

English River Watershed of Iowa

FARM #2

Levi Lyle has been farming on the operation he grew up on in Keota, Iowa, for more than 10 years. He farms about 250 acres in a set rotation of corn and soybeans.

The Lyles have been utilizing soil health practices for more than 25 years. “Since I was in about junior high, my dad went no-till, so we don’t even think of that as a soil health practice, that’s just regular farming,” Levi says. He also utilizes cover crops (beginning with Austrian winter peas, but now largely rye) and buffer strips of alfalfa mix, partially to help manage his organic fields. “You can take that rye mat that is there all season long and still there in the fall, and you can pull it back, and you can really see that underneath it is biology,” Levi said. “The earthworms are there and very busy, and it’s just incredible to see that actual presence of biology in the soil.”

Levi began organic farming, and now 40 acres of his operation is organic certified. “I knew it was going to be necessary, because I could see that absentee landowners who have not lived in this area for more than a generation were probably going to liquidate their assets, and we weren’t going to be able to buy that land, so I sought to be organic,” he said.

He visited other farms in the area and noticed frustration with local organic growers regarding managing their soybeans given significant weed pressures. “I decided to buy a roller crimper and started using it and sharing it with other farmers in the area,” Levi said. “What I found was that we were able to manage weeds, completely suppressing them. It was a little bit unbelievable, seeing how the biomass was able to inhibit weeds - this is rye biomass that we rolled down when we planted the soybeans. It was really attention gathering. We’ll put two bushels of rye on in the fall, and then we’ll roll it down in the spring and just skip the pre-emergent pass with the herbicides, with the option of coming in in July and still using the herbicides. We’re saving costs in the rolling down of rye also.”

Levi, a self-professed ‘believer in the impact of having a diverse soil,’ emphasizes educating the next generation, bringing his children in the combine or tractor when planting in the spring. “When I think about cover crops and building conservation into



our operation, I think about the resilience in the soil,” he said. “I’d like to continue to evolve the way I think about my rotation on the farm, but what I would like to do on our farm is grow a third commodity and call it carbon. I would like to have corn, soybeans and carbon as my three commodity crops.”

View Levi’s interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-JH3nA3ZPE>

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