

# Clark County

## No-Till Dairy Farming



### Background

Ralph Smrecek Jr., owner of the Black River Ranch, is a second generation dairy farm near Greenwood, Wis., in the heart of dairy country. Back in the early 1990s, a zone till movement was started in Clark County. Ralph and his father started by experimenting with a few fields and hiring the planting done. They bought a no-till corn planter in 1993 and since then, have been no-tilling every crop on their 380 acre dairy farm. Across the road from the 50 cow dairy is the Black River, which ultimately flows into the Mississippi River. Ralph is playing a big part in putting conservation practices on the ground to combat erosion and improve water quality.

### Program Successes

Ralph adopted no-till and decided he wanted to implement further conservation practices. Ralph partnered with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to receive technical and financial assistance for grassed waterways through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Ralph attributes no-till and installation of grassed waterways to increased soil health. “The soil is so much better,” said Ralph. He has observed improved infiltration and reduced erosion on his fields. “No-till really works for Ralph; he stuck to it because of his commitment to conservation,” said Jane Reigel, District Conservationist. Ralph is a great example of how you can make no-till work on a conventional dairy farm. With the assistance of NRCS, Ralph has a nutrient management plan and spreads liquid manure two times per year. He follows a rotation of corn, soybeans-oats, and hay.

Ralph is an active participant in the Central Wis. No-Tillers Group, focusing on no-till and reduced tillage to promote soil health, reduce erosion, and protect water quality. Ralph is an advocate both on and off the farm, using no-till on his acres and also promoting soil health and dedication to no-till farming. Ralph has taken time to attend many local field days as an advocate for the soil health movement.



*Ralph, on his farmstead, discusses the importance of soil health in one of his hay fields.*



*Ralph checks for favorable field conditions to no-till into a corn field.*

He has future plans to incorporate cover crops into his no-till operation. He added wheat into his rotation recently and may also try cover crops after corn silage as well.

“There are not a lot of no-till dairy farmers in this area,” said Reigel. “Ralph’s success is a catalyst for others reducing tillage and improving their soil’s health and infiltration.”