Conservation Stewardship Program
Farmer Profile: Matt Bangert

Matt Bangert is a fifth generation farmer. This year will be the last time he works the family’s 1,200 acre farm near Tonica, Ill. with his dad, Ron. Ron’s retiring after this harvest. As Matt starts to run the farm by himself, some of the practices would be more familiar to his great grandfather than his dad.

Bangert’s farm consists of conventionally grown corn and soybeans. He’d been farming for nearly 20 years before he read about the Conservation Stewardship Program, or CSP, in a trade publication a few years ago and went to his local Natural Resources Conservation Service, or NRCS, to learn more.

After talking with Mark Baran, the local NRCS conservationist, Bangert enrolled in CSP with no-till soybeans and nitrogen management. Instead of applying all his nitrogen at once, and losing much of it to runoff, Bangert has started to apply nitrogen only when the corn needs it.

“I’ve wanted to change the way we use our nitrogen, and CSP was an easy way of getting into nitrogen management,” Bangert said. “It’s not like we were way over applying and CSP made us back off, but I think we will have, or will have, higher yields because of it.”

The nitrogen application might not be something Matt’s great grandfather would have recognized, but what he did next was – cover cropping. Matt started two years ago by experimenting with rye and some tillage radishes to add organic material to and loosen the soil, and trap nutrients. It worked stunningly well. Bangert said corn grown on the acres that had cover crops did 20 to 30 bushels better than corn grown on a neighboring field that didn’t use cover crops.

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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, or contact your local NRCS office.

Farmer Profile Continued:
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“I was very happy with the results; it just takes a lot of management,” Bangert said. “I’ve definitely seen enough benefit to outweigh the extra time it takes.” Bangert’s first foray into cover crops wasn’t without its problems. He didn’t get the rye killed off and plowed under in time in the spring. That caused a flush of insects that Bangert and his dad had to deal with.

This fall he plans on using oats and tillage radishes on 325 acres. Both those crops will die off in the cold of the winter, making managing them easier than the original rye. Bangert says now he would do cover crops and nitrogen management even if it wasn’t for CSP, but that wasn’t the case in the beginning.

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Bangert owns about half the land he farms, and rents the other half, and uses CSP eligible practices on both. He said his landlords have been very open to using more conservation practices on their lands. “I was kind of leery of asking them at first, but they were all very willing and it made it easy for me,” Bangert said.

His advice to anyone who is on the fence about CSP? Just try it.

“They just have to see it to believe it, try an acre or 10 acres and just see for themselves the benefits of it,” Bangert said.