



Farmers Improving Soil Health

NO-TILL NUGGETS

Pennsylvania No-Till Alliance
June 2023

Thank You Karl Brown; Welcome Doug Wolfgang



Karl Brown has retired after almost three decades of leading Pennsylvania's State Conservation Commission, a period that saw the agency take on increased responsibilities for supporting water quality on farms.

Brown has been the commission's executive secretary since 1995 and has led the rollout of marquee programs such as the REAP tax credit and a new state cost-share program for farmers. His hiring coincided with major legislative changes to the commission's functioning. The executive secretary received increased independence, and the chairmanship of the commission was designated to alternate yearly between the state ag and environment secretaries. These changes were intended to help the Ag Department and DEP get on the same page at a time when farm and environmental issues were rather contentious.

"Working to bring the ag and the environment issues and perspectives together beginning in '95 is probably one of the most significant issues that our commission has been able to wrestle with and work through," Brown said. "That's been a really key thing."

40 Years for the Chesapeake Bay Program

On December 9, 1983, Pennsylvania became one of three states to sign the Chesapeake Bay Agreement—a document committing various partners to work towards a healthier Chesapeake Bay. At the time few, if any farmers could envision the impact that this milestone would have on their attitude toward the environment, awareness of the need for good conservation practices and, ultimately, how they managed their farms.

Jill Whitcomb, director of the Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Nonpoint Source Management at PA-DEP recently wrote an interesting article entitled *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement at 40: Perspectives on Pennsylvania*. Several of observations from the article may be of interest to members of the No-Till Alliance and are included below.

Jim Seif, the first secretary of DEP in 1995 commented that he "worked to keep conservation districts in an environmental role as well as an agricultural one. They understand water, conservation, local action. They're trusted local partners." The act that created DEP also gave the State Conservation Commission a role as a truly independent agency with its own executive secretary as a "bridge" between DEP and PDA with oversight of the local conservation districts.

Whitcomb responded, "Pennsylvania couldn't meet its watershed goals without the conservation districts. They play a central role. For example, Pennsylvania's Nutrient Management Act was one of the first in the nation, and conservation districts partner with the State Conservation Commission and the DEP to implement the program effectively. We use state and federal funding to support technicians and other positions at conservation districts, but we rely on them so much we're really stretching their resources."

When asked about critics who don't believe Pennsylvania has made enough progress on Bay restoration efforts, Seif was unequivocal in his defense of PA's efforts stating, "Pennsylvania doesn't have to apologize to anybody for its environmental vision and achievements. From William Penn to the state constitution Environmental Amendment in 1970 to our work today, Pennsylvanians should be proud of and draw strength from their environmental heritage."

Over 40 years of Bay efforts, PA farmers have been impacted perhaps the most of any sector by new regulatory requirements resulting from concerns about the Bay. Even farmers not in the Chesapeake Bay watershed have felt this impact. However, many believe that PA farmers, albeit often reluctantly and with loud complaints, have steadily improved their on-farm conservation and nutrient management practices. Many times this has been led by farmers who are members of the No-Till Alliance and if not, are like minded. And many farmers agree that their farm operations have benefited from the new practices adopted.

As we look ahead most do not foresee many new regulatory requirements being imposed on PA farmers. But many also see a need for broader adoption of the practices such as no-till and use of cover crops. There are more funds than ever available to assist farmers with the cost of new BMPs and improved partnerships with Conservation Districts, the State Conservation Commission and perhaps even a more cooperative attitude from DEP and EPA. Perhaps the stage is set for an opportunity we should not waste.

Over the years Karl was always supportive of the No-Till Alliance and our efforts and we thank him for his years of dedicated service.

This key position and its responsibilities will fall to Brown's successor as executive secretary — Doug Wolfgang, longtime director of the Ag Department's Bureau of Farmland Preservation.



Wolfgang grew up on a Schuylkill County farm and, like Brown, worked for a time at the Lebanon County Conservation District. In the years since, Wolfgang has continued to interact with conservation districts because many house their counties' farm preservation programs.

Upon being appointed, Karl Brown said, "I'm really confident that Doug will do a great job, and I think he's got the background and the experience to be able to step in here and hit the ground running."

Doug has already attended several Alliance events and the Alliance is confident that he and the Commission will continue to be great partners.

!!! IMPORTANT !!!
Please Complete the Survey on Page 2 and Return to the Alliance at the Field Day or by Mail

Through our partnership with our good friends at the Stroud Water Research Center, the Alliance is fortunate to have support from grants administered by the SWRC. This allows us to offer free programs such as our field days and winter meetings. However, these funds are dependent on certain reporting requirements to ensure that goals are being met. **So please take a few minutes to complete the Cover Crop and No-Till Survey that appears on page 2.**

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Cover Crop/No-Till Survey – 2022 Crop Year

Your Name: _____

Farm Address: _____

If you don't list address, please list township and county: _____

Is your farm in Chesapeake Bay watershed? **yes** or **no** (circle one).

If no, is it Ohio or Delaware? (circle one)

**** Note: If you previously completed this survey you only need to complete activity for the 2022 crop year****

Categories for COVER CROP acres: (with particular interest in NEW acres since 2019, but baseline acreage prior to 2019 is useful information)	Approx. date planted each year (ex. Sept 15)	BASELINE: Acres in cover crops in 2019	NEW acres in 2020 (didn't have cc in 2019)	NEW acres in 2021 (didn't have cc in 2019 or 2020)	NEW acres in 2022 (didn't have cc in 2019, 2020, or 2021)
Early-planted cereal rye					
Late-planted cereal rye					
Early-planted other single species covers					
Late-planted other single species covers					
Early-planted mixed species covers					
Late-planted mixed species covers					
Harvested for forage					

Categories for IMPROVED cover crop acres	IMPROVED acres in 2020 (improved from 2019)	IMPROVED acres in 2021 (improved from 2020)	IMPROVED acres in 2022 (improved from 2021)
EARLIER cereal rye (at least 2 weeks earlier than typical)			
EARLIER other single species (2+ weeks earlier than typical)			
Shifting to mixed species cover crops from single species			
LATER termination (ie: planting green or delayed spray)			
Other: Describe			

NO-TILL ACRES:	BASELINE: Acres NT in 2019	NEW No-Till acres in 2020	NEW No-Till acres in 2021	NEW No-Till acres in 2022
NEW ACRES				
IMPROVED No-Till Acres (e.g. planting green)		IMPROVED No-Till Acres 2020 (improved from 2019)	IMPROVED No-Till Acres 2021 (improved from 2020)	IMPROVED No-Till Acres 2022 (improved from 2021)
IMPROVED ACRES	N/A			



When: Tuesday, July 25
Where: Chris Pilgrim Farm
(190 Eich Rd, Fredonia, Mercer Co.)

When: Thursday, July 27
Where: Penn England Farm
(10341 Fox Run Rd, Williamsburg, Blair Co.)

Two days of informative panels and demonstrations are planned, creating a can't-miss-event for no-till and cover crop advocates!

A *Meeting of the Minds* dinner (6 p.m. at the farm) will be held the evening prior to each field day.

For the July 25th Field Day, overnight rooms are available at Cobblestone Hotel, Greenville. Call 724-588-4200 to reserve your room.

For the July 27th Field Day, overnight rooms are available at Quality Inn, Altoona. Call 814-944-9661 to reserve your room.

Schedule of Events:

Monday, July 24 – “Meeting of the Minds”
6 p.m. Dinner (free if pre-registered / \$10 at the door) & Open Discussion

Tuesday, July 25 - Field Day (free if pre-registered / \$10 at the door)
8 a.m. Registration opens; View exhibits and displays
8:45 a.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks
9 a.m. Keynote Speaker, *Monte Bottens*
10 a.m. How Legumes Change the Soil and Why Cover Crops are Important, *Panel*
10:45 a.m. Drone Cover Crop Seeding Demo, then Rotating Breakout Sessions/Demos
• Cover Crop Plots • Rainfall Simulator • Equipment (New precision planter, Crawford CD no-till drill)
12:15 p.m. Lunch and View Exhibits
1 p.m. Sponsor Comments
1:15 p.m. Veris Custom Soil Mapping & Precision Fertilizer Placement, *Helena Chemical*
1:45 p.m. Why the Details are Important, *Monte Bottens*
2:30 p.m. Are Your Neighbors Tilling? Why We Don't See the Value, *Farmer Panel*
3:30 p.m. Q & A and Closing Remarks, *Jim Hershey*

Wednesday, July 26 – “Meeting of the Minds”
6 p.m. Dinner (free if pre-registered / \$10 at the door) & Open Discussion

Thursday, July 27 - Field Day (free if pre-registered / \$10 at the door)
8 a.m. Registration opens; View exhibits and displays
8:45 a.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks
9 a.m. Keynote Speaker, *Monte Bottens*
10 a.m. How Legumes Change the Soil and Why Cover Crops are Important, *Panel*
10:45 a.m. Drone Seeding Demo, then Rotating Breakout Sessions/Demos
• Cover Crop Plots • Rainfall Simulator • Soil Pit
12:15 p.m. Lunch and View Exhibits
1 p.m. Sponsor Comments, Secretary Russell Redding Comments
1:30 p.m. Veris Custom Soil Mapping & Precision Fertilizer Placement, *Helena Chemical*
2 p.m. Why the Details are Important, *Monte Bottens*
2:45 p.m. Are Your Neighbors Tilling? Why We Don't See the Value, *Farmer Panel*
4 p.m. PANTA Annual Meeting, *All Members Welcome*

PA No-Till Alliance Summer Field Day Pre-Registration Form

(Events are free-of-charge if pre-registered by July 17. If not pre-registered prior to July 17, there will be a \$10 fee, per event, payable at the event.)

Name _____ Company _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please register me for the following:

Meeting of the Minds Dinner

Mon., July 24 (Free if registered by July 17; \$10 after.)
6 - 9 p.m. (includes meal)

Field Day (Western PA)

Tues., July 25 (Free if registered by July 17; \$10 after.)
8 a.m. - 4 p.m. (includes lunch)

Meeting of the Minds Dinner

Wed., July 26 (Free if registered by July 17; \$10 after.)
6 - 9 p.m. (includes meal)

Field Day (Eastern PA)

Thurs., July 27 (Free if registered by July 17; \$10 after.)
8 a.m. - 4 p.m. (includes lunch)

Mail to: PA No-Till Alliance
2215 Forest Hills Dr., Ste 39
Harrisburg, PA 17112

Pre-registration may also be done via:
Email: jhowes@pennag.com **Phone:** 717-574-4510
Or by visiting: <https://forms.gle/s8RUbEuo1qAQhqb7>

QR Code:





Pennsylvania No-Till Alliance
2215 Forest Hills Dr, Suite 39
Harrisburg, PA 17112

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You're Invited to No-Till Summer Field Days!

Dear Alliance members:

The No-Till Alliance is excited to sponsor two soil health field days in late July. Full details appear on page 3, but a few highlights of both days include:

- Monte Bottons, a nationally known proponent of no-till, diverse rotations and cover crops who will speak about his experience with no-till, cover cropping, inter-cropping, and relay cropping as strategies to create a systems-based approach to managing his farm.
- A farmer panel discussing how legumes change soil structure and how cover crops may offset this change.
- A second farmer panel will discuss why they do or don't see the value of tillage on a regular or even intermittent basis.
- Soil mapping and precision fertilizer placement
- Numerous "hands-on" break-out sessions to view equipment displays, a rainfall simulator and cover crop plots.

Both field days will be preceded the evening before with a "Meeting of the Minds" dinner and an informal discussion of "what's on your mind this year."

I certainly hope that all of you can make time in your busy lives to join us for these events and believe you will find it to be time well invested.

- Jim Hershey, PA No-Till Alliance President

Pennsylvania No-Till Alliance

Our Vision "Using no-till systems to improve our soil and water quality, productivity and profitability for future generations."

Our Mission "To promote the successful application of no-till through shared ideas, experiences, education and new technology."