooms” and roundtables, there were multiple learning opportunities in a variety of formats. The event was a great way to highlight the positive actions and roles that farmers across the nation undertake to protect our soil and water resources when a soil health system is utilized.

Last year, I collected data from eight farms that are part of Peninsula Pride Farms. I wanted to determine the effectiveness of cover crops in the region and to see if the membership was achieving the organization’s goal of “continual improvement of practices that improve the environment.”

This was not a scientific experiment with randomized sampling or selection based on farm size, acres or farming system. This was more a sampling of farms that were willing to provide data.

**Cover crop analysis**

Here is what I learned about the impact of cover crops.

The top portion of Figure 1 shows the data from the farms. It is based on 160 fields and 4,675 acres of cropland. On average, planting a cover crop reduced the risk of phosphorus loss by 1.3 lbs./acre. However, the range was from 7.8 to minus-1.1 lbs./acre. This means that on some fields, planting a cover crop can increase the risk of phosphorus loss, while on others it can have a dramatically positive impact. Another important piece of information is that the mean (the mid-point of the 160 fields) was 0.7. This means there were some very high fields bringing up the average.

For comparison, I looked at the 2019 annual phosphorous report I developed for Yahara Pride Farms in the Dane County area. In the bottom portion of the chart is the YPF data. The average reduction in the risk of phosphorus loss from planting a cover crop was 2.2 lbs./acre, with a range of 22.2 to minus-1.1.

There could be a number of reasons why the average is higher on the YPF farms, but one factor is that we have been working to educate farmers on what fields and under which conditions cover crops have the greatest positive impact. Do not assume that planting a cover crop will always reduce soil and nutrient loss. For the first year of analysis, PPF is on the right track. YPF has been doing this analysis for seven years; when they first started it was a lower reduction.

**Continual environmental improvement**

For the second analysis, the Peninsula Pride Farms board of directors decided to identify how farmers were doing in regard to soil erosion and the risk of phosphorus loss (the Phosphorus Index – PI). They asked farmers to send me copies of their nutrient management plans in SnapPlus so that I could create a benchmark for the group.

In 2016, we had data from most of the membership, totaling 50,096 acres in 2,021 fields. The average PI on all the acres was 2.33 with 62.3 percent of the acres having a PI of 0, 1 or 2; 37.1 percent having a PI of 3, 4, 5 or 6; and 0.6 percent having a PI of 7 or greater. The nonpoint rules require farms to have a rotational PI of 6 or less on all fields.

In 2019, I received SnapPlus plans from the eight PPF farms with a total of 1,215 fields and 31,167.5 tillable acres. Of these farms, two were new to the organization and did not participate in the 2016 study.

I broke the analysis into three data sets:

1. Two farms that did not participate in the 2016 study,
2. Three farms comparing the phosphorus index from 2016 and 2018, and
3. Three farms - 2016 data was updated from the 2016 SNAP program to 2018 SNAP and then compared.

Since the two new farms were not part of the original group, they cannot be measured for continual improvement. However, Farm 7 (in Figure 2) has an overall farm average PI of 1.06, which is the lowest of any of the farms evaluated. Farm 8 is well below the 2016 average. These two members are doing an excellent job of implementing conservation farming practices.

Figure 3 shows the comparison of the SnapPlus plan generated in 2016 v. 2018. All three farms have a lower PI in 2018 than they did in 2016. This is important but not as telling as comparing the percentage of fields with low PI's to the fields with higher PI’s. As shown in the data, Farm 1 increased the percentage of fields with a PI of 0, 1 or 2 from 77 percent to 86 percent. Farm 3 also had a big improvement in the percentage of low PI fields, but Farm 2 had a decrease in low testing fields but also a decrease in the overall farm phosphorus index.

All farms in this table show improvement. Two of the farms were above the 2016 average of 2.33.

The final analysis is probably the most important and, in my opinion, the best way to measure improvement. That said, it is more work. In Figure 4, we evaluate Farm 4 to understand what the data means. The first column is the 2018 whole farm PI of 2.06/acre. The second column is the 2016 SnapPlus file updated into the 2018 SnapPlus program; this had a PI of 2.33. The final column is the 2016 PI from the old version of SnapPlus and shows 2.03.

When the 2016 data is updated into the 2018 program, the PI increased. All the data in the file is exactly the same; the only difference is the program. This means when using the updated version of SnapPlus and the phosphorus index is the same between 2016 and 2018, you have adopted practices that reduced your risk of phosphorus loss.

All farms showed improvement from 2016 to 2018, but the smaller improvements in Figure 3 are not accurate because the original data was not updated to the new version. The three farms with updated plans (Figure 4) saw an average reduction in the risk of phosphorus loss of 0.21. That is impressive.

This data answers the question of whether PPF members are showing continual environmental improvement. These six farms have.

The question on the impact of cover crops is that when planted on fields under farming systems that have a higher potential for soil and nutrient loss, cover crops can reduce the risk of phosphorus loss.

Good job, PPF members. Keep working on continuous environmental improvement.
PPF wants to connect members with equipment with those who may have an interest in using it to increase adoption of conservation practices. We have put together a directory of members to help!

From no-till drills, vertical tillage tools, interseeders and more, members have a variety of equipment available for rent. There are also members who own the equipment and are willing to do custom work. Finally, the directory includes a list of members who are interested in hiring those who own the equipment.

Take advantage of your PPF membership and the opportunity to implement more conservation practices on your farm with the help of fellow members. Check out the directory on our website at peninsulapridefarms.org/member-equipment-directory.