



PROFILES IN soil health

Anson Family Farms
Monroe City, Indiana
20,000 acres
Crops: Corn and Soybean Rotation
Planting: 100% No Till
Covers: Spring Oats, Crimson Clover, Austrian Winter Peas, Tillage Radish, Cereal Rye, Annual Rye Grass



Attitudes Change with Healthy Soil

When asked what the most satisfying result of working towards healthy soil is, the Anson family isn't quick to respond about lower operating costs and increasing their bottom line. Instead, they talk about how excited they are to see clearer water coming off their land.

As a fourth generation farm with 20,000 acres of land, the Anson brothers, Mike, Mark, Doug and Dan and their two sons have seen a lot of change in the farming community. From granddad's ditch erosion problems in the 1930's to watching their father build terraces on their rolling hills in the 70's, the brothers came into the operation with vast knowledge and a passion for farming. Over time, that passion turned into too much stress, too much money being spent, and not enough hours in the day.

"I was starting to feel down and out because our soils had gotten to the point where we could raise 130 bushel of corn on dirt because of genetics and technology, but when we were done planting I got this inner feeling that it wasn't worth it," recalls Mark, "It was too much stress and you could tell the soil just wasn't healthy. It was like we were farming on a gravel road."

Mark was on the verge of calling it quits until he attended a Soil Health Conference in southwest Indiana. After listening to USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) soil health experts Ray Archuleta and Barry Fisher and witnessing the effects of compaction through the slake test, he knew it was time for another change.

"I was a little nervous at first about asking my brothers but I knew it was something we had to try," said Mark.

And try they did. In the fall of 2010, with the assistance of a NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program contract, the brothers planted a few acres of cover crops on areas with the most stress. Three years later, over sixty percent of their farm is planted in cover crops – nearly 12,000 acres.

“We’ve never really been scared to try new things. We figured we’d try it out for at least a year and see how it went,” said Mike. “I went out during a rain storm and looked at the water flowing off our cover crops and it was clear. I was amazed we could see the impact so quickly.”

“The attitude around the farm started to change,” said Mark. “Our employees are proud of the work they are doing and are excited when they talk about cover crops and no-till and how much it’s working.”

It was like we were farming a gravel road.

- Mark Anson, landowner

In addition to the environmental impacts they are seeing, the Ansons are also seeing a significant economic impact. Demonstration plots are showing a thirty bushel increase on cover cropped areas. They were also able to decrease fuel consumption, fertilizer, and fungicides.

“It’s definitely a learning experience for us,” said Doug. “We found out quickly that knowing the source of your cover crop seed is a crucial step in getting a good stand and not introducing invasive species to your fields.”

The Ansons hope to plant an additional 3,000 acres

Natural Resources Conservation Service



Crimson Clover is recommended by the Ansons as a good starter cover crop for small acres.

in cover crops next year. Furthermore, the Ansons adopted a 100 percent no-till operation in 2012 and switched from spring applied anhydrous ammonia to liquid nitrogen and application of turkey manure on below average soils.

“We are blessed in southwest Indiana with great soil. We’re also blessed with huge technological advancements in equipment, management systems, seeds, chemical and much more. It’s a choice that every farmer is faced with – do I farm the way my grandfathers farmed or do I use the God given abilities to change to be in harmony with Mother Nature. We’re choosing to leave our soil in a healthier state than we received from our forefathers.”

To learn more about using cover crops on your operation or improving the health of your soil, visit http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/in/home/?cid=nrcs144p2_031079 or stop by your local USDA Service Center.

Want to unlock the secrets in YOUR soil?

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