

# Lower South Platte Watershed of Colorado

## FARM #9

John Heermann (back row, second from the right) farms about 2,000 acres of rented land in Haxtun, Colorado. He grew up farming with his dad but then started farming on his own about seven years ago.

John grows a variety of crops each year, with no set rotation. He has grown rye, Austrian winter peas, yellow peas, chickpeas, flax, wheat, millet, milo, hairy vetch, woolly pod vetch and numerous different kinds of oats.

His main soil health practice, he says, is keeping the soil covered. To achieve this, he tries to keep a living root in the soil as many days as possible by cover cropping, companion cropping and/or inter-cropping. He also operates a zero-till environment, planting everything with a no-till drill or no-till planter.

“For the past five years, any time I harvest something, I pretty much follow the combine with my seeder and plant a diverse cocktail mix of my cover crops,” he said.

John’s operation is a dry-land operation that receives about 17 inches of annual rainfall. His soil health practices have helped him better infiltrate the water he does receive and has significantly reduced the soil and wind erosion off the farm.

“I have a lot of roots in there that I’ve had the last five years, and I’ve built up some of the organic matter and kept that soil covered,” John said. “So, as far as my water infiltration, it’s actually getting into my soil a lot better, and I’m able to get across these acres a lot more quickly after it rains.”

Following his first few years of cover cropping, John has seen his microbial activity improve. Through all of his practices, he has noticed that his fuel usage has reduced significantly. “I do some custom seeding, and I didn’t really notice that until I started doing other people’s fields and fuel consumption would jump up quite a bit,” he said.



John uses routine soil tests to monitor his many improvements. However, he says his biggest monitoring tool is his shovel. “If I’ve got earthworms and indicator species, then I’m going in the right direction. That’s kind of my best tool,” he said. “The tests are helpful, but, at the end of the day, I think your own eyes and a shovel are the best tool.”

View John’s interview:

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

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