Scott Friedman almost wasn’t a farmer.

“I had been helping my dad on his farm. He didn’t want me to farm. This was coming out of the late 80s. It was a bad time. He told me ‘I wouldn’t wish this on my worst enemy’” Friedman said.

Scott did as he was told, at first. He took up welding instead, but never lost his desire for farming. In 1996, despite the warning from years ago, he joined up with his dad. They then watched their acreage drop from 800 to 400 over the course of two decades as their rented land was sold and broken up by the owners. His dad retired, and Scott was struggling with how to make a living on 400 acres of conventional farmed land. Scott saw his father’s neighbors and colleagues squeezed out of farming during the go-big-or-go-broke 1980s, and was feeling that same kind of pressure. Land prices had skyrocketed even in Scott’s decade of farming and most of the locally rented land was already being farmed.

“Then my cousin came to me and said, ‘you ought to get into organics, just try it.’ His fields looked awesome. I just couldn’t believe how good his fields looked, so I tried it on a small field. I tried it and I liked it,” Scott said.

As he decided to shift the focus of his farming efforts, Scott went to his Natural Resources Conservation Service District Conservationist, Eric McTaggart, to see what kind of programs might benefit him.

While there are programs to benefit organic growers, there are a lot of programs for conventional farmers as well.

CSP is a great way to get involved with cover crops; it offers great incentives and allows farmers to explore new ways of improving soil health.
About the program:

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), administered by USDA NRCS, is a voluntary conservation program designed to encourage agricultural and forestry producers to adopt additional conservation practices and improve, maintain and manage existing ones. Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, prairie, improved pastureland, rangeland, non-industrial private forestland, and agricultural land.

CSP is available statewide through continuous enrollment with announced cut-off application dates for ranking periods. To learn if CSP is right for your operation, visit [http://www.il.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/index](http://www.il.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/index), or contact your local NRCS office.

Farmer Profile Continued:

Scott Friedman

“First I looked at EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) and that wasn’t for me, some of stuff wasn’t going to go with what I was doing. Then I met with Eric and he said I ought to sign up for CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program).”

Scott enrolled 40 acres in CSP, using the practice of time-released nitrogen fertilizer, a common starting point for new CSP enrollees, to test out the program.

In the mean time, an investment group recruited Scott to farm 80 acres for them organically. It worked out fine until the investment group split up. Scott once again saw his acreage shrink, but not for long. Former members of the investment group went onto form Iroquois Valley Farms LLC. When the family that owned the farm Scott’s grandfather had lived on and farmed decided to sell, Iroquois Valley Farms bought those more than 200 acres, and once again turned to Scott to farm the land organically.

It was then that Scott got serious about the Conservation Stewardship Program.

“Once I knew I was transitioning completely (to organic) I wanted to enroll (all the land) in CSP, I mean really, why not? It really encouraged me to take the next step. With organic it’s so easy, a lot of the things I wanted to do were already in the program,” Scott said. “The financial side of it was there and it is something that just a good thing because it encourages someone to have the proper practices.”

Scott uses buffer zones, which are needed to be certified organic anyway, along with cover crops like alfalfa. He said that his corn held on, despite the record setting drought in 2012, a little bit better than those in conventional fields a road over, and credits that in part to the use of cover crops.