AERIAL SEEDING PROJECT

Driving around the northern part of the Yahara watershed this fall, it quickly becomes very obvious that farmers are getting more comfortable with cover crops. Green fields are everywhere! And the cost share dollars that Yahara Pride Farms and the county have put into cover crops are only responsible for a small portion of the acres covered, there are many, many more acres that are covered on the farmer’s dime.

But even with farmers getting more comfortable with using cover crops, we continue to search for innovative ways to make cover crop adoption easier. This year, we decided to try out using an airplane to seed cover crops into standing corn silage. This can help to save the farmers’ time, during a very busy time of the year, and give the cover crop more time to grow by planting them earlier. We decided to use spring barley as the cover crop because it will winter kill. Area farmers have been shying away from cover crops like cereal rye because it grows so vigorously in the spring, making it necessary to terminate it early so it doesn’t interfere with planting the following corn crop. And finding a window in the spring to terminate rye can sometimes be tricky.

Using grant dollars that Dane County had received through the NRCS’s Regional Conservation Partnership program, we were able to cost-share over a thousand acres of barley aerially seeded into corn silage. All thousand acres were planted in about four hours on the morning of September 12. The participating farmers were astounded at how quickly the cover crops could be planted by plane.

It seemed like it was going to be an awesome pilot project (pun intended!) with silage harvest on schedule and warm...
September temperatures. But then the hurricanes that took place in the south this fall changed our weather patterns and we went almost all of September without meaningful rainfall. This meant that the cover crop seed mostly sat on the soil surface until we got our first big rain event on October 3rd. Once it sprouted, the cover crop did grow quickly but most of the fields only got about 6-8 inches tall before cool temperatures stalled out the barley’s growth. Ideally, we’d like to see 12-14 inches of growth on the barley in the fall to provide residue and reduce spring erosion. 

Luckily, nearly all of the participating farmers signed up for three years, so we will have another couple of years to evaluate this practice. Farmers who have tried aerial seeding with barley before have had great success if the weather cooperates so we are hopeful the next two years will bring more September rains and these great extended falls.

The other question and issue that came up with planting cover crops this way was the best method and timing for applying manure to the standing cover crops. Low disturbance injection is compatible with standing cover crops but it is typically best done when the cover crops are about 6 inches tall and then leaving some time for regrowth after the manure application. We didn’t have an option to manage the cover crop like this due to the late start the cover crops got this year. And for farmers that have their manure custom hauled, they don’t have much control over the schedule. So we will continue to evaluate manure applications with cover crops to hopefully settle on some general recommendations.

**COVER CROPS AS A FORAGE**

The other cover crop management practice that I have become interested in, as a way to increase cover crop adoption, is using them as a spring forage. This seems like a win-win as it results in an immediate economic return from the cover crop. But it is a practice that comes with a fair amount of management challenges.

Myself and several colleagues held four meetings (two in Dane county and two in Brown County) with dairy farmers, dairy nutritionists and crop consultants in March to talk about what they thought about using cover crops as a forage, some of the farms were feeding cover crops to their livestock and some were not. The farms that were making it work had young stock on the farm and were relying on the cover crop as a low quality forage to keep weight off of their heifers. One of the major hurdles that every farm talked about was the lack of time in the spring to chop the cover crop while they are also trying to make first crop hay and plant corn. Generally, farms that were having greater success were using winter triticale, rather than winter rye. Several Dane County farms planted some triticale along side their rye this fall so we can compare this coming spring.

We will be coming out with a full report on this project in the coming months to share more about the challenges and successes of using cover crops as a forage.
President’s Message
By Jeff Endres, YPF chairman

As we close out another year, I can’t help but reflect back on all the challenges and success that made up 2017. The farmers that are participating in our cost share programs did a great job in the field as well as reporting back to YPF with their Snap Plus files to document phosphorus reduction. YPF was able to collect every snap file needed to document every acre enrolled in the cost share program.

We need to continue this type of involvement moving forward. The data that we collected in 2017 is very valuable to the farm community when we combine it together with all the other farms in the watershed. We are able to show collectively how agriculture is doing as a whole. Which is quite impressive. This data has been extremely helpful in educational discussions with researchers, stakeholders, policymakers and the community. Never is any individual farm’s information or name shared with anyone! This is private data and YPF treats it with full confidentiality.

In 2017, YPFs resource managers put together a first of its kind Phosphorus Report that gives us all a better idea of what is really happening out on the farms in the Yahara Watershed. We will be sharing this with you all in March at our annual conference. Everyone at YPF thanks you all for your involvement and is looking forward to working with you in 2018. We all wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Sincerely,

Jeff

YPF Announcements

Farm Signs

To get a Yahara Pride Farms sign after completing the certification program, please contact us at (608) 824-3250 or email info@yaharapridefarms.org.

Save the Date!
YPF Watershed-Wide Conference - March 7

Plans are underway for another exciting March conference. Watch your email, social media and mail for more details and the full agenda. Registration opens in late January. The event is FREE thanks to support from our partners below.

DETAILS:
Wednesday, March 7
10 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Comfort Inn and Suites, DeForest

Thank you YPF partners!
Yahara WINS and Yahara Pride Farms: A partnership that works!
By Dave Taylor & Martye Griffin, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District

Farmers in the Yahara Watershed are doing some amazing work to help reduce soil and phosphorus loss from their fields. Yahara WINS is working closely with Yahara Pride Farms and others to support these efforts.

Yahara WINS provides on-going funding to support the Yahara Pride Farms Cost Share program. This program helps offset some of the cost for farmers who are trying new or innovative practices in the watershed. These practices include strip tillage, low disturbance manure injection, cover crops, low disturbance deep tillage, headland staking of manure, and manure composting. Yahara WINS also provides financial support for the Yahara Pride Farms Resource Managers who are working with farmers throughout the watershed.

This fall, Yahara WINS partnered with Yahara Pride Farms, Dane County UW-Extension, Dane County Land and Water Resources Department, and The Natural Resources and Conservation Service on a new cover crop program. This effort focused on aerial seeding of cover crops, with over 1000 acres of cover crops being seeded on nine different farms using this approach. Most of the farmers enrolled in the program for three years, so they will have an opportunity to evaluate the practice over a longer period of time.

More recently, Yahara WINS, Dane County Land and Water Resources Department, and the Clean Lakes Alliance provided a grant to Yahara Pride Farms for the purchase of a manure tanker and a low-disturbance manure injection (LDMI) toolbar. Farmers in the watershed can sign up to use the equipment by contacting Yahara Pride Farms and paying a nominal fee.

YPF Annual Report: Dramatic P reductions documented
By YPF Communications

YPF released our 2016 Annual Report in August that documents information and research on the reductions in phosphorus delivered to nearby surface waters by farmers in the Yahara watershed in 2016. YPF has measured on-farm results for four years, but this is the first year that an annual report has been compiled to share program outcomes with the public.

Aided in part by cost-share dollars, farmers have made changes to their farming practices that have resulted in more than 27,000 pounds of documented phosphorus remaining on the land and thus not entering surface water since we began in 2012.

“Farmers in this watershed are committed,” said Jeff Endres, chairman of YPF. “We have a role to play in water quality, and we take that responsibility seriously - this report documents our work.”

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:
• A commitment by farmers to reduce soil loss and phosphorus to the Madison chain of lakes
• Documentation about how specific farming practices are reducing phosphorus
• All data is from the Yahara watershed
• Long-term, this report provides hope and assurance that agriculture nutrient losses are being addressed
• More than 11,000 lbs. of documented phosphorus reduction in 2016; 27,000 lbs. since 2012
• There are barriers to water quality in Dane County, such as legacy phosphorus, that are beyond farmer’s control

In 2016, five practices were promoted by YPF: Strip tillage, low-disturbance manure injection, low-disturbance deep tillage with cover crops, cover crops and headland stacking of manure. Additional data was collected for combining practices, continuing a practice for multiple years and combined practices over time.

The report breaks down phosphorus delivery reduction achieved, along with the number of acres and the cost per pound of phosphorus for each practice. It is important to note that conservation techniques endorsed by YPF have been adopted as best-management practices for farmers in the program. For each practice, the number of acres without cost-share far exceeds the number of acres with cost-share.

“Together, we have created a culture of continuous improvement among farmers in the watershed,” said Endres.

The report is available for free download at yaharapridefarms.org. If you haven’t already, please check it out!
Clean Lakes Alliance supports innovative projects to reduce phosphorus

By Katie Nicholas, Clean Lakes Alliance

Clean Lakes Alliance strives to fund phosphorus reduction practices in the community. This year, we provided $20,000 to Yahara Pride Farms to incentivize headland stacking, stacking of multiple cost-share practices, and a bonus payment for continuing a practice on a field for an extended period of time. We also contributed $100,000 to Yahara WINS, which assisted with acquiring a low disturbance manure injection toolbar and manure tanker for multiple farmers to use in the watershed. These practices will help keep soil and manure on the landscape, thereby reducing the amount of phosphorus that runs into our waters.

In partnership with UW-Madison and three Yahara Pride farmers, we are currently wrapping up a two-year manure composting project financed by Fund for Lake Michigan. The project is assessing whether there are quantifiable water quality impacts of windrow manure composting. The farmers have observed a volume and pathogen reduction with the piles shrinking to about one-third their original size. Jeff Endres has noted that the compost process removes fly larvae benefiting pest control in the heifer barns and allows him to avoid applying manure in winter when runoff risks are greatest. The University has found that the controlled digestion process produces nutrients in a bioavailable form ready for plant uptake.

We are excited to announce the launching of the new Clean Lakes Grants program in 2018 where $60,000 will be available for projects that divert phosphorus from our lakes. The grant application process is presently open. For more details, including how to apply, see our website at cleanlakesalliance.org/grants. Applications are due by Feb. 1, 2018.

FARM TOUR RECAP

Clean Lakes Alliance, in partnership with Yahara Pride Farms, North American Manure Expo, and Endres Berryridge Farms, hosted our fourth annual Farm Tour on Tuesday, August 22. The event brought together 120 attendees at the Endres Berryridge Farms manure compost site in Waunakee, Wisconsin. Jeff Endres discussed his findings from implementing manure composting over the past three years and gave attendees a tour of the manure compost site including a spreading demonstration on an alfalfa field.

Guests learned about manure composting as a manure management technique to help benefit water quality in the watershed. They also learned how composted manure can be used as bedding and how collected manure is used to start the composting process again. Attendees left with a better understanding of the successes and struggles farmers face when implementing new management techniques.

“There are not a lot of barriers to composting,” Jeff said. “I got sick of digging holes in the ground to store manure. For us, this was a way to utilize the nutrients we already have in our farm system.”

Thank you to Jeff Endres, the North American Manure Expo and Yahara Pride Farms for their partnership for a successful event!

Manure compost field application demonstration with a spreading rate of five tons per acre. Photo from CLA.

Jeff Endres detailing how manure compost is turned and removed for field application. Photo from CLA.
YPF has a tremendous list of sponsors and supporters. Without their assistance, YPF would not be able to offer the level of programming that has come to be expected from our group. We sat down with Compeer Financial to talk about their business and what drew them to YPF.

AS A COMPANY, WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO YPF?

Compeer Financial, and our predecessor association Badgerland Financial, have been very proud to be a long-time sponsor of the efforts of the Yahara Pride Farms group. The great work the group does and the focus on sustainability at the farm level, for the advancement of agriculture in the Yahara watershed, has always been one of the main reasons for our support.

The educational opportunities, particularly showcasing different tools farmers can use to lessen the impact on their acreage is truly cutting-edge. It’s really special for us to see all the good this farmer-led organization has done in terms of on-farm local research, information shared and farmer to farmer idea exchange.

WHAT SERVICES DO YOU PROVIDE THE AGRICULTURE COMMUNITY?

We provide loans, leases, risk management and other financial services throughout 144 counties in Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin. From agriculture real estate to operating loans, rural home loans, appraisals, and crop insurance, Compeer Financial is able to offer valuable products and services to help rural America succeed. Our services are provided with convenience in mind, through visits to fields, barns and homes, or by maximizing technology to make the most of every hour in every day.

WHAT IS A SERVICE THAT YOU PROVIDE YOU WISH EVERY FARMER KNEW ABOUT?

Farmers are about growing – crops, livestock, and a legacy. Whether the next step means a loan, lease, risk management planning, or a new home in the country, Compeer Financial can help. At Compeer Financial, our team is passionate about agriculture and the people who raise our food, fuel and fibers. We’re here to help them make better decisions, assess strengths and weaknesses, understand global markets and become more confident in applying risk management techniques.

Whether on the farm, in a conference room or online, we help our clients create a competitive edge with objective, practical knowledge that allows them to reduce risk and grow their operation.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR FARMERS IN A DOWN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY?

In the down agricultural economy that we are currently facing, advice that we have for farmers is to know their numbers. It is vital to know your cost of production and breakeven price, in the event that you need to act quickly to take advantage of opportunities to sell.

Additionally, looking for opportunities to buy inputs at more economical prices, while continually fine-tuning your operation, whether it be your ration, milking time or any other number of variables, are especially important in this current market environment.

This is a time when attention to detail is incredibly important and impactful on
farmers’ bottom lines.
We encourage farmers to keep their lender in the know of their financial situation, particularly in this financial climate. Clients creating and maintaining an open and honest flow of communication between themselves and their loan officer is vital. Without knowing the full picture, or not having access to up-to-date, and real numbers, we cannot equip farmers with the proper products and tools to help endure.

GIVE A BRIEF HISTORY OF COMPEER, AND ANY COMMENTS IN YOUR FIRST SIX MONTHS AS A NEW COMPANY:
On July 1, 1st Farm Credit Services, AgStar Financial Services and Badgerland Financial joined together as Compeer Financial, strengthening our commitment to the agricultural community. By combining resources, knowledge and expertise, Compeer Financial will champion the hopes and dreams of rural America like never before. Compeer Financial is off to a strong start and our financial process have exceeded our expectations. Compeer Financial is a member-owned, Farm Credit cooperative serving and supporting agriculture and rural communities. Based in the upper Midwest, Compeer Financial exists to champion the hopes and dreams of rural America. With 1,200 dedicated team members serving more than 43,000 clients, we offer specialized expertise and personalized service regardless of the size of the farm, the type of crop grown or the livestock raised.

ARE THERE ANY FINANCIAL TOOLS THAT FARMERS NEED TO BE AWARE OF IN THE FUTURE?
Technology is consistently evolving, whether it is in the office or out in the fields. Although it may not be realistic to invest in some technologies during the down economy, doing your research and finding those options that will help you stay organized with your bookkeeping or create efficiencies out in the field can make all the difference, when it comes to yields or inputs. Keeping track of your financials by using electronic software has the potential to save you time and energy as well. Which will help you stay up to date on your numbers.

It is hard not to become discouraged during times like these. However, farmers are some of the most hard-working, dedicated and passionate people in our workforce. We will endure, just like we have through the tough times of the past. Embrace the opportunities that arise, and keep pushing forward towards a brighter future.

HOW CAN PEOPLE CONTACT YOU OR THEIR AREA REPRESENTATIVE?
To find out more about Compeer Financial, or to contact your local office, go to compeer.com or call 844-426-6733.
Farmers are some of the most hard-working and passionate people in our work force. We will endure, just like we have through the tough times of the past.

- Laura Herschleb, Compeer Financial