

Pee Dee Watershed of South Carolina

FARM #30

Carl Coleman, now in his third year as a seedsman, used to operate a 700-acre farm in Dillon, South Carolina. The operation, which primarily grew corn, yellow peas and soybeans, was a family operation started by his grandfather and is now run by Carl's son.

"No-till and cover crop are really our two main conservation practices that we're using," Carl said. The operation has been no-till since 1990 and has been utilizing cover crops for about seven years. "We try to keep something growing on the land if we don't have a crop growing."

Carl was drawn into the cover crop arena following a presentation by Ray Archuleta. "He got to talking about all these things - how we could cut our fertilizer and reduce chemicals, how we could do all these different things, and how the practices we were doing were pretty detrimental to soil health." It was following that presentation that Carl spoke with his District Conservationist about how he could adopt the practice on his operation.

His soil health practices have helped him significantly reduce the amounts of phosphorous and potassium that they apply. He has also been able to practically eliminate lime applications, as he hasn't needed to put any out in about six years. "What we've learned is when you have a healthy soil and you quit putting all your synthetic fertilizer on, instead of having this up-and-down cycle, we've flattened out. That is a huge savings," said Carl.

Carl has also seen his soil come to life. "I was so excited about seeing earthworms," he said. "Even though we've been no-tilling since 1990, I've never seen an earthworm. So when I got to seeing earthworms, I knew the biology was getting ramped up."

Subsoiling, a common practice in the sandy loam soils of his area, has been reduced due to his practices and the decrease in compaction that they've caused. "What we began to see with the covers is that because of the root structure, our soils were not compacting. The roots helped kept the channels open and we saw less ponding of water after these big rain events," he said.



"Unfortunately, a lot of the times the reason why we do things is because we've always done it, and that's not a really good reason," Carl said. "We encourage people to take one field and just don't do anything. Just plant covers. Don't let a fertilizer truck run on it. See what happens for two or three years. That's the only way you're going to know."

View Carl's interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2gwrEpsN6I>

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