

# Stony Creek-River Raisin Watersheds of Michigan

## FARM #21

Blaine Baker and his wife Barbara, along with Blaine's brother Kim and his wife Donna, milk 500 cows and farm 2,300 acres on their operation, Bakerlads Farms, in south central Michigan.

Their operation is 100 percent no-till. They started experimenting with no-till in the 1980s and have been utilizing cover crops on all of their acres for over six years.

"The base of our cover crops is annual rye," Blaine said. "We don't use a lot of straight annual. We have annual with rye rape and rye rape clover."

The Bakers have about three miles of buffers along their ditches – some of which were installed with assistance through CRP and CREP. Blaine started using filter strips around 1990 and applies fertilizer using variable rate technology and plants according to yield monitoring data.

"We started out no-tilling using a multi-coulter setup on the first corn planter, but that didn't make it through the season," Blaine explained. "Our second no-till planter was a double frame planter, so we had the weight needed to penetrate the soil to get good seed placement." Now, he uses a planter that only has residue managers and spiked closing wheels. "We tried annual rye several years ago but had trouble killing it in the spring, so we quit using it. We now have that figured out and aren't afraid to use it," he said.

Blaine has seen numerous benefits from his soil health practices, including improved organic matter and reduced compaction and erosion.

"The soil holds up a lot better," said Blaine. "That's the beauty of the annual rye that we use. It shoots roots through some pretty hard stuff, and it goes awfully deep, so what compaction we are creating, we're hoping that we are taking out with the cover crops."

According to Blaine, the biggest challenge in using conservation practices is "just getting people to use no-till."



"I have told several people that if you aren't going to no-till, don't waste your money on cover crops," he continued. "They won't help reverse the current soil health trend they are experiencing if they are going to destroy all of the gain with tillage. As far as our operation, we are committed to no-till, so when we purchase a new piece of ground, it gets no-tilled."

View Blaine's interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxvTdwDK93U>

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