

# Strong Communities, Healthy Waters: Sustaining Agricultural Communities While Enhancing Our Natural Environment

## Lebanon County No-Till Farmer Network Project

The Chesapeake Bay Funders Network (CBFN)\* collaborated on a **Farmer to Farmer Network Project** in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania to link experienced no-till farmers to beginning no-till farmers, through a “mentoring” relationship of networking and technical assistance. This is the first program of its kind in the state to address the peer-to-peer aspect in the farm community. **The challenge** was to change farming behavior and we did this by increasing interaction among farmers. **The goal** was to help reverse the lack of adoption of a continuous no-till systems (CNT) approach on individual farms. **What we worked to achieve was a way to integrate the value and knowledge of successful CNT systems into an effective farmer-to-farmer networking, training and technical assistance model. This program brought a diversity of people together to learn from one another and develop creative working relationships to incorporate new farming practices.**



Farmers, including Plain Sect on a Field Walk

**Project Partners:** The CBFN has provided funds to the Capital Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Area Council, a regional non-profit group in south central PA, to work with local partners in creating the Farmer Network. Local partners include the Lebanon County Office of Penn State University Cooperative Extension, Lebanon County Conservation District, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and private sector service providers.

**Project Goal / Achievements: Create a “hands-on” learning model for beginning no-till farmers** After three years the network consisted of 13 Advisors providing support to 60 Advisees;

**Provide education and training to farmers and technical field staff:** A total attendance of 135 farmers “kicked the tires” at field days; No-Tilling for Success Conference grew from 70- (year 1), 220- (year 2) and 235 (year 3) attendees;

**Increased and continued adoption of no-till systems in Lebanon County:** Overall increase of no-till acreage with 33 farms enrolled in a sister cost share program, representing 3,947 acres;

**Tangible/Measurable Results:** Yield and cost data evaluation after 3 year tracking, example: *Lawrence Martin just got 100 bushels of corn for his CNT efforts compared to 82 bushels and saved 17% over previous costs in addition to his time savings.* Additionally, critical soil testing and comparison yield information now more available.

**Document and assess the effectiveness of the network:** Increase in farmer sign-ups for transitioning to no-till cost share “sister” program was the highest (over 300% higher) in Lebanon County than the other 6 counties participating in the program.

**Create a guide to implementation for those interested in taking a similar approach.** How To: Reach Out & Involve Farmers; Manage the Process; Lessons Learned and Key Considerations; Guide Report.

*\*The Chesapeake Bay Funders Network is a collaboration of private non-profit foundations in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. More information about the CBFN can be found at:*  
[www.chesbayfunders.org](http://www.chesbayfunders.org)

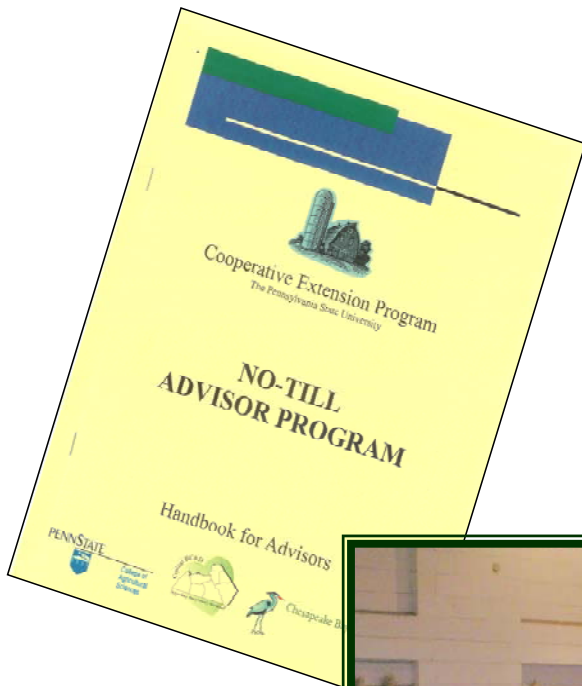


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The Capital RC&D Council is an equal opportunity provider

*“Farmers are independent and go their own way until someone makes a recommendation that catches their attention and they may change a practice based on the recommendation.” Kirby Reichert, Advisor*

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**Lebanon County No-Till Farmer Network Project**



**Technical Assistance Manuals for Mentors and Advisees**



**Numerous workshops held for farmers**



**Great turn-out for Field Crop Walks**

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