

Soil health field day demonstrates success in establishing cover crops

By Jamie Fisher

Calumet County Ag Stewardship Alliance (CCASA) co-hosted a Soil Health Field Day with the Between the Lakes Demonstration Farms Network on Aug. 17 at Bob Danes's farm, Danes Fairylane Dairy Farm, in New Holstein, Wis. Over 90 attendees learned about establishing cover crops during harvest season, GPS mapping and field demonstrations.

Attendees were split into groups and rotated through multiple sessions. Tony Reali, Calumet county land and water conservationist, presented on looking at Nutrient Management Programs (NMP) to help farms reach their conservation goals. Reali also discussed the standards and rules of NR151, focusing on nutrient concentration and tillage. Working with your crop consultant will be key to a farmer's success.

John VandenBoom from Holsum Diaries and Zak Kenneke from Libertyland Farm presented a session on rapid methods of establishing cover crops during harvest season. VandenBoom talked about the fields looking like green carpet. In the spring, they like to harvest the rye for heifer forage before planting corn.

Danes shared his experience with planting peas for canning in a no-till cover crop. A challenge this year was the lack of soil moisture during the planting season. It was difficult to get good seed-to-soil contact. Danes adjusted down pressure on the planter to help get the seed in the ground. He also mentioned the drier season had the crops a little short on phosphorus.

It is important to have a good relationship with the canning company. Some crops like rye are allergens in the canning industry. Danes guarantees to hand pick rye, weeds and oats out of the field to provide the best opportunity for a clean crop.

Attendees also took a ride to demonstrate GPS hazard maps throughout the field. Snap Smart, InDepth Agronomy and Country Visions presented their programs for GPS hazard mapping. The field tour gave live examples of measuring depth to bedrock and the variations of depth in different areas of the field. All three maps went off the GPS on your phone. It's open for everyone to download and free. It was emphasized that it's important to never consider a map to be 100% accurate.

Riesterer & Schnell showcased equipment demonstrations and upgrades to accommodate the shift to conservation. Improvements on press wheels, double bearings, closing wheels and tank scales all help with the move to a successful conservation program.

Steve Hoffmann with InDepth Agronomy shared thoughts on growing your own nitrogen and keeping manure available for cover crops. He suggests the farmer should get cover crops planted before applying manure for nutrients. This will give a bigger window to get nutrients on the crop.

"This rotation is better for you and better for the soil," Hoffman said.

The soil health day ended with a low disturbance manure injection into winter rye stubble demonstration by Tasch's Custom LLC.