Erosion, cover crops, no-till and P: Field day at Wooster

The annual Ohio No-till Field Day will be held at OSU-OARDC, August 29. The program begins and ends at Fisher Auditorium, 1680 Madison Ave., Wooster. Registration (with coffee and snacks) opens at 8:00 am. The program will begin at 8:50 with welcoming comments by Jan Layman, President of the Ohio No-Till Council, and Dave Benfield, Associate Vice-President for Agriculture, OSU-OARDC.

We have an incredible panel to start the program, including Glover Triplett who was the co-founder of the historic no-till research plots in 1962. Others on the panel will focus on no-till and cover crops. The first topic, at 1:00 pm, is on managing cover crops. It will be presented by Jim Hershers, a no-till farmer and innovator in eastern Pennsylvania. He serves as President of the Pennsylvania No-till Alliance. Jim interseeds covers in corn, and "plants green," both soybeans and corn. He will describe his management techniques that have given positive results for five years. He designed and built (and markets to several states) the interseeder. He is experimenting with different cover crop mixes and has had success with skipping every third row of corn, providing 60 inches for the cover crop between the pairs of corn rows. The interseeder can work through corn up to 4 feet tall.

Hershey Farms includes a lot of livestock. They market 1.3 million broilers and finish 3600 hogs a year. They are in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and have to meet strict requirements for the livestock and cropping operations. (Don’t be surprised if Ohio farmers eventually have similar requirements for Lake Erie and the Ohio River.) Jim says, “It is easier to be on the leading edge of conservation rather than cleaning up afterwards.”

Jim Hershers also owns 400 acres in Clinton County. It is farmed by custom operators and Wilmington College takes students to the farm to learn about cover crops, no-till, and soil health.

Session A will also include Jerry Grigar on the benefits of switching from transition -al no-till to continuous no-till, and Jim Hoorman will share tips on succeeding with no-till corn.

Erosion and cover crops will be the main topics in Session B. The program organized by the Wayne County SWCD and Wayne County Extension, includes an hour on using cover crops within a soybean production system to prevent soil erosion, build healthier soils and raise productive soybean crops. This session will feature the return of two of the morning speakers, Dave Brandt, no-till farmer and longtime cover crop user on his Fairfield County farm and Bill Haddad with New Day Ag Consulting. With their extensive knowledge and experiences they will provide attendees with a wealth of information.

Session B has a half hour covering the topics of cover crop cost share programs and the use of cover crops for forage. Wayne County NRCS and SWCD personnel will provide an overview of the technical assistance and cost share programs available to farmers in the Muskingum watershed who have an interest in planting cover crops. A local farmer panel will describe how they use cover crops to not only protect the soil but also as an alternative forage resources on their farms.

Lake Erie and Gov. Kasich

As I write this, there is plenty of consternation and concern in the farm community. Is no-till a solution to the algae issue, or is it the problem? One suggestion at a hearing was to do aggressive tillage to get P off the surface. Yuck! (That’s an editorial opinion.)

Seriously, can continuous no-till with cover crops and all chemical fertil-izer injected (not incorporated, which implies tillage) keep P out of the lake? Can a farmer spread manure (a small contributor of total P in the watershed) on no-till ground, un-frozen, with a growing cover crop? Stay tuned.