

Forward Farmer

Yahara Pride Farms Newsletter

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Yahara Pride Farms 2013 Phosphorus Report

You may have noticed a different landscape as you have driven through rural Dane County this past year. Yahara Pride Farmers are making major changes in how they prepare land and cover their land for the winter, and it hasn't gone unnoticed. Through YPF's phosphorus reduction programs and on their own, YPF members in the Yahara Watershed incorporated new, innovative conservation practices on their farmland to prevent phosphorus from entering waterways. There were four major incentivized programs offered to farmers in 2013 including: strip tillage, vertical manure injection, cover crop assistance, and a Farm Certification Program.

In total, YPF members tilled 200 acres of land using strip tillage, injected 300 acres of manure into the soil using vertical manure injection, and planted 2,375 acres of a variety of cover crops to mitigate soil erosion. With the popularity of cover crops increasing in the Yahara Watershed, more acres of green legumes are sprouting in the countryside among crops. Many farmers planted more cover crops than what YPF offered through our cost-share program, which resulted in a substantial phosphorus reduction.

To estimate the total phosphorus reduction of these green algae-preventing practices, YPF's Conservation Resource Manager Dennis Frame completed a SnapPlus analysis of all of the cost-share programs that were made available to YPF members. SnapPlus was also used as a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of the certification program.



Strip Tillage

Strip-tillage is a conservation system that uses minimum tillage. Farmers use it to combine the soil-drying and warming benefits of conventional tillage with the soil-protecting advantages of no-till. Strip tillage can be easily identified in the field by looking for darker, disturbed soil only in the portion of rows that will contain the seeds.

This year, there were three farms that tried the strip tillage equipment. After running field information through SNAP, it was estimated that strip tillage provides an average phosphorus reduction of 1.4 lbs/acre. From the data, it can also be concluded that strip tillage offers great estimated reductions in phosphorus loss when used in fields that were going to be fall or spring chiseled. In 2013, it is estimated that the three farms that used strip tillage helped prevent 170.5 lbs of phosphorus from entering the Yahara waterways.

Vertical Manure Injection

Vertical manure injection is a relatively new farming system that incorporates manure with minimal soil disturbance. In contrast to surface application of manure, vertical manure injection/incorporation places manure below the surface where it does not interact with runoff water during storms. It is very unlikely you will distinguish this practice by its manure odor, for one of the major benefits of manure injection is the absence of the manure smell.

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Yahara Pride Farms Certification Benefits

For a detailed description of all certification components, please review our Certification Checklist on our website.

By becoming a Yahara Pride Farms CERTIFIED member, producers currently have access to branding benefits as well as the following discounts.



Thanks to our sponsor
Badgerland Financial:

- Discounted servicing or appraisal fees
- Discounted tax or farm accounting services
- Discounted registration fees to attend industry meetings & conferences

Additionally, the following benefits will soon be available to certified members:

- Expedited permitting
- Value-added commodity prices
- Discounted agricultural supplies
- Sustainable agricultural producer label



Announcements

Yahara Pride Farms is looking for local implement dealers to donate the use of and/or exhibit their conservation equipment at the 2014 Fall Field Demonstration Days in late October. If you are interested, please contact Rachel at 608-255-6329 or by email: rachel@yaharapridefarms.org



We had a great meeting and tour on the Jeff Endres farm with NRCS state conservationist, Jimmy Bramblett. Lots of great opportunities ahead for Yahara Pride Farms.

Breakfast on the Farm Update

On Saturday June 14th, YPF joined the Zander family in Mt. Horeb for this year's Dane County Breakfast on the Farm. YPF's role was in the education building where we taught breakfast goers about YPF and its phosphorus reduction activities in the Yahara watershed.



At the booth, the YPF team engaged all ages through fun learning activities - YPF trivia enhanced the learning experience and many people received prizes for their outstanding participation. The event provided an excellent opportunity for phosphorus reduction education for both rural and urban attendees.

Like us on Facebook & follow us on Twitter.

If you post a tweet about @YaharaPride use these hashtags:
#RenewtheBlue #YPF #CoverCrops

Yahara Pride Farms 2013 Phosphorus Report, cont.

The manure injector traveled from field to field as 11 farmers vertically injected manure into 20 fields, or approximately 321 acres. Over 3,000,000 gallons of liquid manure were applied with this equipment in the fall of 2013. There was significant interest in using this equipment, and having it available earlier in the year is thought to increase the number of acres injected. This practice is again planned for 2014 and will be made available to area YPF members for cost-sharing in late summer of 2014. After evaluating the collected data in SnapPlus, it is estimated that vertical manure injection provides an average phosphorus reduction of 2.9 lbs per/acre. With this estimate, this year's vertical manure injection phosphorus reduction was 674 lbs.

Cover Crop Assistance

Cover crops are grasses, legumes, small grains or other crops grown between regular grain crop production periods for the purpose of protecting and improving the soil. One of the major reasons for growing winter cover crops is to reduce soil erosion. The most common cover crops in our region are fall-seeded cereals, such as rye or wheat, and fall-seeded annual ryegrass.

In 2013, the program worked with 20 farmers on 80 different fields. Last year, cover crop seeding was mostly planted traditionally or through aerial seeding. You may have noticed a low flying airplane seeding area fields. In the Yahara watershed, cover crops have quickly become more popular and beneficial in significant amounts of tillable acres that have sufficient slopes that are at risk of erosion. This year the data showed that land coverage of cover crops provided an average reduction of 1.0 lbs/acre in the Yahara watershed. This year's cover crop program helped prevent 1,957 lbs of phosphorus from entering the Yahara waterways.

2013 Results Summary Table

Strip tillage: Average reduction of 1.4 lbs/acre - helped prevent 170.5 lbs of phosphorus from entering the Yahara waterways.

Vertical Manure Injection: Average phosphorus reduction of 2.9 lbs per/acre - helped prevent 674 lbs of phosphorus runoff.

Cover Crops: Average reduction of 1.0 lbs/acre - helped prevent 1,957 lbs of phosphorus from entering the Yahara waterways.



Farm Certification Program

The Farm Certification Program began in 2013 with the goal of providing farmers in the watershed with a non-regulatory and confidential evaluation of the environmental risks as well as documenting the beneficial practices occurring on their farms. Our two contracted conservation resource managers complete a whole farm walkover to identify conservation strengths and weaknesses on the farm. The certification program involves an assessment of four areas: facilities & non-permeable areas, a farm crop and soil fertility program, a walkover of the fields for environmental needs, and an evaluation of the SnapPlus plan. There are specific categories in each of the four areas that are evaluated through a point system. The overall rating system for the certification program ranges from 1 to 100, which then places farms into three categories: green, yellow and red based on the level of points they acquire for a specific area being assessed.

Once the onsite certification assessment is complete, our conservation resource managers evaluate the scores of each section. They then sit down with each farmer and discuss the results from the assessment. During this time, all green, yellow and red risks are reviewed and they offer constructive suggestions for future conservation initiatives. Farms must attain at least 80% of the points to become certified. The evaluation aids in creating a long-term vision for the farm operation.

End Result

In total, the cost-share programs prevented 2,801.5 pounds of phosphorus from entering the lakes in 2013. All of these programs have produced significant results over a short period of time. While driving around this fall, be sure to take a look at the changes in our countryside as YPF farmers implement new, advanced farming techniques in their fields.

Sponsor Profile:

MSA Professional Services

Who we are:

MSA Professional Services, incorporated in 1962, is a multi-disciplinary consulting firm serving clients throughout the Upper Midwest. We serve Yahara Pride Farms (YPF) members from our Baraboo and Madison locations. Our agricultural engineers offer many services to help farmers succeed. We give them advice and assist with planning so they can do their all-important job in the best possible way. We share YPF's mission of preserving and enhancing soil and water resources for future generations.

Why did MSA decide to partner with YPF?

MSA is proud to support the efforts of Yahara Pride Farms and farmers who work together to protect the Yahara River watershed. As agricultural engineers with ties to the agriculture industry, we understand the challenges that farmers face and provide services to help them make good production and environmental decisions. We can guide farmers through the complex governmental permitting process that will lead to compliance with state and federal regulations. We also design projects, such as feedstock leachate and runoff collection systems, manure storage and manure transfer systems.

A short list of our ag-related services includes:

Permitting & Livestock Siting
Feed Storage & Leachate Containment Design
Manure Handling, Storage & Transfer Design
Fertilizer & Pesticide Containment Design
Spill Prevention Control & Countermeasure (SPCC) Plans
Composting System Design, Operation & Maintenance

Approximately 30% of our corporation's workload is related to water and wastewater projects. We believe in the importance of working with community stakeholders to identify and resolve challenges. Yahara Pride Farms is a great example of how diverse groups can all work together as environmental stewards.

How do your services assist with the implementation of conservation practices?

Our solutions incorporate the appropriate conservation practice or design so the end result fits each farmer's need and site constraints. Our goal is to design systems that are as simple and economically feasible as possible. We are very well versed in Natural Resources Conservation Services practices and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources requirements.

What discounts does MSA provide Yahara Pride Farms certified members?

MSA offers YPF members **one free site visit** to discuss how conservation practices apply to their projects and the process for completing those projects. At this meeting, we can discuss the project design considerations, possible alternatives and permitting requirements. After this visit, YPF members will be in a better position to decide how they want to proceed with their project.



Contact:

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MSA

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Why You Should Consider Cover Crops for Your Farm

Featured Guest Article from United Soybean Board



The state of soybean planting around the country right now ranges from “finished” to “about to start,” depending on geography and weather. But even if you’re still focused on getting your first soybean seed in the ground, it’s not a bad idea to start thinking about what you’ll plant after harvest. If those plans include cover crops, you might start seeing the benefits as early as next spring.

Cover Crops Could Be Right For You

At least that’s what Ohio State University assistant professor and extension educator James Hoorman would like tell you. “I’ve had farmers tell me that cover crops are only suited for small farmers or that it simply won’t work for them,” he says. “But I know of a farmer who plants over 10,000 acres of cover crops a year.” Hoorman says the number of acres planted to cover crops on a yearly basis continues to multiply as more and more farmers realize that cover crops are beneficial.

Risk vs. Reward

Numerous rewards may be gained from planting cover crops. Consider all of the following:

Organic matter: Cover crops can increase the amount of organic matter in your soil. “It takes approximately 10 tons of decomposed plant residue and 1,000 pounds of nitrogen per acre to increase soil organic matter by one percent,” says Hoorman. Using cover crop mixtures can increase organic matter levels in a much more cost-effective way. Increased organic matter also increases the soil’s water-holding capacity, which will pay off in dry spells.

Improved soil structure: Cover crops increase the soil’s porosity, improving drainage and decreasing soil compaction.

Weed control: Planting a cover crop can help suppress weed growth by competing for nutrients and sunlight that would otherwise be free for the weeds’ taking.

Soil erosion: Cover crops help hold soil in place that may otherwise be susceptible to erosion, lessening nutrient runoff and keeping those valuable nutrients in place for the next crop to use.

However, cover crops are not fool proof. A farmer does assume some additional cost and risks when using them, but most, if not all, can be avoided with well-timed management. It’s important to get crops planted in early fall, to give them 60 to 90 days of growth before winter. This may mean that inter-seeding with the corn or soybeans in the ground is needed. Cover crops left to grow too long in the spring, may dry out the soil for the next crop, especially if using cereal rye or winter rye. Management is the key, says Hoorman.

Good Things Come to Those Who Wait.

In today’s fast-paced world, it’s easy to want quick results. But in the case of cover crops, patience is not only a virtue, it’s a necessity. It may take three to seven years, says Hoorman – to see the full benefits of using a cover crop. The best results come from planting a cover crop every single year. He compares planting cover crops to the costs of tilling a field. “If a farmer tiles a field at \$1,000 an acre, he doesn’t expect to get all of that money back in the first year. It is an investment that will pay off over time.

As for the perceived additional cost associated with planting cover crops, Hoorman says it may actually save farmers money. “It costs a tremendous amount of money to do tillage, between the labor, fuel and wear and tear on the equipment. The money farmers would have spent tilling a field should be spent on growing a cover crop.”

Better nutrient retention may lessen the need to apply expensive fertilizers over time and more weed control could reduce the number of herbicide applications in a year, all adding up to additional savings.”

Farmers across generations are working towards water quality

A series of testimonials on our Certification Program

We interviewed farmer Jeff Meffert on his experiences as he went through the Certification Program. Read on to get a first-hand look at the process and its value.

Farm Overview:

Third generation farmer Jeff Meffert owns and operates Meffert Homestead, Inc., a 100 cow dairy in Waunakee, WI. Jeff farms with his wife Ann, daughter Megan, son Luke, as well as his parents. Meffert Homestead milks 100 mature cows in a parlor/free stall barn set-up and raises an additional 100 replacement heifers. Jeff follows a nutrient management plan for his 280 acres of farmland to best plan for crop nutrient needs and to save on fertilizer dollars.



Jeff Meffert
Dairy Farmer
Waunakee, WI

Interview

Q: Why did you decide to become a Yahara Pride Farms certified farmer?

A: There are a couple of reasons why I decided to go through the certification process. One reason is that I have been exploring manure storage expansion and thought that consulting with the resource managers would help with the process of identifying which manure storage structure would be most beneficial cost-wise and environmentally. Also, I thought it would be beneficial to have an objective party view my farm to identify certain changes that I may have never thought of that could help advance my business while doing so in an environmentally conscious way.

Q: How long did your certification farm walkover take?

A: The walkover of the facilities and land for the size of my operation took about an hour of my time.

Q: Were you satisfied with the information shared with you so far and have you found the information useful?

A: As of right now, we haven't reached the point in the certification process where we sit down and talk specifically about the ratings in each area but throughout the

process, they have reaffirmed things I have been doing well and have even offered a few suggestions for improvements. For example, they pointed out a spot in a ditch where water should be redirected--something I had never thought of.

Q: What is the most beneficial part of the certification program from your point of view?

A: For me as a farmer, I see the most beneficial part of the certification program as the potential for changes in my nutrient management plan. I haven't gotten to the part in the process where I sit down with Joe and Dennis to discuss all of their findings but if they have a suggestion on how to put dollars back into my pocket through nutrient management planning, I would see that as a huge advantage.

Q: Would you recommend becoming certified to another farmer and why?

A: Yes, I would recommend it because of the potential to make changes to save money through nutrient management planning or through different farming practices that you have never tried before. It is also great that these suggested practices help control erosion and benefit the environment.

"Consumers look at that validation as a positive thing and they like to do business with people who are doing things correctly."

Q: Are there any other comments you would care to make?

A: In this day and age in agriculture, a third party is becoming necessary in validating that we as farmers are doing the best jobs that we can. Consumers look at that validation as a positive thing and they like to do business with people who are doing things correctly. This Farm Certification Program gives me another tool to say yes, I am following my nutrient management plan and doing everything I can to have conservation practices in place where they are needed.



Thanks to our partners!

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United Cooperative
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Wisconsin Soybean
Marketing Board
Wisconsin DNR
Yahara WINS

**Bolded names indicate new partners of YPF*

To become a sponsor of YPF, please contact Rachel at 608-255-6329.

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Middleton, WI 53562

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Conservation Resource Managers
Dennis Frame
Joe Connors



If you are interested in Yahara Pride Farms apparel please visit: ces.land-send.com/CleanLakes

To get a Yahara Pride Farms member sign (shown right at Endres Berryridge Farms) after completing the certification program, please contact us at 608-255-6329.



The Clean Lakes Alliance (CLA) proudly contributes administrative, financial and marketing support to Yahara Pride Farms.

www.cleanlakesalliance.com

Grant Updates

Village of DeForest

In April, the Clean Lakes Alliance (CLA) was awarded \$10,000 from the Village of DeForest 2014 Stormwater Grant program. The funds will go towards our YPF cover crop test plot that's helping us better understand how to keep soil in its place & phosphorus out of our waterways, as well as our Demo Days. We are excited to have the support of the Village of DeForest - thank you!



Equipment Upgrade Grants

In June, two Yahara Pride Farms members were awarded \$23,125 from Yahara WINS to upgrade their existing manure management equipment to a vertical manure injector. Just last year, vertical manure injection prevented 674 pounds of phosphorus runoff through the YPF cost-share program.

If you are interested in learning more about injection, please contact Rachel Fossum at 608-255-6329.

PDPF & Yahara WINS

We are excited to announce that the Clean Lakes Alliance received two new grant awards recently, both to be used for Yahara Pride Farms initiatives. The Professional Dairy Producers Foundation (PDPF) has granted \$5,000 to strengthen our YPF certification program & annual farm technology demonstration days, and Yahara WINS has granted \$80,000 to assist in the implementation of agricultural conservation practices through our cost-share program. Thanks to PDPF & Yahara WINS for your support!



Upcoming Events

Dane County Fair

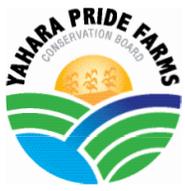
July 16-20th, 2014
Alliant Energy Center, Madison
For more information:
www.danecountyfair.com



WI Farm Technology Days

August 12-14th, 2014
Stevens Point, WI
For more information:
www.wifarmtechnologydays.com





3609 Niebler Lane
Middleton, WI 53562

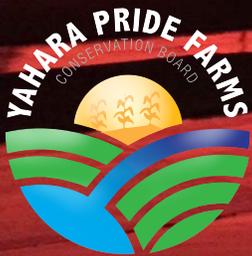


Photo by Natalie Endres