

Perry County Farmers Come Together to Share Ideas to Protect Chesapeake Bay Watershed

An innovative, grassroots concept promoted by the Perry County Conservation District to bring more awareness to no-till and cover crops has evolved into a successful tool for farmers throughout Perry County.

The two-year old workgroup relies on input and ideas from the agricultural community to increase the implementation of conservation tillage and cover crops throughout the county through farmer-to-farmer interaction, sharing knowledge and experience, building awareness, providing education, as well as creating a sustainable peer support network.

The no-till group typically meets for on farm sessions such as planter clinics, cover crop walks, innovative equipment demonstrations, and special topics/speakers. The meetings are designed to provide the latest information on no-till systems, and allow farmers to discuss current farming concerns with their neighbors. The group has grown to an active group of 20+ participants (with a mailing list of approximately 40) that meets 4-5 times a year, any level of experience is encouraged to join from beginner to 30+ years no-till experience.

With help from an enthusiastic farmer and PA No-till Alliance board member, Dave McLaughlin, and support from the PA No-till Alliance, Perry County Conservation District, PA West Branch Crop Management Association, Penn State Cooperative Extension, Joel C. Myers No-Till Consultant, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, USDA NRCS New Bloomfield Office and local equipment dealers, a the no-till peer group was formed to educate farmers about the benefits of no-till farming and provide support from experts in the field, as well as local farmers who had already successfully adopted the practice.

The use of no-till and cover crop systems has be shown to improve not only soil and water health, but also the economic health of the farming operation. Farmers using no-till spend less time in the field, and therefore spend less on fuel, equipment and labor costs. A community rife with thriving farm operations will attract supporting businesses such as feed, seed and equipment dealers, manure haulers, welding shops, etc. These small agricultural-based businesses will need employees, and provide additional tax revenue to the region.

