



PROFILES IN soil health

Jimmy Emmons
Dewey County, Oklahoma
2,000 acres
Crops: Wheat, alfalfa, canola, cow/calf operation
Covers: Multi-species



Leading by Example: Oklahoma Grower Uses Farm to Demonstrate the Hope in Healthy Soil

Jimmy Emmons knows change is hard. So rather than pushing people to change, he prefers to lead by example.

“When we went into a canola rotation we were one of the first ones in this area to try that, and a lot of people said it wouldn’t work,” says the 54-year-old Oklahoma farmer. “I had some very skeptical landlords, but I went ahead and planted on my own. Later, one of the landlords said to me, ‘When are you



The installation of remote sensors in his fields will help Mr. Emmons track soil moisture, how fast that water is moving through the soil profile, and soil temperature. “I hope in the data we will be able to show how much water we are saving from evaporation, which is something that we can’t see,” Mr. Emmons says.

going to try some on my land? I like the looks of that, and it’s making money.”

Mr. Emmons hopes the same thing will happen when his landlords and his neighbors see the benefits of improved soil health on his land.



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Farming nearly 2,000 acres in Dewey County, Oklahoma, Mr. Emmons is sharing what he’s learned about soil health on his farm through workshops, field days and test plots. “I want my neighbors, my friends, other board members to be able to come and to learn a little bit about what we are doing. A lot of people think it’s just dirt—that all we have to do is put a little water and some nutrients on it,” he says.

“I really think we have got to get them to understand that the health of our soil is like the health of our bodies. If you have high blood pressure or

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- Jimmy Emmons, landowner

Jimmy Emmons, his wife and business partner, Ginger (left), and his farming associates Karson Leibold and Tanner Farris (right), are now forging a new frontier in soil health on their farmland in Western Oklahoma.

cholesterol, you can go on and on and we still function but we don’t function at our full capacity,” Mr. Emmons says. “It’s the same way with soil. If it’s not healthy, it may be functioning and growing a crop—but not to its full capability.”

As a board member of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, he’s committed to improving the soil resources on his land, and hopes others will follow suit—not just for the sake of the resources, but also for the sake of their farming operations.

From a business perspective, Mr. Emmons believes improving soil health will improve his businesses’ bottom line. “I’m very passionate about getting to the next level of production.”

profiles in soil health

In fact, his banker has also been a critical part of his soil health renaissance. "He's in. He's actually planning some cover crops this year, himself," Mr. Emmons says. "The bank is very progressive and sees the need to improve the soil—because better soil means better financing, lower risk and better operations."

But like others who now farm using soil health management systems to improve the health and function of their soil, Mr. Emmons has also learned from others.

"My 'ah-ha moment' of getting into soil health was when a producer from Indiana showed photos and figures of his plots at a national conservation meeting. He wasn't buying any fertilizer for his cash crop and he not only improved production, but lowered the cost of production," he says.

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- Jimmy Emmons, landowner

"It was like 'Ah-ha, now we're talking. If he can do it there, why can't we do it here?' And so that is when we got started here."

But Mr. Emmons wasn't completely without his doubts. "I kept hearing that growing a cover crop was moisture neutral and that it doesn't use much water to grow a crop. I kind of laughed and thought, 'You guys are going to have to prove that to me,'" he says.

Jimmy Emmons, Oklahoma

So Mr. Emmons came home and invested in some water and temperature probes to track soil moisture, and to track how fast water is moving through his soil profile. The probes also monitor soil temperature.

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Like a growing number of producers, Mr. Emmons is excited about what he believes is a "new frontier of conservation."

"Everybody wants to be green," he says, "but I think it's time that we look at the dirt and have a brown revolution to improve the soil and get back to the dark rich soil that we all used to have."

Mr. Emmons, his wife and business partner, Ginger, and his farming associates Karson Leibold and Tanner Farris, are now forging that new frontier in the farmland of Western Oklahoma. More importantly, perhaps, they're also planting the seeds of hope in healthy soil for their neighbors and for generations to come.

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