

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Success Story



Got Soil? Make it Healthy! Van Wychens Show How It's Done

 United States
Department
of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

“A conservation plan is a huge plus, and we’ve always had one; the soil has to make a living for me and I want to take care of it. A conservation plan helps me think ahead, it provides direction, and documents what we’ve done.” George Van Wychen

George Van Wychen has been farming since 1977, and planting cover crops for 15 years.

“I have a passion for healthy soil. I don’t want to see brown creeks and runoff from tilled fields in the spring,” says George. “I am proud of my farm and want to show what we’ve done with cover crops, erosion control, and building healthy soils here.”

George’s son, Nick Van Wychen, is equally committed to building the soil and keeping the water clean. Nick is an outdoorsman and an environmentalist as well as a farmer. That’s why the Van Wychens agreed to serve as one of four Great Lakes Demonstration Farms in the Fox River Watershed Phosphorus Reduction Initiative.

These Farms demonstrate the best, leading-edge conservation practices to reduce phosphorus entering Green Bay and Lake Michigan. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

(NRCS) and the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) in collaboration with the Brown County Land and Water Conservation Department and Outagamie County Land Conservation Department have organized the Farm network.

Brent Peterson is the project manager for the Lower Fox Demonstration Farms Network points out that these are innovative farmers, conservation leaders as well as community leaders. That’s why they were selected and that’s why they are working so hard to show how conservation can improve this watershed.

Great minds have come together here to work on these problems, and there are great ideas being tested, notes Brent.

The momentum is really growing, notes Jim Jolly, Brown County Conservationist. “These farmers are committed; they are really invested in making this work.”



The Van Wychens held a Cover Crop Field Day, drawing over 50 area farmers, crop advisors, and ag professionals, to see a variety of cover crops, showcasing conservation benefits and soil health improvements that can be gained from keeping the soil protected and under cover. There was a soil pit tour; soil testing demonstration, and manure application equipment on display.

“We want to help get the word out to other farmers, and figure out new and better ways to farm and protect our water and environment,” says Nick. “We’re trying new things. There is lots of interest; we get questions from other farmers.”

The Van Wychens will continue building the health of the soil and sharing what they’ve learned to help others see the benefits of good conservation.



Radishes are deep-rooted, drawing up nitrogen from the soil. This cover crop is excellent for compaction control, the flowers attract pollinators and are excellent forage for grazing.



George Van Wychen (l) and Jason Firster, Soil Conservationist with NRCS, examine the soil profile, investigating the root depth of the radishes during the field day.

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