

Palouse Watershed of Washington

FARM #17

Tracy Eriksen manages a 3,000-acre operation with his family in Saint John, Washington. On their operation, the family routinely grows winter wheat, spring wheat and canola and occasionally grows spring barley and peas.

Tracy has been farming for more than 65 years. He began his soil health journey in the mid-'70s as he recognized that erosion was a big problem and threatened the future of the farm. "The incident that really got me started on the soil health kick was watching a piece of wood go down the hill along with flowing soil as I was weeding one day," he said. "I decided at that point that we really had to do something different or we weren't going to have anything left here for my sons and future generations."

Tracy started the journey by modifying equipment to combine operations so he could make fewer trips across a field. He claims it took him a bit of time to get the hang of it, but after 35 years of experimenting, he says the erosion has stopped. Since 1985, the Eriksens have progressed from high- to low- to an ultra-low disturbance no-till system on their farm.

"Besides the erosion, the main thing that I see is that we've been able to develop much better infiltration of water in our soils," Tracy said. This better infiltration, combined with surface residue and improved soil structure from no-tilling, leads to more resilience under varying weather conditions.

The practice of no-till also allows him to get over acres quickly, freeing up labor for other endeavors.

One of the initial challenges Tracy faced was learning how to handle the residue. In 2010, he rented a CrossSlot drill in an attempt to mitigate this challenge, and in 2014, the family built their own drill using the CrossSlot technology. "From that point on, residue really hasn't been a problem for us," he said.



He hopes that more people will look at soil health and decide to try something on a few acres other than the normal. "So many operations are still farming as my grandfather farmed," Tracy said. "It's a really hard habit to break."

View Tracy's interview:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_f1f1X_4s4

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