

Inland Bays Watershed of Delaware

FARM #7

Blaine Hitchens (pictured right) is a third-generation farmer from Laurel, Delaware, who took over Chip Baker's (left) operation after he retired in 2018. Baker grew corn, soybeans, vegetables and watermelon, and Hitchens now rotates corn and soybeans and maintains a poultry operation.

Chip began with cover crops within the last 10 years and has kept the farm no-till since 1990. He began with radishes and experimented as he went, settling on a multi-species mix including cereal rye and a radish. "I knew we had to change, and I was never afraid of change and never had been for 40 years," Chip said. "I know there's people out there that probably thought, 'What is he doing? He's nuts!' I remember when I first started no-tilling soybeans, I was one of the first ones."

Blaine has been no-tilling his own operation for the last 15 years, and now plants all of his cover crops by planting green. "We let our vetches and ryes go to full bloom and to head, and that way we are retrieving everything we can from that crop to feed our next crop," he said.

Chip and Blaine both turned to their local NRCS office for assistance. "We received a lot of information from NRCS, along with funding to put these practices in, to basically fund the project to learn how to do this," Blaine said. "That has been a very big advancement for us, because farming - it's been tough forever, so why would you want to spend money on something you might not get your return back on. Now we're seeing the return come back from it, with the input." "We just couldn't afford to make the mistakes to do it," Chip said. "Since NRCS funded it, it really made it easy. They made it affordable by paying for it, and so you could make the mistakes and learn."

"We are being able to reduce our chemical cost, because now we are learning what chemicals we can cut back on," Blaine said. "As of this year, we are down by 50 percent of our nitrogen calls, and we're on zero on our potassium. So, we look at the overall expense, we have saved a lot of money on input costs. Going forward, it's just going to be to see how much farther we can go on the opposite way with inputs and retrieve the same goal."



View Blaine and Chip's interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TTLdOi4dGk>

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