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### **WINNING SOYBEAN CONTEST YIELD ON CRP**

The Soybean Digest just reported that farming with conservation in mind has revealed itself to be quite profitable. It was profitable for Joe Zenz, Lancaster, Wisconsin, who won the dryland soybean yield contest with a yield of 92.8 bushels per acre.

With soybeans currently valued at \$12.50 per bushel, his gross on the contest field was \$1,160 per acre. If this was a net share lease farm, meaning the producer pays all the expenses and shares 33% to the landlord, the contest field grossed \$382.80 per acre to the landlord. That's really an achievement that's incredible, so how did he do it?

Zenz accomplished this feat with a no-till drill, paying attention to nutrient management, and yes, the weather cooperated. The real story here is the soybeans were planted into ground that used to be CRP. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is for land that is highly erodible/sensitive land and less productive, that's why it was put into CRP.

This was the first time Zenz entered the soybean yield contest. The farmer knew the field was going to make a good contest field because he kept the field in no-till following CRP, planted no-till corn three years in a row while building up nutrients and being aggressive on that end, and planted the no-till soybeans into "virgin" ground with inoculant. The beans were planted early, for Wisconsin that is May 1st.

The most important fact is his contest acres have yet to see a plow since being enrolled in CRP for 20 years and while growing no-till corn and soybeans on it after CRP. He knew there was really good organic matter that had built up at the surface and he did not want to disturb that. Zenz said the last thing you want to do is use conventional tillage. If you no-till, then you reap the advantage of improved organic matter and water infiltration for quite a few years. Tillage breaks that down.

Next year, Zenz says his contest field will likely go back to corn, with the addition of a cover crop. He has been experimenting with planting a cereal rye cover crop on his corn after corn acres and has been impressed with how that is working. The cereal rye cover crop helps break down the corn residue so planting is easier because there isn't as much residue to deal with. Last fall, he put cereal rye on corn stalks that are going into beans this year, and that is looking promising.

A one percent increase in soil organic matter increases water holding capacity and water infiltration of your soil. It has over 1,000 pounds of organic nitrogen and gives you slow release nitrogen during the growing season. This level of increase will increase the soil phosphorus by 167-200 lbs per acre and sulfur by 123-145 lbs per acre. Some of the P and S is then released to the growing crop each year. If Zenz would have started tilling the CRP, we make the same mistakes when prairie was plowed in Saline County at the turn of the century. We lost soil organic matter and precious topsoil to erosion making the farmland less productive in the long run.

If we continue to lose additional pasture ground to crop production in Saline County, when caterpillars are used to doze down the 11-16% slopes and the grass is all plowed up and subject to erosion, it will only serve as added pressure to our cow-calf enterprises in the county.

Of note, I am hosting a cow-calf meeting around the lunch hour Thursday, March 8th at Saline Center. Dennis Bauer, an extension educator from Ainsworth, will be a key speaker. He has some great ideas on keeping feed costs lower. Farmers Cooperative will be sponsoring the lunch. There will be more details



next week on this activity and maybe something we can build on in the future for cow-calf producers in the area.

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