



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

FACT SHEET

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AGRICULTURE: WE'RE HALF WAY THERE

Jimmy Crosby, Cros-B-Crest Farm



Staunton, VA: Jimmy Crosby doesn't take a lot of "bull" when it comes to his soil health. The former professional bull rider left home 16 years ago to join the rodeo but has now returned to his family's Virginia farm with a passion for making it more productive and profitable.

Though he's a fifth-generation farmer, Jimmy only recently took over management of the

cash grain operations at Cros-B-Crest Farm in America's legendary Shenandoah Valley. Cash grains on this family farm are mainly corn, wheat, and soybeans.

"When I came home to farm, we needed to diversify our operation to create additional, steady income, corn after corn just wasn't working," Crosby said. "Healthy soil is the key to making money in the cash crop business."

Now operating tractors and combines, he took a fresh look at the land and became concerned about soil erosion and excessive nutrients in the farm's streams and wetlands. Jimmy reached out to USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to get help designing a cropping system to improve soil health and water quality for increased profits.

With funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), he has implemented crop rotation, residue and tillage management, cover crops, and nutrient management practices on the land. His "Beginning Farmer" status qualified him to receive incentive payments of up to 90 percent of installation costs for recommended conservation practices.

"Organic matter is the most important soil ingredient," explained Crosby. "To build healthy soil, my goal is to reach five percent organic matter. Our highest yielding field has 4.9 percent organic matter, producing the most with the least amount of inputs and rainfall."

Crosby has now gone well beyond bull riding's acclaimed "eight-second" mark to score high as a true Virginia soil health champion. In just a few short years, he has transitioned from beginning farmer to president of the Virginia No-Till Alliance (VANTAGE).

"Leaving crop residue on the land and planting cover crops are the easiest ways to increase organic matter in the soil," Crosby added. "It has laid the foundation for a successful, sustainable row-crop operation."

Improving soil health is key to higher profits and cleaner streams. Best management practices for cropland that improve soil health include:

- Cover crops
- Continuous no-till
- Leaving crop residues on the land
- Nutrient management
- Crop rotation
- Contour farming
- Filter strips

One indicator of good soil health is the content of organic matter in the soil. Soil organic matter above three percent is good. Leaving crop residues on the field, reducing tillage, and planting cover crops will help increase soil organic matter. Healthy soil absorbs and holds more water, reduces erosion, and increases crop yields.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and your local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) can help cover expenses for certain best management practices that improve soil health and keep soil on the land and out of streams.

This is one in a series of articles about farmers who have implemented conservation practices to improve farm operations and water quality in nearby streams, demonstrating how agriculture has achieved half of the nutrient reductions necessary to clean up local streams and the Chesapeake Bay.

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