

Beaver, Indiana, and Westmoreland Districts head to Clinton County to Learn about Soil Health

Submitted by Beaver County Conservation District.

On June 9, 2016, Jeff Leindecker, Leya Ramer, and Dan Griffith from Beaver County, Indiana County, and Westmoreland Conservation Districts (respectively) met with Lisa Blazure (Clinton County Conservation District) at Schrack Farms in Loganton, Clinton County, to exchange ideas and information, and observe soil health in action. The operation is a 1000 head dairy with 2200 crop acres, many of which have been no tilled for forty years with the addition of cover crops in the last five years. Jim Harbach, Clinton CD farmer director and partner in Schrack Farms, and Gerard Troisi, crop advisor and production consultant, explained the benefits of keeping a living crop on the land twelve months a year.

Soil health indicators such as water infiltration and percent soil organic matter were explained, and rates between the counties were discussed. The group dug around in several soil types and crop rotations as Lisa, Jim, and Gerard narrated the below-ground action.

“What I gained from this most was having the opportunity to feel and smell healthy soil,” said Jeff Leindecker. “Also, the trip reinforced what I tell farmers in Beaver County...the agencies have done a fantastic job in minimizing soil loss, and now we are showing you that not only can we virtually eliminate soil loss, but we can actually build soil.”

Lisa Blazure commented, “It was nice to have the interaction and sharing of ideas with other District staff.”

Dan Griffith added, “What Schrack Farms demonstrates is that cover crops are indispensable to increase soil organic matter (SOM): when surface residue decomposes, very little of it actually makes it into the ground - most is volatilized into the air; even high residue crops - like grain corn - need cover crops to increase SOM; SOM only increases from the roots left in the soil - one third of the weight of the crop above ground will be what the roots weigh - they will decompose in the ground and stay there as carbon.”

Jim Harbach was a speaker at the 2016 Southwest PA No-Till/Soil Health Conference held in Latrobe, Westmoreland County. The 2017 Southwest PA No-Till/Soil Health Conference is scheduled for Wednesday, January 25, 2017, at St. Vincent College in Latrobe. Please contact Dan Griffith (dan@wcdpa.com) or Jeff Leindecker (jeff.leindecker@bccdpa.us) for more information.



Dan Griffith, Jeff Leindecker, Lisa Blazure, and Jim Harbach examine the soil characteristics in corn planted into rolled rye. Photo taken by Leya Ramer.



Jim Harbach and Leya Ramer discuss the contrast in soil moisture between uncovered and covered soil. Covered soil will retain more moisture and stay cooler in summer months than uncovered soil. Photo taken by Dan Griffith.