

2014

RECOGNIZING THE

CONSER-

CONSERVATION ACHIEVEMENTS

VATION

OF UNITED STATES

LEGACY

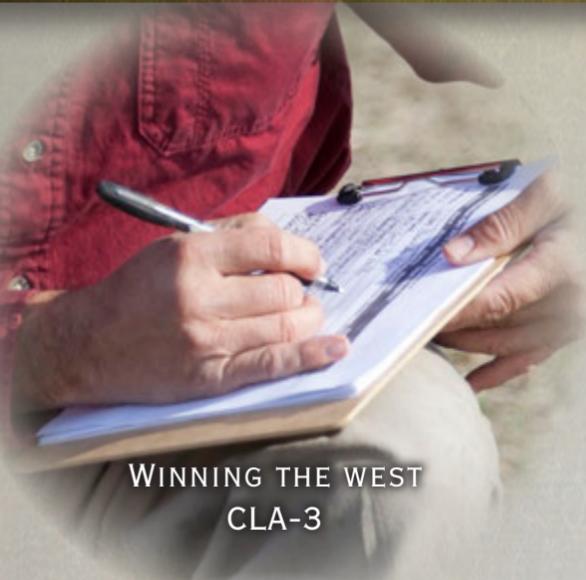
SOYBEAN FARMERS

AWARDS



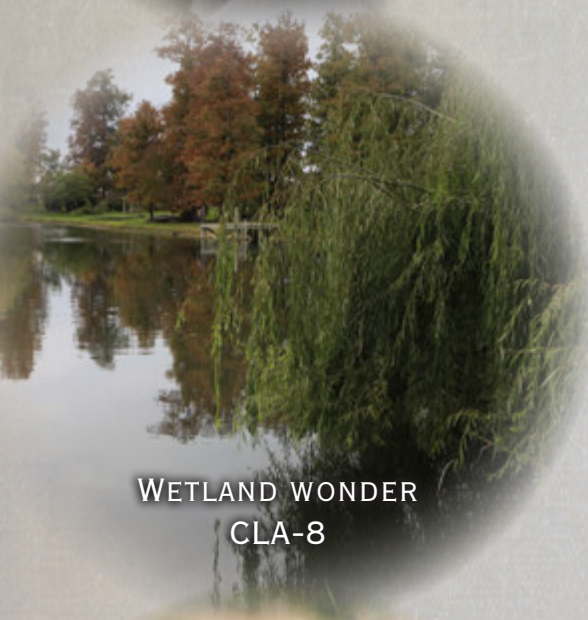
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2014
RECOGNIZING THE
CONSER-
VATION
CONSERVATION ACHIEVEMENTS
OF UNITED STATES
LEAGACY
SOYBEAN FARMERS
AWARDS

WINNING THE WEST
CLA-3



Soil and creek protection, less fertility, less tillage, cover crops, GPS precision, soil health, wetlands and ponds, wildlife habitat, consumer education and much more. As you read about these conservation efforts implemented by our award recipients, you'll understand their passion to build a successful and profitable legacy.

With great pride we congratulate three outstanding soybean producers, each a regional winner of the 2014 Conservation Legacy Awards:

MIDWEST REGION WINNER

DAVID AUSBERGER

NORTHEAST REGION WINNER

MARK AND PHYLLIS LEGAN

SOUTH REGION WINNER

JERRY PEERY

This special recognition is made possible thanks to the conservation commitment and support by the American Soybean Association (ASA), United Soybean Board (USB), BASF, Monsanto and *Corn+Soybean Digest*.

ASA President Ray Gaesser, a soybean farmer from Corning, Iowa, praised the 2014 regional winners of Conservation Legacy Awards saying, "These three winners are shining examples of how American farmers are dedicated and responsible stewards of the land, using sustainable practices while working to meet the demands of feeding an increasing global population."

"U.S. farmers have been constantly practicing sustainability and improving the

environmental practices used on our farms for over 200 years" says soy checkoff farmer-leader Doug Winter, a soybean farmer from Mill Shoals, IL.


"The Conservation Legacy Awards provide American farmers an opportunity to demonstrate their sustainability efforts to the U.S. public as well as to consumers and customers of our agricultural products around the world."

"Ultimately, farmers are the ones who make the difference in implementing the right conservation practice for their operation. We congratulate this year's winners", stated Nevin McDougall, Senior Vice President of Crop Protection for BASF. "We are committed to supporting farmers with continued investment in R&D to improve productivity in a sustainable manner, this year and in the years to come."

It's important to note that the world doesn't just need more food. It also needs better food that's more nutritious, says Michael Doane, Sustainable Agriculture Policy Lead for Monsanto. "And it needs to find ways to make the process of growing food more efficient and aligned with our environmental needs, so farmers use less water and land and better utilize things like fertilizer, herbicides and pesticides."

Corn+Soybean Digest is proud of our long-term commitment to recognize farmers who think differently about their conservation practices. "We hope that this annual showcase of award-winning conservation practices give all farmers ideas to implement on every field in order to leave an outstanding conservation legacy for decades to come," says Kurt Lawton, editor, *Corn+Soybean Digest*. ●

WETLAND WONDER
CLA-8



PASSING THE PASSION
CLA-12

Winning the west



BUFFER STRIPS AND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES PROTECT IOWA'S WEST BUTTRICK CREEK

West Buttrick Creek was a playground for David Ausberger as he grew up in Greene County, Iowa, along the banks of this silvery skein of water. It was more than just a place to swim and explore—West Buttrick also was a place a boy could hide away.

“Our farm was landlocked, so you didn’t hear any car noise, and couldn’t see any other houses,” Ausberger recalls. “It was easy to imagine that you were living in the 1850s.”

But as Ausberger grew up and began farming the land in the early 1990s, he soon learned that this stream was a thread that connected central Iowa farmers to a lot of folks

The Ausberger family maintains generous buffers and plants trees to improve water quality in West Buttrick Creek.

downstream. The creek flows into the Raccoon River, the source of drinking water for the city of Des Moines, located about 60 miles south.

“In the late 1990s, the Iowa Soybean Association approached growers in the West Buttrick Creek watershed with concerns about high nitrate levels,” Ausberger says. “We farmers needed to take the reins and do something about it.”

ISA helped him develop a written Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan to reduce nutrient losses. “Soon after, I began doing replicated strip trials, guided stalk testing, manure trials, nutrient benchmarking, and using satellite imagery and other methods to quantify the effectiveness of various practices that I use on my operation,” he says.

The Ausberger farm also features a number of acres in the Wetland Reserve Program, along with generous buffers in

sensitive areas along the creek. “We have planted around 30,000 trees in the riparian buffer on one 200-acre tract,” he points out.

And within the banks of the creek, one of the smallest species—the 3-inch-long Topeka shiner, an endangered minnow species—has been given a boost. “Dad has excavated a silted-in oxbow adjacent to West Buttrick Creek as Topeka shiner habitat,” Ausberger says. “We’re doing all we can to reduce our impact on West Buttrick Creek.”

NEVER-TILL

Ausberger credits his father, Bob, with directing the family farm toward environmental stewardship. “We have been no-till since 1981, when Dad and my cousin started the

idea,” he says. “I recall coming home from a high school vocational class and saying, ‘I think we need to look into this.’”

His father was already planning to use the technique in the upcoming growing season. “He was a step ahead of me, but it was nice that we were both thinking along the same lines,” Ausberger says. “We are now a strict no-till operation. In fact, it might be better described as ‘never-till.’ The only tillage we do is to smooth out the trenches from when we install tile lines or make tile repairs.”

The family takes seriously its commitment to stewardship of the land. Ausberger grows around 1,700 acres of corn and soybeans near Jefferson, Iowa, and he points out that there is only one stipulation in the contract for the land he rents from his father.

“Dad insists that I continue to be no-till,” Ausberger says. “The commitment to soil and water conservation is more than just lip service. We’re trying to protect the resources for future generations.”

Ausberger is officially recognized as a Certified Conservation Farmer, a title awarded through a new initiative from Iowa Conservation Connect, a consortium of conservation agencies.

“I straddle the line between being an economist, a businessman and a conservationist,” he observes. “I have noticed—and my banker has noticed—that using conservation methods



2014 CONSERVATION LEGACY AWARDS

MIDWEST REGION WINNER



Side-by-side strip trials compare nutrient sources from manure and compost in an on-farm research project.

has resulted in a pretty good return on investment. That fits in perfectly with my family's philosophy, a multigenerational philosophy, of conserving the soil and being good stewards of the land."

His efforts now extend beyond simply conserving the soil—Ausberger now is looking for ways to restore the soil. "Agriculture's so-called Brown Revolution is exciting to me," he says. "I am still on a corn-soybean rotation, but in recent years I have added cover crops to help with soil and water quality as well as disease, weed and insect management. I believe that having healthy soil will result in better returns with less loss. And it will make modern agriculture more appealing to others who consider themselves stakeholders in the environment that we impact."

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Cover crops are relatively new to the area, so Ausberger now

is focused on trying to learn what species work best, and how to manage them. "We would like to coordinate manure and compost applications over the top of cover crops to reduce nutrient loss from the manure, and to keep the soil microbes and earthworms happy and working year-round in the soil," he says.

He has strip trials underway in cooperation with the Iowa Soybean Association's On-Farm Network to find some of those answers. He seeded cereal rye by airplane over soybeans the first week of September. Now, in a set of side-by-side strip trials, Ausberger is comparing turkey compost to poultry litter and a control strip.

"We have been using poultry litter for about 20 years, so it will be interesting to see how crops respond to the different nutrients," he says. "The cover crops provide additional organic matter, and the root mat helps to prevent wind and

fying practices that I do with my own equipment on my own land will produce more valuable results for me than those produced by outside groups."

He found that cover crops allowed him to get back into the fields more quickly during 2013's wet spring. "The planter actually rode on top of the ground better, and didn't mud up as much as the fields that did not have cover crops," he observes. "That was a nice, and unexpected, side benefit to cover crops."

Ausberger is not surprised at the interaction between managing soil and managing water. "We learned a long time ago that good soil management complements good water management," he says. "We own tiling equipment and do a lot of our own drainage work. We have noticed, with the advent of yield monitors, the yield boost that we get from employing internal drainage in the fields. That fits in well with our no-till philosophy."

Good drainage systems and water control structures allow

water erosion while building soil structure. Once the cover crops are terminated, they should feed the subsequent crop as the nutrients from the cover crops are mineralized."

Ausberger likes the idea of investing in on-farm research. "My philosophy is that quanti-



A 2.1-megawatt commercial wind turbine on the Ausberger farm is part of a locally developed wind farm that produces enough energy to meet the need of the nearby town of Jefferson.



rainfall to infiltrate on his rolling fields, Ausberger says, thus reducing the potential for erosion. "We continue to install tile where it is needed," he adds. "We're also working with neighbors on a larger scale drainage project. It would eliminate an open drainage ditch that delivers water directly to the creek. A large water-retention structure would not only reduce soil erosion, but allow for denitrification to improve water quality before it enters the creek."

TELL THE STORY

"I think one of the most important things that modern farmers need to do is to reach out and discuss with people in town what we are doing for the environment," Ausberger says. "The prevailing attitude is that farmers don't understand or care about the environment. That's not true."

He promotes ag advocacy by offering to share his story, working with the Iowa Soy-

bean Association's Farm and Food Ambassador Team or simply talking with people he meets at a local grocery store. In August 2013, he hosted a white tablecloth dinner overlooking West Buttrick Creek. "We had a tent, and white tablecloths, and we had a

chef prepare a beautiful dinner," Ausberger says.

Nearly 40 guests, ranging from neighbors to city council members to state legislators, saw first-hand how a farmer can grow food while protecting the environment. They saw Ausberger's 2.1-megawatt wind

turbine, part of a locally developed wind farm that produces enough electricity to serve the town of Jefferson. And they learned that this farm, recognized as Tier III in the USDA-NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program, has a wildlife component on every tract.

"I think we farmers have a good story to tell, and we can do it," Ausberger says. "We need to let people know that we are out here working for them, and working for the environment."

Unlike West Buttrick Creek, conservation is a legacy that flows both forward and backward for the Ausberger family. "It is a way to preserve the land for my kids—or someone else's kids—who may be farming it in the future," he says. "The conservation legacy also is a way to honor Dad's ideals and commitments. Whether my kids are walking this ground when they grow up, or they live a thousand miles away, I hope they do not have to worry about the air they breathe or the water they drink." ●

A white tablecloth dinner hosted on the Ausberger farm last summer served local decision makers with locally grown food as well as information about modern agriculture.

West Buttrick Creek seems small and isolated, but it feeds the Racoon River, a source of drinking water for the city of Des Moines.



A number of cover crop combinations have been evaluated at Legan Livestock & Grain. Winter barley, which can then be double-cropped with soybeans, is a new favorite.

Wetland wonder

THIS INDIANA FARM BALANCES PIGS, COVER CROPS AND NATURAL NUTRIENTS WHILE BOOSTING WILDLIFE

Many farmers claim to live and breathe the conservation ethic, but Mark and Phyllis Legan literally do just that. Their home in west central Indiana, near the town of Coatesville, sits in an oasis featuring a pond, a constructed wetland area, thousands of trees and abundant wildlife.

It wasn't always this way. "The 10 acres that our home sits on was in sow lots for 50 or 60 years before we moved here, and the hogs had rooted up most of the vegetation,"

Phyllis explains. "It was a goal of ours to change that and make it into a home site, as well as a place where wildlife would feel comfortable."

The Legans started by building the pond, and soon added a constructed wetland above the pond to allow native grasses and plants to filter the water and allow any sediment to settle into this shallow structure. "It also provides a great place for wildlife," Phyllis adds. "We have some duck boxes out there, and we have planted thousands of trees, including plum, walnut and hickory, that help provide habitat."

As the sun sets over this

wetland wonder, the fading light sets off a magnificent range of hues that are reflected from the water's surface. It's easy to forget that this oasis is just a stone's throw from their modern, 3,000-sow hog operation, and is surrounded by nearly 1,000 acres of cropland

that the Legans operate—and it's proof that a conservation mindset and commercial agriculture can co-exist.

Barry Fisher, the Indiana state soil health specialist for USDA/NRCS, says Legan Livestock & Grain demonstrates the integration of livestock and conservation cropping systems for environmental stewardship and water quality. "The Legan family

farm is a showcase of conservation practices," he says. "They use no-till, cover crops, grass waterways, filter strips and have a comprehensive nutrient management plan for their livestock operation."

FIRST GENERATION

Another remarkable aspect of the Legan family farm is the fact that it was built from scratch. "We are first-generation farmers," Mark points out. "Neither of us grew up on a farm. I ended up studying animal science at Purdue University and then spent seven years with the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service."

In 1989, the couple took the plunge into full-time farming, entering into a rental agreement on 180 sows and 100 crop acres. "Over the years, through partnerships with other people and opportunities we have had, we have been able to grow to where we are today," Mark says.

The cropping operation is mostly in a corn/soybean rotation, but the Legans do grow some continuous corn, and they incorporate cover crops on every acre. The 3,000 sows produce about 80,000 pigs a year to weaning age.

Those hogs produce a source of natural nutrients for the crop farming side of the operation. "As a pig farm, one thing we have always been concerned about is utilizing the manure nutrients we produce," Mark says. "Cover crops allow us to do that. They help tie up those nutrients when we need to do a fall application of manure, and cover crops bring a lot of long-term benefits to the soil."

The Legans prefer to apply manure to a cover crop that is established and growing. A





commercial applicator uses a low-disturbance injector to apply the manure to the field. "Once the cover crop is established and the roots are actively growing, it is ready to soak up the nutrients," Mark says.

The Legans continue to experiment with various combinations of species for their cover crop mix. "Annual rye has been a staple of our cover crop program," Mark says. "We like it from the rooting standpoint. We also use tillage radish. We've also tried other species, such as crimson clover and winter wheat."

After the 2012 drought, the Legans used barley as a cover crop to help reclaim some of the nitrogen left behind by the short corn crop. "We were so short of corn for the sow diets that we planted 110 acres of barley, and took it through to harvest," Mark adds. "Barley is ready for harvest two to three weeks earlier than wheat, so we were able to double-crop soybeans into those acres, and they turned out pretty well."

Planting food plots and native warm-season grasses are part of the Legans' effort to help restore quail in the area.

The Legans are considering barley in their long-term plans. "We hope to continue to include barley in the sow diets," Mark says. "The idea of having a different crop in the rotation really appeals to me. And barley allows us to tie up nutrients from fall application of manure, while pulling out

some additional phosphorus from the soil where we are putting on nutrients."

Spreading those manure nutrients over more acres is a goal for the Legans. "Our farm has always been about trying to optimize inputs," Mark says. "We've seen in recent years that some of our best yields

are in continuous corn where manure has been applied. We are always looking for ways to get manure applied to more acres, because we definitely see a yield boost."

REACHING OUT

The Legans have opened their farm to visitors by hosting field days, tours and workshops, including the Putnam County Conservation Expo. Both Mark and Phyllis take on active leadership roles in their community, at the state level and in national organizations.

Phyllis takes agriculture's message to local students through Indiana Farm Bureau's Agriculture in the Classroom program. "I talk with students, ranging from preschool through high school, about agriculture," she says. "The speeches I give usually have a natural resources bent, telling how we use manure nutrients to better the land. People mostly think of manure as a waste, but to us, it is a valuable product."

Phyllis also works with Operation Main Street, a program from the National Pork Board. "I talk to a lot of classes about nutrition, and make presentations to some agriculture science classes," she says. "I speak mostly on the nutrition of pork products, but this also gives me the opportunity to showcase our farm and tell how we take care of our nutrient management."

In addition, she has chaired the Putnam County Soil and Water Conservation District Board. "It was a big learning curve for me when I first started," Phyllis admits. "But I learned so much, and was able to understand how we can influence our natural resources and take better care of them."



The Legans constructed a pond and have planted thousands of trees on their home site, which was a former hog lot.

2014 CONSERVATION LEGACY AWARDS

NORTHEAST REGION WINNER

It has always been really important to me to be a part of making things better."

Mark also has served agriculture in a number of ways. For 12 years, he represented agriculture on the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's water pollution control board. "That experience convinced me that, as farmers, we need to get serious about our nitrogen utilization, from an environmental standpoint," he says. "Of course, it's also important from an economic standpoint, since we write checks to purchase the nitrogen to grow corn."

The Legans have been working to fine-tune their own nitrogen applications, experimenting with nitrogen stabilizers and using pre-sidedress and end-of-season stalk testing to help establish their N rates.

"Managing nitrogen is difficult, since weather plays such a key role," Mark points out. "But we have to continue to learn. Conservation is not only important to the future of our



The Legans operate approximately 1,000 acres of row crops, primarily in a corn/soybean rotation, planted in a no-till system.

farm, but also to the future of our food supply—and not only here in the United States, but on a worldwide basis.

"When we look at the amount of food that we need to grow in the next 50 years to satisfy population growth, we must have sustainable systems," he continues. "That means not

only keeping topsoil in place, but also soil health. We need to be improving the assets that we have on top of the ground as well as underneath the ground."

FUTURE FOCUS

Continuing to protect and improve natural resources is a priority for the Legans. One of

those resources is wildlife.

"Phyllis and I have taken it on as a challenge to get some quail re-established here," Mark says. "We plant a food plot on the west side of the pond. Last winter we kept a covey that resided here and when the snow got heavy, I was actually carrying pig feed out to the quail and feeding them on top of snow drifts."

The Legans are now embarking on their own multi-generational conservation legacy. Their daughter, Beth, and husband Nick Tharp, have joined the operation. With the birth of their granddaughter, Kate, three generations of Legans now call Putnam County their home.

"As a new grandmother, I have started thinking more about the future, and how important it is to take care of things we have here on earth," Phyllis says. "It is important for us to leave things a little bit better for our granddaughter." ●



A constructed wetland offers habitat for many species. Nesting boxes are provided for waterfowl, and a number of nut-bearing trees have been planted adjacent to the wetland.

Passing the passion



Springhill Farms stays timely with cover crops by seeding as soon as possible after a field is harvested.

THIS KENTUCKY FARMER SPREADS THE WORD ABOUT SOIL HEALTH AND RESPECT FOR NATURAL RESOURCES

Jerry Peery grew up in Hickman County, Kentucky, and began farming in 1957, after his graduation from high school. It was a time when the conservation culture was taking hold in western Kentucky, and Peery witnessed the birth of no-till farming first-hand.

Just across Kentucky Lake, his fellow western Kentucky farmer, Harry Young, Jr., grew the world's first commercial no-till corn crop in 1962. And Peery was influenced by one of no-till's leading evangelists, University of Kentucky

agronomist Shirley Phillips, the man who famously stated, "The limitations of no-tillage are only in man's imagination."

The concept certainly captured young Peery's imagination. "My interest in sustainability led me to attend field days where these men discussed the advantages of moving away from conventional tillage practices," he recalls. "Attending these events through the early 1970s increased my fascination with minimum tillage and convinced me to become one of the earliest proponents of no-till farming in this area."

The transition took some time. "We were still using

conventional farming practices until the early 1970s, when I began to experiment with no-till farming by planting soybeans, with a borrowed planter, behind my wheat crop," Peery recalls. "I was not the first local farmer to use no-till, but I was among the first."

He and his wife, Valarie, devoted about 20% of their fields to no-till while they continued to accumulate land, reaching 750 acres by the mid-1970s. They

built a home and established their farm headquarters on a piece of land adjacent to the village of Springhill. "We changed the name of the operation from Jerry Peery Farms to Springhill Farms in 1985,

and that's when we converted the entire farm to no-till," he says.

Since then, Springhill Farms has served as an inspiration for other conservation-minded farmers. "Jerry has been a leader and trendsetter in corn and soybean production," says Dan Ellison, president of the Kentucky Association of Conservation Districts. "His early adoption of complete no-till convinced many other farmers in Kentucky and surrounding states that the practice can be more cost efficient and greatly reduce soil loss at the same time."

Best of all, Peery is now passing along his passion for protecting natural resources to the next generation. His grandson, 16-year-old Jonathan Reynolds, keeps the farm on-track with its cover crop





program by drilling a rye-and-radish combination as soon as the combine finishes a field.

"Jonathan works with us on the farm about every day," Peery says. "It gives us a chance to teach him about the importance of conservation."

WATERWAY WORK

Springhill Farms has continued to expand, now operating approximately 1,600 acres, but conservation remains the highest priority. Each field is evaluated to see where it may need waterways and border strips. "We would rather have a good waterway than a ditch to cross," Peery says. "Nearly 6% of our tillable ground has been sown into grass waterways and border strips, which control gully erosion and filter runoff. Fields in this county are rolling, so if we didn't establish waterways, we wouldn't have any soil left."

Peery has served on the Hickman County Conservation District board of supervisors for 35 years. "Because of that, I feel the need to promote no-till and conservation," he

says. "If you are going to be on the board, you need to participate."

Since the waterways and border strips on Springhill Farms are mowed regularly, it improves the appearance of the land and serves to promote conservation practices. "As we mow from one field to another, we also mow the rights-of-way to improve the appearance of the community," he says. It also eliminates tall grasses and weeds that might obstruct the vision of drivers.

His old home place has been "recycled" into The Peery House, a private restaurant, by the Peery's daughter, Kristia, who attended culinary school in 2005. She also manages the farm office.

"After finishing culinary school, she remodeled the home where I grew up and now hosts private parties and does catering," Peery says. "The grass waterways near The Peery House are mowed each time the lawn is mowed. That's also a way to showcase the conservation efforts that are in

A byproduct called "grit," a mixture of sand, soil and bark from a local paper mill, is used on select areas of fields to help boost organic matter.

place on Springhill Farms, and it promotes agriculture as well."

SOIL HEALTH SOLUTIONS

Peery not only wants to stop soil erosion, he also wants to build soil health. Cover crops are nothing new to this operation. "We began using cover crops more than 30 years ago, planting winter wheat and hairy vetch," he says. "In recent years, we have transitioned to using mixtures of cereal rye, ryegrass, crimson clover, Austrian winter pea and oilseed

radish to try to maximize the benefits to each specific field's soil." Turnips also have been used as a cover crop for sweet corn, or as forage for wildlife, on Springhill Farms.

The "go-to" mix on Springhill Farms is a blend of cereal rye and oilseed radish. "It has been a good mix for us," Peery says. "By using cover crops, we keep a live root system growing year-round and the diversity of plants is an excellent way to increase the efficiency of soil microorganisms while scavenging nutrients for cash crops. The rye also helps control weeds, and the radishes help break up compaction."

He's always looking for new combinations of grasses, legumes and brassicas to improve overall soil health. "We will continue to network with conservation officials and other cover crop experts to improve our program," Peery says. "We believe improving soil health is a vital part of long-term sustainability. We understand that a fully functioning soil food web provides for nutrient, energy and water cycling, allowing the soil to express its full potential while improving soil, water and air quality."

Peery has found ways to recycle a couple of local products

About 6% of the land at Springhill Farms is devoted to waterways and border strips that protect rolling fields. "We would rather have a good waterway than a ditch to cross," Peery says.

2014 CONSERVATION LEGACY AWARDS

SOUTH REGION WINNER

to boost the soil. One is an industrial "grit" made up of sand, soil and bark, a byproduct from a local paper mill. "We've found this to be an excellent product to help build organic matter and improve moisture retention in select areas where the topsoil is thin or has been disturbed by heavy equipment," he says. "We plan to continue the partnership so we can provide a disposal service for the paper mill while enhancing the health of our soil."

A second product salvaged from the mill is a felt product, approximately an eighth of an inch thick, that Peery uses as an improvised landscape fabric. "We use this material as an apron to prevent soil erosion where grass border strips and waterways enter creeks and streams," he says.

PRECISION PUSH

Peery credits precision agriculture with pushing his conser-

vation efforts to a new level. Springhill Farms began the transition in 2005 by equipping its sprayer, tractors and combine with global positioning system (GPS) technology.

"Precision farming technologies enable us to minimize input costs, maximize crop production, and improve soil and water quality," he says. "We recognized early on that these technologies are more efficient than manual applications, and understand the added costs are outweighed by benefits to the environment and increased efficiency in our farming operation."

Sprayer swath control, for example, prevents damage to grass waterways by automatically shutting off nozzles as the sprayer traverses these sensitive areas. "Variable rate seeding and fertilizer applications, planter row command capability and GPS guidance lets us grow more productive



Jerry Peery is passing along his passion for stewardship to his 16-year-old grandson, Jonathan Reynolds. Working with Jonathan on the farm "gives us a chance to teach him about the importance of conservation," Peery says.



Springhill Farms has experimented with a variety of cover crop species, but most acres receive a mix of cereal rye and oilseed radish.

crops while reducing the impact to natural resources and the environment," Peery says. "And it saves money. Improvements in soil testing and plant tissue testing have enabled us to take advantage of the data needed to apply fertilizers, chemicals and seeds with precision. That was not an option when I began farming with my father in the 1950s."

No-till, cover crops and precision farming form the framework of conservation on Springhill Farms. "Conservation has been very important since I began farming on my own in 1957," Peery says. "Farming has been my life for nearly 60 years, and my farm is 100% no-till today because

I have been working hard to protect the land. I have done my best to teach my children and grandchildren, even those not directly involved in the farming operation, the importance of good land stewardship."

Ray Archuleta, soil health specialist for USDA/NRCS, calls Peery "a beacon of humic hope for the 21st Century."

Peery simply sees himself as a steward of the land. "We understand there will never be more land than currently exists," he says. "We believe it is our moral and spiritual responsibility to do everything we can to leave the land in better condition than when we began caring for it." ●