



Farmers Improving Soil Health

NO-TILL NUGGETS

Pennsylvania No-Till Alliance
March 2024

Jill Clapperton Provides Stimulating Keynote at Soil Health Meetings

The Alliance soil health meetings held in late January both featured a stimulating keynote address by Jill Clapperton and a series of other thought-provoking speakers and panels. Due to health concerns, Clapperton was unable to travel, but her presentation via Zoom nonetheless easily held the attention of the audience. Additionally, with microphones linked in there was ample opportunity for interaction via questions and responses.

If one were asked to summarize her presentation in one phrase it would likely be "it's all about the roots" as she repeatedly emphasized their critical role in developing healthy soils through stimulating microbial activity, providing a path for water infiltration and building organic matter.



Keynote speaker Jill Clapperton participates in the soil health events via Zoom.

One of the more interesting panels featured producers discussing, "What are We Doing That's New?" At both events, Lucas Criswell discussed his 5 years of perfecting relay cropping of wheat and soybeans in order to maximize return per acre. Bill Cannon also spoke of his experimentation with sowing cover crop when side dressing corn.

Also at both events, David Hunsberger relayed his experience transitioning to a high energy forage crop and cash crop rotation to meet the needs of his operation. He has concluded that soft dough barley, dwarf forage sorghum and grain sorghum all may have a role. Bill Cannon talked of his experience planting cover crops while side-dressing corn and Brian Zimmerman relayed results of his planting green and nitrogen trials.

Lucas Criswell harvesting wheat with soybeans inter-seeded as a relay crop.



Finally, at each meeting farmers with 20-plus years of no-tilling and cover crops with hard, hard to manage poorly drained soils related what they have learned. Two take-aways:

1. When speaking of no-till and cover crops, you need both; you can't do one without the other and
2. It can be done, you just have to learn how to manage your equipment, soils and rotations effectively.

(L-R:) Donn Branton and Ed Wilkinson speak on the topic of, Hard Soils? Yes it Can be Done!



If You are Interested in Installing Conservation Practices...

Never have funds been more readily available! The chart below is based upon a comprehensive list provided by the State Conservation Commission, highlighting programs most applicable to Alliance members.

STATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

DEP: Chesapeake Bay Countywide Action Plan Implementation Grant	Provides financial and technical assistance for Chesapeake Bay Watershed counties to establish and carry out a Countywide Action Plan (CAP). These plans include Best Management Practices for agricultural operations.
DEP: Growing Greener Plus Grants Program	Provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits. Funds watershed restoration projects, which includes, but is not limited to: design and/or construction of agricultural BMPs, agricultural planning and watershed planning, education and outreach, operation, maintenance and repair/replacement, technical assistance, monitoring, and watershed group organization support.
SCC: Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP)	Provides financial and technical assistance for the implementation of best management practices (BMPs) on agricultural operations in the commonwealth.
SCC: Agriculture-Linked Low Interest Loan Program (AgriLink)	Provides 'low-interest' loans to assist farmers in implementation of BMPs listed in approved Act 38 Nutrient Management plans, Chapter 91 Manure Management plans, Agricultural Erosion and Sedimentation plans (Ag E&S) or conservation plans.
SCC: Conservation Excellence Grant Program (CEG)	Provides financial and technical assistance for the implementation of best management practices (BMPs) on agricultural operations in high-priority locations within the commonwealth. Financial assistance is available as a grant can be utilized in combination with loans and tax credits.
SCC: Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP)	A first-come, first-served program that enables farmers, businesses and landowners to earn PA income tax credits to offset the cost of implementing conservation practices. Tax credits provided by the REAP program help farmers off-set the costs of implementing best management practices (BMPs) that benefit their farms and work to protect water quality at the same time.

FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

NRCS: Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)	Awards competitive grants that drive innovation and develop the tools, technologies, and strategies for next-generation conservation efforts on working lands. Grantees leverage the federal investment through matching requirements. Through CIG's new On-Farm Trials, partners provide incentive payments to producers to offset the risk of implementing innovative approaches.
FSA: Conservation Loans Program	Provides loans to agricultural producers who implement BMPs and promote conservation on their farms.
FSA: Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)	Protects soil, water quality and habitat by removing highly erodible or environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production through long-term rental agreements.
NRCS: Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority natural resource concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance - the higher the performance, the higher the payment.
NRCS: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits, such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation and improved or created wildlife habitat.

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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."