



Call (717) 733-6397 to start your subscription!

Place your Mailbox Market Ads online or fill out the in-paper form.

- Homepage
- Classifieds
- Mailbox Markets
- Place a Mailbox Market Ad
- Antiques Center
- Public Auction Register
- Order Classified Ad
- Sales Report Form
- Subscribe
- Agricultural News Feeds
- Agricultural Links
- County Dairy Princesses
- Electronic Edition
- North Electronic Edition
- South Electronic Edition
- Auctioneer Guide
- Gun Shows Guide
- Photos
- Ag Directory
- Searchable Display Ads
- Alternative Energy
- Dairy Of Distinction
- About Lancaster Farming
- Mid-Atlantic Horse
- Contact Us

Home » content

Bay Farm Network Holds First Conference

Submitted by Editor on Fri, 03/05/2010 - 12:53pm.



Nitrogen Monitoring Can Help Bay, Bottom Line

Chris Torres
Staff Writer

LANCASTER, Pa. — When it comes to cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay, farmers have often struggled with the conflict between doing something environmentally sound and at the same time making a profit.

That's where programs like the Bay Farms On-Farm Network come into play.

Started in 2004 with only a handful of farmers, the network has grown to include 130 farmers in five Pennsylvania counties along with a few farmers in Virginia.

The goal is to come up with sensible solutions to controlling problems such as nitrogen runoff, but doing it in a way that is economically feasible for farmers.

On Feb. 25, the group held its first conference at the Lancaster Farm and Home Center, focusing on ways the network is addressing nitrogen management through the use of various tools.

The meeting attracted about two dozen people including farmers, educators, and technical assistance people.

"We're getting some real results. Real numbers we can relate to," said Mike Brubaker of Brubaker Farms in Mt. Joy, Pa., one of the original farms involved in the program. "We're always looking for economic payback. Environmentally, we have to talk about our soil, our land, our soil quality because we're concerned about the bay."

The group has partnered with Penn State, the University of Connecticut, conservation districts, and others.

They have also partnered with the Environmental Defense Fund, a group that historically has often been looked upon by the ag community as the "enemy."

Suzu Friedman of the Environmental Defense Fund said while the group has had its past issues with agriculture, they would rather see more farms on the land than possible development.

So they have taken a collaborative approach with the group to find ways to make environmental improvements while at the same time making it economically feasible for farmers.

"If it's not going to work economically, it won't work environmentally either," Friedman said.

In 2004, 22 farms in Lancaster County got involved with the project. The scope was expanded two years later to include some farms in Lebanon and Chester Counties.

There are also some farms in Virginia that are participating in the program.

Its focus so far has been on nitrogen. Using tools such as chlorophyll meters, stalk nitrate tests, pre-sidedress nitrogen tests, and aerial imagery, farmers are given information on how much nitrogen is in their fields to better manage how much they need.

"Nitrogen brings uncertainty. It is an expensive input," Friedman said.

Tracy Blackmer of the Iowa Soybean Association was also on hand at the meeting. He has worked on a similar program in Iowa.

"The whole point of this project is you can actually see how something works," Blackmer said. "We now have all the precision ag tools we can evaluate with and give this information to farmers."

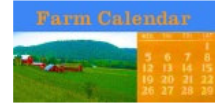
Aerial imagery in particular, Blackmer said, can provide data that a yield meter cannot, such as if fields are stressed from lack of nitrogen or if some fields have too much nitrogen on them.

It can also tell how efficiently nitrogen is being spread on certain fields.

It costs between \$100 and \$150 to rent a plane. But Blackmer said growers, at least in his state, say its worth it.

FEATURES

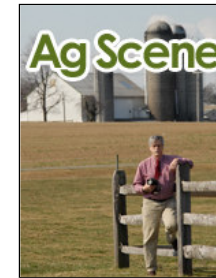
- Weather
- Recipes
- Letters/Commentary
- Receive Email Alerts
- Subscribe
- Archives 1955-1983
- Market Reports
- Penn State Ag Blogs



Lancaster Farming Calendar



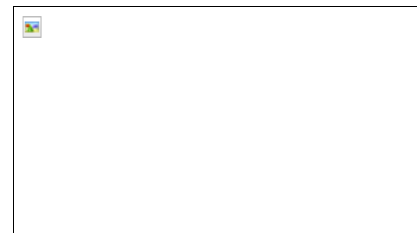
Ag Scene by Dick Wanner -- (click on photo)



ADVERTISING

More than pays for your 1 year
Lancaster Farming subscription (\$49)

Click to see Binkley & Hurst streaming video



MARKET NEWS REPORTS

- Northeast Butter
- Northeast Cheese
- New Holland Livestock Auction (Monday)
- Vintage Livestock Auction (Monday)
- Eastern Region Frozen Eggs (Friday)
- Daily National Egg Market-at-a-Glance
- National Feedstuffs Market Review (Wednesday)
- New Holland Pig Auction (Wednesday)
- Pennsylvania Produce Summary

Username or e-mail address: *

Enter your Lancaster Farming username, e-mail address, or an ID from one of our affiliates: **Drupal.**

Password: *

Log in

- Create new account
- Request new password



There are currently 8 users and 27 guests online.

"It allows growers to see patterns. You can learn a lot real quick by getting feedback," he said.

So what's been the impact here? Tom Morris, a soil fertility specialist with the University of Connecticut, has been keeping track of the data from the participating farms.

From what he has studied, it appears that some progress is being made in terms of nitrogen application.

In 2007, about 4,750 acres of farmland in the program showed a net nitrogen reduction of 27 pounds per acre.

A 2008 test of 16 farms in the program showed a large net reduction in pre-plant nitrogen fertilizer use and a 2008 test of 11 farms showed a net reduction in sidedress nitrogen.

Still, there are issues to hash out, particularly with measuring nitrogen coming from residual manure, which is more difficult to measure.

"It's a very complex situation to figure out," Morris said. "There is still room for improvement. But there is potential for better profits, conservation and improving the environment.

"The farms are making big changes in their management using this information."

Jeff Graybill, extension educator in Lancaster County, said he has found a combination of the stalk nitrate test and the chlorophyll meter are the best way to tell how to manage nitrogen.

He presented results of a test he did in 2006 of 85 farms in the county, 29 of which were Amish.

He took the meter to the various farms and found that 78.5 percent of the farms had a sufficient amount of nitrogen and did not need a sidedressing.

He later used the stalk nitrate test at the end of the season to get a gauge of what happened during the entire season.

Overall, he said the tests resulted in a better understanding of how to use nitrogen on farms. It also showed that application of nitrogen as a sidedressing resulted in better efficiency than applying it all up front.

But there is still room for education and getting producers to actually use these tools on their own. He found most producers he talked to for some reason or another are hesitant to use the tools, either because of time or money.

He finds the tools can provide a benefit.

"There is room for education. There is room for fertility management," Graybill said. "You have to have a plan and you have to have it penciled out."

» [login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

- [New Holland Hog Market \(Monday\)](#)
- [New Holland Cattle \(Thursday\)](#)
- [New Holland Sheep and Goat \(Monday\)](#)

**What do you think of the local food movement?
Has it...**

Benefited Agriculture	74%
Had Little or No Impact on Agriculture	20%
Harmed Agriculture	5%
Total votes: 74	

[older polls](#)