

Strong Communities, Healthy Waters: Sustaining Agricultural Communities While Enhancing Our Natural Environment

Lebanon County No-Till Farmer Network Project

The Chesapeake Bay Funders Network (CBFN)* is collaborating on a *Farmer Network Project* in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania to link experienced no-till farmers to beginning no-till farmers, through a “mentoring” network of education and technical assistance. This is the first program of its kind in the state to address the peer-to-peer aspect in the farm community. By increasing interaction among farmers, it is expected that technical field staff will be able to improve program delivery with a positive, collaborative approach.



No-Till corn planted into cover crop.

A no-till cropping system is a cost-effective way to reduce soil erosion, increase soil quality, decrease on-farm fuel use, as well as retain soil carbon and nitrogen through the use of cover crops (reducing the volatility of manure when applied). Once put in place, this series of agricultural practices on farms improves water quality in the region’s streams and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay.

Project Partners: The CBFN has provided funds to the Capital Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Area Council, a regional non-profit group in south central PA, to work with local partners in creating the Farmer Network. Local partners include the Lebanon County Office of Penn State University Cooperative Extension, Lebanon County Conservation District, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and private sector service providers.

Project Goals:

- Create a “hands-on” learning model to reduce the risk of change for beginning no-till farmers;
- Provide education and training to farmers and technical field staff through field days and winter meetings;
- Facilitate up to 40 farms in the county converting to a no-till system approach;
- Document and assess the effectiveness of the network;
- Create a guide to implementation for those interested in taking a similar approach.

Project Achievements: In the first year of the program, 8 mentors and 12 beginning no-till farmers (over 2,500 acres) became involved in the project. A mentor meeting was held to discuss the “work plan” and to gain input, as well as to provide agronomic and equipment training. A series of field walk events also took place in the spring/summer 2007.



Lebanon Farmer Network Field Walk in June 2007.

*The Chesapeake Bay Funders Network is a collaboration of private non-profit foundations in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. More information about the CBFN can be found at: www.chesbayfunders.org

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