

Welcome

PCM Events and Updates

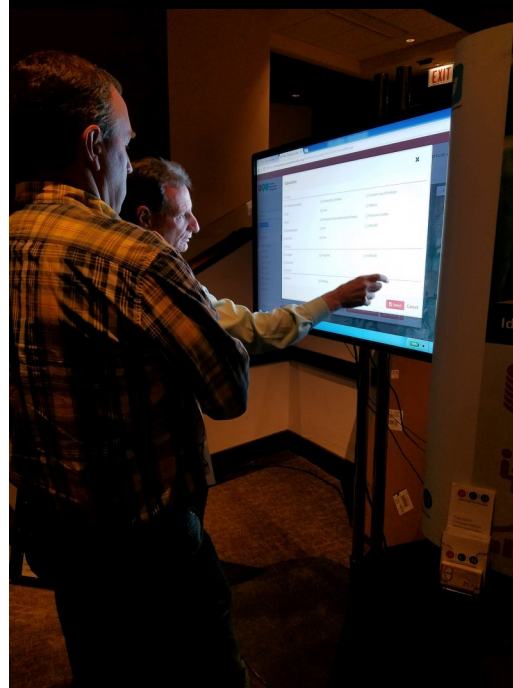
A critical piece of PCM's success is the one-on-one relationship between PCM co-operators and their Specialists. PCM Specialists have been busy delivering the RAAP Reports (Resource Analysis and Assessment Plans) to our 117 co-operators in IL. The PCM team has been working hard all winter to have these reports ready to deliver before planting.

The PCM Specialists are always learning and each Specialist has areas of special interest where they strive to become local experts by attending various training opportunities throughout the winter season. Some highlights include: Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy Conference in Springfield, National Conference on Cover Crops and Soil Health in Indianapolis, Illinois Farm Economics Summit in East Peoria, National No-Tillage Conference in Louisville, Soil Health Summit in Rosemont, and Conservation Cropping Seminar in Peoria. This is in addition to the training, help and advice regularly received from Soil & Water Conservation Districts, NRCS Staff, and the Illinois Corn Growers Association.

(Below, right) A mix of cereal rye and tillage radish cover crop seeded on Oct. 3, 2017 on a PCM farm. (Below top left) Another rye-radish mix. After a few warm days, the rye greened up nicely. The tillage radish had winter-killed.



PCM Farmer Portal Demo by PCM Enrollment Coordinator, Randy Stauffer, at the 4th annual Soil Health Partnership Summit in Rosemont, Illinois Jan. 18-19.



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(Above) Local Fish Fry at the Peery farm in KY - the last social event before spring planting begins.

Updates from the PCM Specialists

Clay Bess—East-Central Region (Champaign, Douglas, Edgar, Ford, Vermilion Counties) — Nearly all of the 62 East-Central PCM farmers spent 1-2 hours with their Conservation Specialist, Clay Bess, in February to review their Resource Analysis and Assessment Plan (RAAP). Options were discussed and conservation was planned using data from the PCM Program Summary. One indication of implementation is the 15 EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) applications and multiple CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program) applications submitted by East-Central PCM producers alone, utilizing Clay's NRCS training and separate funding pool only available to farmers in PCM. A majority of these farmers will be trying cover crops for the first time with financial assistance from the USDA.

Sarah Carlson at PCM Quarterly Dinner—East Central Region



Dozens of these farmers attended the last PCM Quarterly Meeting, this time in Gifford on February 28th. 45 total attendees heard from cover crops experts including Sarah Carlson from Practical Farmers of Iowa and extra insight into PCM from their Specialist. This summer will be another rung up the ladder as PCM adds two new Enrollment Coordinators to the region, Mike Leitz and Zach Timm, as Gary Knoblett settles in the Central Region. A few things Clay plans for the Summer of 2018 is to add hours of airtime to his drone and direct the development of PCM's website.

PCM Farmer, Eric Nafziger, sampling tile lines for the IL Corn Growers nitrate sampling program



Jacob Walker—North Central Region (Livingston, McLean, Tazewell, Woodford Counties) — On February 28th, Jacob hosted a meeting in Chenoa, Illinois – the focus of which was cover crops. Sarah Carlson from Practical Farmers of Iowa, and Jim Ifft, a farmer from Fairbury Illinois, both presented. Although we did not have a massive turnout, there were excellent questions asked and constructive discussion.

There are nearly 50 farmers currently enrolled in the North Central Region. Jacob has been busy meeting with farmers to deliver their RAAP reports. Farmers have provided all kinds of feedback for the PCM program as well as ways to make the RAAPs more meaningful. Jacob is excited to compile this feedback for the PCM team to review and implement.

This summer Jacob plans on working with enrollment coordinator, Kent Bohnhoff, to enroll another 15 farmers in the program. While any farmer is welcome to join, Jacob has been focusing on enrolling more farmers who use cover crops in their operations. This is a group that is underrepresented in our dataset. He works with farmers as well as NRCS staff to develop a list of cover crop farmers who may be interested in the program.

Chris Stewart—PCM Kentucky— Kentucky is now six months into the program and Chris works directly with 21 farmers in 5 counties (Graves, Hickman, Carlisle, Daviess and Christian). Chris hopes to expand PCM to the other 5 Kentucky counties in the second year of the program. Kentucky PCM farmers are very no-till oriented due to their highly erodible land, so the most common new practices Chris works with are cover crops and variable rate fertilizer inputs. Most farmers in the PCM region have the technology in place

for precision agriculture techniques like variable rate seeding and variable rate fertilizer application to match soil and tissue sample data from their field records. This is a great success story and the ROI on this technology is proving itself and getting better every year. The strip till program is advancing in the region also, with a couple of Chris' farmers now having over 3000 acres in strip till and cereal rye cover crop in 2018.

As a PCM specialist, Chris' favorite part of the job is being in the field with producers. During farm visits, he can assist these producers in their conservation goals for the future. He has found these visits to be a 2-way street. Chris learns from the producers and they learn from him. He's not afraid to jump in a combine or a grain truck if that is what it takes! Chris walks fields and sees firsthand what issue a producer might be dealing with and together they work to find a conservation-minded solution. The field work is the best part of his day!

Chris believes through precision agriculture and cover cropping combined with the independent spirit of the American farmer, PCM will play a big part in the reduction of nutrient losses and the success of sustainable agriculture for the present and next generation of farmers.



Chris Stewart digging in an annual Rye grass cover crop field at the Peery farm checking root development and counting earth worms.

Farmer Highlight—Mike Wurmnest



Wurmnest in Brazil on an Illinois Corn Growers Association Mission.

Mike Wurmnest operates his family's farm in Deer Creek, IL, raising corn and soybeans. The farm has been in the family since 1900. Mike has two sons and a daughter-in-law that farm with him. He has been farming for 50 years and when people ask him, "How long are you going to keep farming?", he says, "I want to keep farming until I get it right." Bottom line, they are still trying to make improvements to "get it right." Their farms vary from gently rolling to highly erodible. Over the years, Wurmnest has tried many types of tillage and no-till. Each of the systems he has tried has its advantages and disadvantages. Usually the advantages were known and were part of the sales pitch to try it. The disadvantages? Mike had to figure those out all on his own! Mike works closely with his local fertilizer dealer to fine-tune nutrient management,

using variable rate and four-year soil testing. He is also making plans to experiment with cover crops. **Mike is in PCM to put all the pieces of the puzzle together.** Like every farm family, it is critical for Mike to know that his conservation decisions are also financially sustainable to ensure he has soils that provide abundant crops for generations to come.

Field to Market just selected Mike to profile in their 2018 Farmer Spotlight Series due to his outstanding conservation and stewardship efforts.



Wurmnest putting on strips before planting corn.

Partner Highlight—Agren Inc.

This is the 2nd year that PCM farmers have had the opportunity to receive a SoilCalculator report from Agren. The SoilCalculator Report provided in the Resource Analysis and Assessment Report (RAAP) delivered to each PCM cooperator, was developed by Agren. Agren shares PCM's vision of targeting conservation practices and reducing risks associated with adopting practices. Along with the SoilCalculator, Agren also offers tools for constructing and designing waterways, ponds, wetlands, and basins.

Soil erosion has a significant, negative impact on crop yields, especially in years when weather conditions are unfavorable. Erosion also results in lost nutrients and lowered land values.

With SoilCalculator[®], you can:

- Compare management alternatives
- Target practices to high soil erosion areas
- Lower input costs and protect land value
- Make decisions based on actual slope steepness instead of book values
- Calculate average soil erosion per acre and total annual soil erosion
- Visualize erosion areas across the field under various tillage and cover crop scenarios

