



PENINSULA FARMER

Farming with pride | The official newsletter of Peninsula Pride Farms

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peninsulapridefarms.org



PPF members gathered to learn about grass waterways at Sam Kinnard's farm in July. Read about these events on page 6.

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Local farmers, government agencies collaborate on fall manure hauling

By **Steve Schauer** for PPF

It seems there has always been this notion that government agencies and farmers do not see eye-to-eye or work together. This is clearly not the case in Kewaunee and southern Door counties.

During a Sept. 11 meeting, attendees discussed best practices for the annual fall manure hauling season. The aim: Do

what is best for the land and water.

During the one-hour meeting, local farmers sat down with representatives from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Kewaunee County Land and Water Conservation Department, and Door County Soil and Water Conservation Department

to review regulations and practices. The farmers are members of Peninsula Pride Farms (PPF), a nonprofit farmer-led watershed conservation group committed to protecting and improving water quality through innovative farming practices. PPF organized the meeting, the second in as many years.

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“The safety of our neighborhood and our environment is taken very, very seriously by farmers,” PPF President Don Niles said. “With the technology and the tools, we have available, like the detailed weather reports and maps, we can do a better job in our fields and be more conscious of the land and water.

“It is important for each farmer in the fall before manure is spread to work together with other farmers and the regulatory agencies to make sure we are all on the same page. We all need to make sure our plans are consistent with the expectations of our neighbors and regulators.”

Peninsula Pride Farms is a nonprofit organization of dairy and crop farmers and corporate members committed to protecting and improving ground and surface water in Kewaunee and southern Door counties in Wisconsin. The group leverages the ingenuity of the agricultural community, university research and scientists to implement practices with measurable outcomes.

The use of no-till and cover crops were talked about extensively at the meeting. The practices, which limit disturbance of the soil and keep a growing crop on the fields year-round, improve soil structure, reduce erosion and can extend the time farmers need for field work. Those efforts make a difference in the short-term as well as for next year’s crop.

“Last year was an extremely wet year and a very challenging time for farmers,” Niles said. “We asked the regulators to meet with us ahead of the hauling season to review their concerns and ideas, and our plans. We wanted to make sure we had the best plans and practices in place. Even though this is a dryer year with more opportunities, there are still concerns. This meeting is just a pregame warmup, so to speak, to the hours of field work ahead.”

The meeting was important because everybody in the community cares about the land and water, said Davina Bonness, Kewaunee County Land and Water Conservation director.

“Farmers are the ones that are taking care of our land and water and managing it in the fields. So, if we are not all working together — the public, farmers, government agencies and our entire community — we will not have clean water,” she said. “If we work together with farmers to implement the best management practices to safely distribute manure during the fall, it will lead to cleaner waterways. It is really about the communication between all entities. We all must work together because it is not just one person watching over the land, it is all of us.”



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Continuous improvement with partner support

By Don Niles, board president



Hello and happy autumn 2020. After surviving the enormous challenges of 2019, it is a wonderful break to be in the fields with this year's conditions. Harvest is progressing smoothly and steadily up and down the peninsula. We are chopping corn when it is ready and gearing up for getting fields fertilized at the proper time, without hardly breaking a sweat.

The leadership of PPF has been working hard and pushing the organization to continuously change in our own right. We have started a program called "Conservation Conversations" that many of you are already aware of. These are brief monthly meetings, occurring on different farms, which feature a discussion on a conservation practice on that farm. These short events at the end of the workday have been very popular with members and will certainly be continued.

Another first, is we were able to offer

cost-share funds to non-members who are interested in what we are doing and wanted to try new conservation practices themselves. This was made possible with the generous support of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), which remains a solid supporter of PPF and what we do. (See page 5 for an update from TNC).

Many of you may recall that we instituted a new program in 2019, where we met with both county conservation departments, as well as the DNR immediately before beginning of fall manure hauling. The meeting last year was very well attended, which was a strong indicator of the level of concern farmers and regulators both had with the weather conditions of the time. We repeated a similar meeting this year as well (story on page 1).

This time attendance was considerably lighter due mainly to the fact that everybody was chopping on a beautiful day. However, a couple of things at this meeting caught my attention. One was a reminder from all departments about

the importance of pre-tillage to break up conduits in dry cracked soil. The other thing was the enthusiastic appreciation all departments have for the more common practice of farmers and applicators calling local government agencies ahead of time to inform them where, when and how we plan on applying manure in the upcoming days. This is strictly voluntary and not a requirement. However, it allows for the efficient use of their time if they know where activity is planned and can set their schedule accordingly.

The point was even brought up that if they receive a complaint on the phone it's nice to be able to say, "I was just out there checking on things a couple hours ago and things look great." This informal practice is just one more example of continuous improvement and transparency.

Thanks to all PPF members and supporters for your continued efforts to improve.

Enroll in the PPF cost-share program Forms are due Nov. 15

PPF is once again offering members an incentive program to encourage conservation practices. This is a great opportunity to try different practices on your farm with reduced risk. All types and sizes of farms are encouraged to enroll.

2020 cost-share programs:

- Cover crops — \$30/acre, max 50 acres
- Harvestable buffer — \$325/acre, max of 4.6 acres
- Depth of soil over bedrock — max \$1,500/member
- Split nitrogen application — \$10/acre, max \$1,500/member
- Low-disturbance manure application — max \$1,500/member

Download the enrollment form with full details at peninsulapridefarms.org under "About us" > "Cost Share Program" and submit no later than Nov. 15. Questions? Contact Nick Guilette at (920) 304-6293 or nickguilette9@gmail.com, Nathen Nysse at (920) 858-5756 or nathen@tilthag.com or Adam Barta (920) 255-2703 or acbarta@riocreekfeedmill.com.

New edge-of-field monitoring research in Kewaunee County

By **Eric Cooley**, co-director, Discovery Farms

Discovery Farms® monitored three edge-of-field surface water sites and two tile drainage sites at Pagel's Ponderosa Dairy from 2003 to 2008. Through this research, information was gained on the timing and magnitude of soil and nutrient loss from cropped fields, weather and soil conditions that generated surface runoff and tile flow, and the effect of cropping system, tillage, manure/fertilizer application and other management factors that influenced soil and nutrient loss on the farm. The late John Pagel and other farm managers used this information to make management tweaks to mitigate future losses. Pagel's Ponderosa was one of the original Discovery Farms sites selected for Discovery Farms research and John was a leader in conservation, as he always strived for "continuous improvement" on the farm.

In fall 2018, a joint venture between Discovery Farms, the Door Kewaunee Demo Farms Network, Peninsula Pride Farms and the Kewaunee County Land Conservation Department brought edge-of-field monitoring back to Kewaunee County. The study will evaluate the effectiveness of cover crops, no-till, and grassed waterways to mitigate soil and nutrient loss from cropland at the edge-of-field scale. The project is partially funded and guided by the USDA-NRCS via the EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and will run for a minimum of 5 years (2019-2023).

Two edge-of-field monitoring



stations were installed to measure and collect runoff samples from monitored basins. Samples are collected by Kewaunee County Land Conservation Department staff with remote technical assistance from the United States Geological Survey, and are analyzed for soil, phosphorus and nitrogen. The sites are located at two different farms: Deer Run Dairy LLC, operated by Duane and Derek Ducat and Dale Bogart and Augustian Farms LLC, operated by Aaron, Todd and Ginanne Augustian. These farms are implementing conservation practices including re-engineering waterways and planting cover crops to observe how they can reduce runoff.

With the record setting precipitation and intense rain events in the past few years, we have observed elevated gully, sheet and rill erosion in Kewaunee County and across Wisconsin. As intense rain events are becoming more common with climate change, conservation practices to reduce soil loss, both in the field and concentrated flow channels, will become increasingly important to maintain crop productivity and

reduce environmental impact.

In the summer of 2020, waterways at both Augustian Farms and Deer Run Dairy were renovated. At Augustian Farms, an existing waterway was redesigned to NRCS technical standards both upstream and downstream of the monitoring location. At Deer Run Dairy, a historic waterway was revamped to NRCS technical standards downstream of the monitoring site, as past erosion had caused parallel flow channels outside of the waterway and reduced the effectiveness of the waterway. Additionally, a concentrated flow channel upstream of the monitoring site was graded and seeded to protect from gully erosion at Deer Run Dairy. Future water quality monitoring at both sites will compare soil and nutrient loss to determine the effectiveness of renovating concentrated flow channels at both sites.

We look forward to sharing more data from this project with producers.

To receive the latest information from the Discovery Farms Program, visit www.uwdiscoveryfarms.org and click "Subscribe for updates."

The Nature Conservancy partnership with Peninsula Pride Farms brings value to all

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



Healthy soils are the cornerstone of life. They are one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems on Earth and produce

95 percent of our food and filter our drinking water. The global demand for food will increase by more 60 percent in the next 30 years, creating one of the century's paramount challenges—and one of the greatest conservation opportunities today.

Farmers in Wisconsin are rising to meet that challenge in many ways, including focusing on improving soil health. There are currently 31 farmer-led groups in Wisconsin whose members are learning from each other how soil health practices can turn-around degraded soil health. Through the Dairy Strong Sustainability Alliance, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is partnering with five groups including Peninsula Pride Farms in Door and Kewaunee counties.

As stewards of the land, farmers are among our greatest allies in conservation, but they need help. The Nature Conservancy is working across science, business and policy sectors to empower America's farmers with

the tools and resources they need to protect soil health and water quality while meeting global demands for food.

TNC's support for Peninsula Pride Farms and the other five farmer-led groups can be summarized in three ways.

Each year, TNC provides private funding to help support the groups' cost-share programs. These private funds are used to match funds from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, thereby doubling the cost-share funds available for members to test new practices to build soil health and improve water quality.

Second, through DSSA, TNC helps the groups organize their annual activities. This includes attending monthly board meetings and field days, developing new ways to encourage participation in the cost-share program, reporting on the groups' success each year by tracking acres of soil health practices and improved nutrient management, and helping the groups tell their story of how conservation can benefit farmers' bottom lines and agricultural sustainability.

Finally, TNC has and continues to advocate for support and funding for DATCP's Producer-led Watershed Grant Program each year. In 2020, the program awarded \$750,000 in grants to groups like Peninsula Pride Farms.

The Nature Conservancy's goal is to reduce nutrient runoff from cropland into U.S. waters by 20 percent by 2025. One way to do this is to improve soil health and nutrient management practices on more than half of U.S. cropland. The Conservancy has staff in many U.S. states creating networks of partnerships with farmers, ranchers and leaders in the agriculture industry to advance solutions that will make a difference.

Farmers in Peninsula Pride and the other farmer-led groups are demonstrating that, with widespread adoption of soil health and nutrient management practices, U.S. farmers can meet growing demands for food, while improving water quality and improving their bottom lines. We are proud to partner with Peninsula Pride Farms' members and many others to build rich, fertile soil and resilient farms that benefit us all.



Conservation Conversations connect members

Members share and learn at new events

By Steve Schauer & Lauren Brey for PPF

Farmers talk conservation, share success and challenges

Trying a variety of practices and spreading out risk has worked well for dairy farmer Paul Cornette.

Cornette, who owns and operates Cornette Dairy LLC in Kewaunee County, hosted the first “Conservation Conversation” event put on by Peninsula Pride Farms. The casual events are intended to allow farmers to gather for one hour each month to talk about what they’re trying on their farms for conservation.

Cornette farms 900 acres and grows all the forages needed for the farm’s dairy cattle, plus grain corn, wheat and straw. He started experimenting with broadcasting cover crops in the summer of 2018 and got more interested in double cropping and planting into green. He experimented with no-till corn last year, which worked well.

Partnering with a neighboring farm, Guilette Farms, owned by Nick and Aaron Guilette, allowed Cornette to try planting into green without modifying his own equipment.

“I wasn’t ready to spend the money to modify my planter just to try 20 acres. Now, I’m ready to spend the money to modify my planter and plan to do up to 100 acres of no-till next year.” His plans for the future also include planting into green and planting cover crops this fall and possibly interseeding to facilitate planting into green.

“It takes playing around with it to know where you need to be,” he said.

The event focused on sharing experiences with no-till planting corn into a green living crop of alfalfa. The field where the event was held was light, well-drained ground.

“This is probably the most consistent corn field I have,” Cornette said. “This field has taken the weather better than the field we’ve planted conventionally.”

“I think you can get away with less than ideal conditions as long as you get seed in,” Nick Guilette said. “The living roots make a big difference.”

Other attendees also shared their experiences with planting into green and cover crops. A topic of discussion was how to incorporate manure application into no-till systems.

There was also discussion around what practices farms should try. Nathen Nysse, agronomist with Tilth Agronomy, advised that every farm is different, so it is important to discuss farm goals and needs and have a plan in place for a crop year. Know what you’re trying to achieve before you start trying things. However, flexibility is also important to factor in weather.

The group also had a chance to look at the planter Guilette’s had modified.

“That’s what this organization (PPF) is about: highlighting different tools in the toolbox,” Guilette said.

The living crop sucks up the wa-



ter and gives soil structure to carry equipment across the field.

“Planting into green has really opened my eyes,” Guilette said. “The soil health and water quality benefits are real.”

Cornette encouraged other farmers to try a new practice. “It’s handled this wet weather unbelievably well,” Cornette said. “After hearing other people’s stories and seeing what I saw, I’d say stick with it and give it a chance.”

Farmers use grass waterways to keep water clean

There are many ways a farmer can help the water in their fields become cleaner downstream and grass waterways is one practice being used by Nor-Kin Dairy Farms.

PPF hosted their second Conservation Conversation on July 28 in one of Sam Kinnard’s fields in Kewaunee County. Those that attended discussed the value and use of grass waterways.

“The main reason for the grass waterway is to keep water within our fields and help with the flow of water,” Kinnard said.

Kinnard and his wife, Shari, have used grass waterways for decades to help maintain water on their fields. Sam was taught early on by his father the importance of conservation and sustaining the land and has continued that mindset throughout his 270 acres. While a grass waterway can



significantly reduce erosion, it also provides a way for crops to soak in the nutrients.

Grass waterways appear to be a hands-off practice, but they must be maintained yearly or the water won't move properly through the field.

"Maintaining the grass waterway is important and I try to mow it once or twice a year depending on the weather conditions," Kinnard explained.

Kinnard recently replaced a section of his grass waterway in one of his fields on Thayse Road and shared the reasoning for why he decided to do this.

"This part of our grass waterway, with all the rain had washed out, and what we had wasn't doing its job," he said. "We redid this section of our waterway by regrading and taking a lot of stones out before reseeding it to help with the water flow. We also redid some of the tile line to help with the water flow underground. Doing all these things has helped with maintaining the waterway and sustaining our water."

Farmers over the years have placed a great emphasis on sustaining and conserving the land they own and operate, not only for their families but for the community around them.

"The reason we are talking conservation with farmers is because the small things can make a big difference downstream," said Nathan Nysse from Tilth Agronomy who helped lead the conversation. "We all work

together and are doing this for the environment. The water in this waterway flows through to the neighbor's yard and if we can do our part to keep this cleaner here, it ends up being a lot cleaner water downstream. We want to emphasize the small projects farmers are doing to keep their environment better for everyone else."

Peninsula Pride Farms members learn importance of interseeding

Cover crop interseeding has numerous benefits for farmland soil, and those in attendance at PPF's third Conservation Conversation of the summer on Sept. 2 walked away with a better understanding of what cover crop mixes to choose.

Matt and Craig Oehmichen from Short Lane Ag Supply in Colby, Wis., gave an hour-long presentation to nearly 30 people, the largest group to attend a PPF Conservation Conversation this year, to discuss in detail the dos and don'ts of interseeding.

The brothers went in depth about how interseeding a cover crop is a symbiotic relationship with the harvesting crop in the soil. They also displayed various cover crop plants that were planted in Brey Cycle Farms' corn field adjacent to the gathering, including seven top turnip, daikon radish and crimson clover.

"We have to remember there isn't one thing that stands out with a cover crop, because it's about the entire ecosystem," Matt Oehmichen said.

"Cover crops help soil biology, worms and other insects and moving nutrients up and down in the soil."

Participants were shown a slide that demonstrated a field with various rows of cover crops. In the first six rows, there was only one species planted, then one row of three seeds mixed, one row with five and a row with an eight-seed mix. It was proven that at least a five-seed mix is needed to have a beneficial cover crop for the soil and the harvesting crop. The rows with a single seed planted washed away in the rain.

"This was our first year using interseeding on a field that was no-till corn after triticale was harvested in early June," Jacob Brey said. "One benefit we have seen in our field is increased water retention and building organic matter. The field we planted the cover crop on has shallow depth to bedrock. What we are trying to do here, because we are not able to apply manure, is build organic matter and increase the soil health."

Interseeding into a corn crop was discussed at length. The best time to plant was when the corn was at a V2 or V3 growth stage. Different application methods of a cover crop depend on the individual farm, and the soil structure varies immensely from farm to farm. Oehmichen said it is more important to be concerned with root mass than what is growing on top because of the organic matter that is created.



PENINSULA PRIDE FARMS

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Your input needed: Member conservation practice survey *Responses due Nov. 15*

From PPF

PPF requests members take a brief survey to understand what conservation practices are being done on the land.

Through survey results, we demonstrate the effort farmers are making to improve soil health and water quality. The conservation practices implemented by members not only improve water quality, but also improve productivity of farms through increased yields and reduced input costs. These practices can help the

land withstand extreme weather events.

The surveys provide a measurement for PPF to compare efforts from year to year. The conservation practice survey is a quick and simple way for farmer-led groups to gauge farmer engagement and interest in practices, as well as for our group to share the positive impacts we are making on the environment in our community.

The 2020 survey is under way. Members can expect a call or

text, as we near the deadline of Nov. 15.

It is critical that we have 100 percent participation.

To complete the survey, go to peninsulapridefarms.org and under "About us" select "Member survey."

Questions? Contact Steve Richter at srichter@tnc.org or (608) 577-3076.



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