

Producer Panel Discusses Bay Farm Network

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Staff Writer

LANCASTER, Pa. — Matt Young, Nelson Beam and Roger Rohrer each participate in the Bay Farm On-Farm Network.

But each of them has gotten something different from it.

At the first Bay Farm On-Farm Network Conference at the Farm and Home Center

here Feb. 25, the three farmers participated in a panel discussion on their experiences participating in the program.

It was a rough 2009 for Matt Young of Keystone Dairy Ventures in Peach Bottom, Pa.

The low dairy prices resulted in his family having to sell off their 2,200 milking cows, which were held at two sites. Today, only one site is operational and the family milks about

320 cows, also keeping 600 replacement heifers.

The family, Young said, farms 450 acres, all no-till. Manure liquids are used to fertilize half of that acreage.

He's always had an interest in water quality, so he thought joining the network would be beneficial.

Then he found out the Environmental Defense Fund was involved.

He didn't like that so much.

"Me and a couple of other farmers considered putting some sort of legal wall between us and Environmental Defense Fund," Young said.

Surprisingly though, he's found the environmental group to be cooperative and he's gotten a lot of ideas from them.

He's found the corn stalk test to be helpful in figuring just how much manure to use on the fields and he intends to manage nutrients better.

"I've always enjoyed working on things to improve water quality so being a part of this is helpful," he said.

Nelson Beam raises hogs and crops in Berks County.

Good conservation practices are a tradition in his family. His

father back in the 1960s installed terraces and waterways. The farm has been no-till for 20 years and Beam uses rye as a cover crop.

Applying nitrogen as a sidedressing has also been a tradition for the last 25 years and he's been trying to figure out ways to manage it better.

"It didn't take me long to figure out if we could do something to manage it, that would be a good thing," Beam said.

Using a stalk nitrate test was beneficial for him in 2008 as he found he was short on the amount of nitrogen he needed.

This past growing season, he found a significant difference between using cow manure and the manure from his hogs.

Through testing, he found the manure from cows was actually better for growing his crops. It's information he intends to use to better manage the manure he puts on the fields.

"That was kind of interesting to gather that information," he said. "Aerials (field images generated from an airplane) have helped too, they've given me some good information."

Roger Rohrer, who raises 106,000 broilers in Lancaster County and is also an ag lender, said he has benefited from the corn stalk test to better understand how to use the nitrogen coming from the poultry litter.

"The program has helped a lot with understanding that," Rohrer said. "We have made a lot of strides in this area. Overall, environmentally, we are all going to have to do better."

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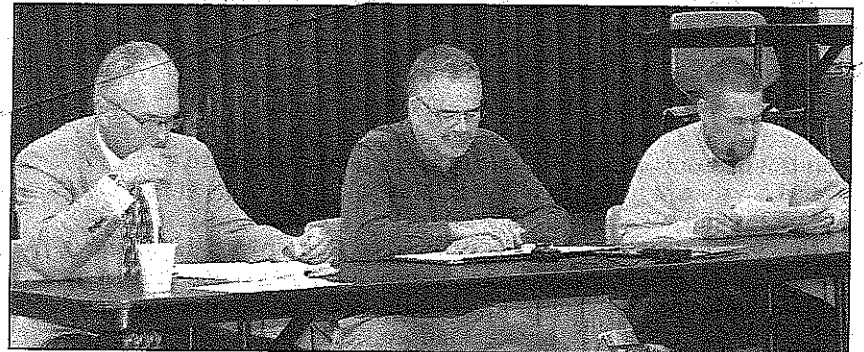


Photo by Chris Torres
Roger Rohrer, Matt Young and Nelson Beam participate in a panel discussion at the recent forum.