

# Conservation Allows Expansion of Family Farm

When Jim Andrew came home from the Army to farm with his father, a big concern was how to expand their family's century farms near Jefferson, Iowa. Their innovative choice, made three decades ago, has turned Andrew into a conservation leader and the first farmer in the U.S. to qualify for Tier III, the highest performance level under the Conservation Security Program (CSP).

"Instead of bidding against the neighbors to buy more land, we chose to make the ground we had better," Andrew explains. "Some of it was highly erodible, so that put us into an aggressive system of creating terraces."

Andrew installed miles of terracing to preserve his fragile acres but found he was still losing soil after big winds and heavy rains. His next step was a decisive move to no-till planting: "We got rid of 18 big tractors and implements and that just about paid for a smaller tractor, a corn planter, a sprayer and a no-till drill.

"One reason we sold our equipment was to burn our bridges, so we couldn't go back to plowing if things got tough," he says. "I've been no-tilling ever since. I see very little, if any, soil loss, and every year those earthworms seem to do better and better. When we get a five-inch rain, our soil just soaks it up like a sponge."

Andrew believes his no-till practices were the leading reason he qualified for CSP Tier III. Another reason was his three farm ponds, surrounded by the trees he has planted, fitted out with nesting boxes and stocked with fish.

No-till's benefits don't end with erosion, according to Andrew. He has calculated that his hours in the tractor are about a third of what they used to be, reducing energy use, machinery costs and labor. As a result, he handles almost all his fieldwork on his own.

Always an enthusiastic spokesman for agriculture, Andrew has spent the winter speaking to other farmers about conservation practices and the Conservation Security Program.

"It kind of hurts me to drive in the winter and see black snow in the ditches because someone has gone through



GENE LUCHT, IOWA FARMER TODAY

*"Wouldn't it be great to orient farm payments to conservation so the guy with the highest payments is the best conservationist in the country."*

— JIM ANDREW

with tillage and the soil is eroding. I want to say to other farmers, 'Come on, guys, it's not that hard.'"

At the national no-till conference, he spoke to 800 other farmers primed to apply for CSP as soon as their watersheds become eligible, but to his contacts at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Andrew is pitching concepts that go beyond CSP.

As Conservation Reserve Program contracts expire, bringing erodible land back into production, he has suggested payments to encourage growers to use no-till methods instead of plowing the soil. He also believes there should be technical outreach on conservation methods to urban Americans who build homes on large rural acreages—a concept he calls "CSP light."

"CSP is the guinea pig USDA could use to craft a conservation-based farm bill," he suggests. "Wouldn't it be great to orient farm payments to conservation so the guy with the highest payments is the best conservationist in the country."

**Type of Operation:** corn and soybeans

**Land in Agriculture:** 1350 acres

**Greatest Challenge:** Increasing the number of other farmers who utilize conservation practices

**Unmet Need:** Expansion of federal programs for conservation practices

Voices for Change

  
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Established in 1980, American Farmland Trust is the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting our nation's farm and ranch land. AFT's mission is to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment. AFT works at the federal level to effect farm policies and with states and local communities to enact strategies to save their land.

#### Why Save Farmland?

We rely on our best farmland to feed America and much of the world. In addition,

- Farmland provides more than 70 percent of the habitat for America's wildlife. Developing that land puts America's biological diversity at risk.
- America is becoming more dependent on imported food, some from countries with less stringent environmental and safety regulations.
- When farms and ranches are pushed off the most fertile soil, farmers are forced to rely more on fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation to do what the best land does naturally. Farmland loss has visible environmental impacts.
- The cost of basic services (schools, fire, police and maintenance) skyrockets in communities across the country that sacrifice farmland to uncontrolled growth. Scattered development increases taxes and makes services more costly.
- Agriculture provides millions of jobs both on the land and in secondary services. Farmland protection is an investment in the backbone of our economy.

**We're Saving America's Farmland**—where the need is most urgent and where success can have the greatest impact through a three-pronged strategy of:

- Protecting the Best Land by advancing conservation easement programs that allow farmers and ranchers to permanently keep their land in agriculture.
- Planning for Agriculture by developing and implementing sound community planning that achieves a balance between sensible growth and thriving agriculture.
- Keeping the Land Healthy by fostering the best farming practices and guiding farmers and ranchers to adopt these practices.

#### 2007 Farm Policy Campaign

Convinced that strong federal farm policy is the key to saving farm and ranch land, AFT has launched an aggressive campaign aimed at policy change for the 2007 U.S. Farm Bill. We are working to transform U.S. farm policy to a system that links financial support to environmental stewardship and rewards farmers for producing healthy food, clean air and water, wildlife habitat and open space. A diverse and growing consensus is emerging among farmers, ranchers, conservationists, fiscal conservatives and public interest groups to create a new system. Our work on farm policy is rooted in our mission to protect farmland, ensure a future for agriculture and improve stewardship.

