



PENINSULA FARMER

Farming with pride | The official newsletter of Peninsula Pride Farms

July 2021

peninsulapridefarmsinc.org



President's Message:
Encouraging days ahead
Page 3

Partner Updates:
ETL testing
Page 4

Feature Story:
Confidence in no-till
Page 6

'Take a chance': Peninsula Pride Farms members innovate with cover crops

By **Steve Schauer** for PPF

Mike Vandenhouten was blunt in telling farmers at a Peninsula Pride Farms field event it was time to make a change and improve the area's soil health.

"There comes a time when you have to take a chance and quit doing things the way we have traditionally been doing it. I think there is a better way to do it and

this is an excellent opportunity for me to give it a try. I have some reservations, but we will see what happens," Vandenhouten said about planting oats as a cover crop last fall and no-till planting this spring.

The Conservation Conversation, held on April 28, had nearly two dozen farmers looking at the soil biomass deep in a soil

pit with Jamie Patton, senior outreach specialist in the Nutrient and Pest Management Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She showed farmers what is happening below the surface and why cover crops are needed for living roots year-round.

(continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1)

“There were 100 pounds of oats planted last fall and there is a tremendous amount of biomass in this field,” Patton said. “We don’t need to till this in. Many farmers get anxious about seeing this much residue out here and as long as our equipment is setup for this, it is going to be no problem to no-till plant.”

As Patton dug into the soil, she showed the immense cover crop root structure and numerous earthworms. The soil was a dark, rich black color and crumbled as Patton broke it apart. She also showed a clear soil demarcation where at one time it was conventionally tilled compared to today’s practices.

During 2019, Vandenhouten had a 30-acre field that was too wet to plant corn. After it dried in mid-July he planted tillage radish and oats as a cover crop. A year later he planted soybeans in that same field and had a record year with 72 bushels an acre. Vandenhouten had never had 50 bushels an acre of soybeans on that field.

“I can’t give all the credit to cover crops, but it does have me intrigued as to how much of a difference the cover crop did have,” he said. “I am going to continue



cover crops and see if I have good results like that again.”

Nathen Nysse, an independent crop adviser for Tilth Agronomy, asked Vandenhouten what his communication has been with those who have no-till planters and experience with oats as a cover crop.

“That’s the greatest thing about being a member of Peninsula Pride Farms, there is such a network of people,” Vandenhouten said. “There are farmers who have tried

different practices like this that have had succeeded. By talking to them it gives me a great deal of comfort that I can do this too and hopefully have the same success they have.”

To view Mike Vandenhouten and Jamie Patton’s interview from the field day visit: peninsulapridefarmsinc.org and click on news.

Cost-share attracts new members

Since the beginning, The Nature Conservancy has been a valued partner in helping us achieve our conservation goals and try new practices. Their generous support through funding has allowed us to offer different cost-share programs and subsequently attract new members each year, and in 2020 our membership grew again.

We would like to welcome Will Boeder, Dave and Dennis Dalebroux, Kerry J Denil, Brent Eisenmon, Scott Jeanquart, Dale Mueller, Jordan Nowak, Johannes Wakker and Joe Zellner.

Each year we offer cost-share programs and in 2020 we developed a first-time cover crop cost-share program with funds from The Nature Conservancy. Each farmer that signed up received \$30 acre, with a maximum of 40 acres.

See our 2021 cost-share program on page 3 and watch for details about other opportunities.

Encouraging days are ahead

By **Don Niles**, board president



Greetings once again from PPF. I hope all is going well for you. The ideal conditions of last fall have carried over into the new year and for most of us spring work went smoothly. This has been a great fall and spring in terms of trying new practices and seeing the results without Mother Nature throwing curve balls at us. It has been a confidence building year for innovation.

I find it very exciting that most of you are using your PPF cost sharing dollars to try new things. By far and large, most members will cost share a practice once or twice. After that they feel confidence in the practice and move on to something else. That is exactly the spirit of innovation that will make our organization successful. Keep an eye on the various cost shared practices available to you. Also, if you are thinking about a practice that is not currently cost shared and would like it to be let us know. Contact a PPF board member and share your idea, we may be able to help.

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the “New Member Cost Share” program, which was first introduced last year thanks to an additional grant from The Nature Conservancy, was very well received. We plan on something similar for this year. Let us know of any individuals that you think may be interested; we would be happy to hear from them.

It is interesting to have also received several requests lately from non-ag groups to discuss what PPF is up to. There is a lot of interest among people who do not farm, to find out how and why things may look different in neighboring farm fields. I am happy to accommodate these requests to spread the message of what we are doing and why we are doing it. Also, our cost share field signs are helping. However, there is nothing more effective than you, yourself, taking the time to answer a question or two as to what you are doing and why you are doing it. These are great opportunities when they happen. Nobody can tell your story better than you can.

Don

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

PPF is 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.

2021 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
- Nitrogen Inhibitor/Stabilizer — \$10/acres, max 50 acres

Download the enrollment form with full details at peninsulapridefarmsinc.org under “About us” > “Cost Share Program” and submit no later than Oct. 15. Questions? Contact Nick Guilette at 920-304-6293 or nick.guilette@ebertent.com; Nathen Nysse at 920-858-5756 or nathen@tilthag.com; Adam Barta 920-255-2703 or acbarta@riocreekfeedmill.com; Todd Koss at 920-255-3303 or btkoss14151@yahoo.com

Discovery Farms to test equilibrium tension lysimeters (ETLs)

By **Ryan Heiderman**, UW-Madison Division of Extension Discovery Farms Program



Hello Peninsula
Pride,

My name is Ryan Heiderman, and I was recently hired as the new Nitrogen Projects Coordinator with UW Discovery Farms. I am a UW-Madison alum with a degree in soil science. My interests are in applied agronomic and ecological research, which can provide producers and land managers with the knowledge and tools to make informed, profitable and environmentally-sound management decisions. I am excited to be a part of the Discovery Farms program and to begin working with farmers across Wisconsin.

Since 2015, Discovery Farms has collaborated with farmers across the state to conduct on-farm nitrogen (N) assessments to better understand nitrogen use efficiency (NUE). Benchmarks from data collected on more than 300 fields have been established for different NUE categories ranging from low to high efficiency. These benchmarks allow producers to assess and compare the efficiency of their current N management plans with those on other farms in the state.

In general, these NUE calculations are ratios of outputs to inputs with the simplest calculations of NUE being yield, or N content of harvested yield, divided by the amount of N applied. A more detailed determination of NUE utilizes zero-N test strips, which allows



Kevin Masarik of UW-Stevens Point Center for Watershed Science and Education shared this photo of himself installing an equilibrium tension lysimeter.

for a better understanding of the soil's ability to supply N absent additional fertilizer or manure inputs. Comparisons between NUE calculations under current management with that of the zero-N test strip can show the true economic value of the gain in yield from N application. Discovery Farms encourages producers to participate in this relatively simple NUE monitoring effort and can provide on-farm support for field trial installation. Calculating NUE in your fields can allow you to understand potential economic and environment impacts of shifts in your N management.

While NUE is a powerful tool which can provide a simple assessment of N use by crops, it does not explicitly quantify N leaching losses, which may negatively impact groundwater. In particular, there is concern of groundwater contamination of nitrate from agricultural and other non-point sources.

Nitrate contamination happens when

this highly soluble, negatively charged form of N leaches beyond the crop root zone and enters local aquifers. To better understand nitrate leaching under different farm management practices, Discovery Farms will soon be installing research trials to measure in-field drainage and nitrate leaching below the root zone with the use of equilibrium tension lysimeters (ETLs). An ETL is basically a 'bucket', equipped with drainage flow measurement and sampling instruments, which is buried below the root zone of an undisturbed soil profile. ETLs maintain the natural flow paths of water by matching the matric potential, or the adhesive attraction of water to the soil matrix, of the surrounding soil by utilizing a vacuum pump. An ETL can continuously measure year-round drainage, as well as collect soil water samples, at specified intervals, to be measured in the lab for nitrate concentration.

Discovery Farms will install ETLs this fall in a Pepin County field to better understand the impacts these practices have on nitrate leaching. Findings from this work and additional future monitoring sites will be used by groundwater scientists and regulatory personnel, farmers, farm advisers, local government personnel and community stakeholders interested in groundwater, public health and agriculture.

For more information about Discovery Farms and the nitrogen related projects visit uwdiscoveryfarms.org.

Conservation progress impacts public perception of agriculture

By Steven Schauer for PPF



Bob Bultman

Agriculture is more than just farmers working the land to grow and harvest crops each year. It's about taking care of the soil that grows those crops which feed our local communities and those thousands of miles away.

Bob Bultman is learning more about what farmers in Door County are doing to preserve and make the soil healthier. The Door County board supervisor and member of the Land Conservation Committee attended a Peninsula Pride Farms Conservation Conversation field event in late April to learn more about cover crops and soil biology.

“Regenerative agriculture is something I have been reading a lot about,” Bultman said. “Restoring our soils and maintaining high levels of soil fertility is within our abilities. It's a matter of making decisions that keep the soil life healthy. We live in a country where people who work the land have broad latitude in their choices and intensities of land practices. Intensification of agricultural practices increases stressors on the soil health ecosystem and some are trying to play catch up with better management systems. It was really uplifting to see that people really want to learn about regenerative agriculture and the PPF event was just a small sampling.”



Farmers and the public attend a Peninsula Pride Farms Conservation Conversation to learn about soil health.

Members of PPF have made a collaborative effort to protect, nurture and sustain the precious soil, water and air in the Door Peninsula. They have made conservation advancements each year since the group was formed in 2016. Most recently, an analysis showed members implemented 18,246 acres of cover crops and 21,310 acres of conservation tillage (strip or no-till). They also have miles of harvestable buffer strips that protect waterways from potential harmful runoff.

“There are always opportunities to do things better and my hats off to the older farmers who are open enough to try these regenerative practices,” Bultman said. “It's a credit to them for getting outside their comfort zone and listening to a new perspective or seeing a new way of farming. It's a credit to the folks who do stay open to learning more and I think learning keeps you young.”

PPF's Conservation Conversation

in April was hosted by Mike Vandenhouten and attended by a variety of younger and older farmers, and members of the public who wanted to learn more about soil health. The informal Conservation Conversations began in 2020 as a way to connect farmers with each other and the public to discuss and demonstrate groundbreaking conservation practices.

“I think anything we can do to connect people to farmers is a good thing,” Bultman said. “Far too many people don't know where their food comes from. The more PPF can do to have these sorts of events the public can attend and learn is a good thing. I salute PPF for welcoming everybody to educational events. It is important that the public comes and learns as well. Learning new things keeps you young and fresh and flexible. We need to be flexible because it's what leads us to being resilient.”



Confidence in no-till pays dividends

By Steve Schauer for PPF

Aaron Augustian knew when he decided to no-till four years ago he was taking a gamble on his farm. Fast forward to today and he isn't deterred by the naysayers but has the confidence to talk with other farmers about why no-till is increasing his profit margins and saving time.

"You must be confident in what you are doing," Augustian said in his no-till corn field. "You just put your blinders on and earplugs in and don't worry about what your neighbors are saying. You need to let the crop show the results. Everyone is chasing bushels per acre and at the end of the day it is more about margin per acre. We are all learning together and are only going to get better at this."

Augustian was one of nearly two

dozen farmers at a Peninsula Pride Farms Conservation Conversation, held on May 25, who discussed the advantages of no-till conservation practices and learning from failures. Augustian, whose farm is less than 2 miles from Lake Michigan, decided to start no-tilling his land four years ago because of his proximity to the lake. He has noticed there is better water infiltration and when there are heavy rains, he has almost no runoff.

"The soil structure is improving slowly," Augustian said. "We are noticing that when it rains we have more infiltration of rainwater that stays on the soil. Along with manure application, it seems to stick to the soil better with the growing cover crop out here."

“

What's the topsoil worth? It's worth something and it's worth a lot.

- Nick Guilette, PPF

Augustian started with 25 percent of his acres under no-till practices before advancing to more acres. He is now at 95 percent doing no-till and planting corn into green. He hasn't no-till planted soybeans yet but is preparing to do so next year.

Nick Guilette who works at Ebert Enterprises was among several experts



ends

who provided insights at the gathering.

“No-till offers some flexibility when it comes to rotation planting,” Guilette said. “When we start talking about soil health benefits, we notice a lot of things: better infiltration, better soil structure, and fewer passes over the field leads to fuel savings. There are several benefits that come quickly when a farm decides to practice no-tilling.”

Increasing bushels per acre isn’t the ultimate goal when implementing a no-till conservation strategy, Guilette said.

“Yield is one thing, but margin per acre is also important,” he said. “There is fuel savings, and Aaron’s field didn’t have to get tilled twice or even three times. There was a no-till pass and

maybe a little bit more money was used on the herbicide program. There is some scouting that needs to occur to see if weeds are under control or potentially if there are army or cut worms. It will take a little bit more boots-on-the-ground scouting, but that is a savings per acre.”

Augustian talked about the fall of 2019 when, despite record rains, his no-till fields carried his equipment and had very little ruts.

Guilette emphasized that point. “What’s the topsoil worth? If you ask 10 different people you will get 10 different answers,” he said. “It’s worth something and it’s worth a lot. I will venture to say I doubt we had any erosion out here. It’s not even a consideration. If we get a 3-inch rain

and this was conventionally tilled, I don’t know what would happen.”



Corn growing in Augustian’s no-till field.



PENINSULA PRIDE FARMS

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peninsulapridefarms.org

Join us at a future Conservation Conversation

The fourth Tuesday of every month we host an informal event in a field to discuss a conservation practice, the successes and failures and what to do differently in the future.

This year we hosted events in Brussels and Carlton to talk about oats as a cover crop and no-till planing corn into green. We look forward to seeing you at our next Conservation Conversation. Visit PeninsulaPrideFarmsInc.org for event information.

