



# Farmers Teaching Farmers: Another Tool For Nutrient Management Training

Clint Hodorff’s family farm is in Fond du Lac County’s northern Kettle Moraine, right where the glacier dumped gravel and sand and left steep hills, deep valleys and a patchwork of soils. Josh Hiemstra’s family farm lies in Springvale Township on the other side of the county, where his steepest slope is 4 percent and the Rock River borders his land.

Their common denominator? They write their own nutrient management plans, document their progress, and are happy to tell other farmers about it.

And that’s how they wound up in a classroom last December, leading Fond du Lac County Land and Water Conservation Department’s 2017 advanced nutrient management planning class. Becky Wagner, the county’s agronomist, had received a Nutrient Management Farmer Education (NMFE) grant from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and used it to host an August field day on Hiemstra’s farm, a winter nutrient management education day and advanced training day on using the SnapPlus



*Spring barley cover established after corn silage harvest on Joel Hiemstra’s land*

nutrient management planning software.

The grants allow recipients, like Fond du Lac County, to offer incentives to farmers for soil testing and other elements needed to complete a nutrient management plan. They also support workshops, on-farm visits, manure spreader calibration, and consultations. The grants normally help local educators and agencies provide training for farmers new to nutrient management or the SnapPlus software.

Wagner has a long history training farmers both in initial nutrient management planning and in continuing education and likes to think outside the box. “I’ve been doing farmer training since 1999. I’m tired of the same old things, and a lot of people come every year, so I like to keep it fresh. With all the farmer-led initiatives now, who better to lead the training than farmers?” she thought. That innovative approach won a grant for the county.

She used the funding to bring in speakers, hold a field day, and offer the one-day training in December the day after the SnapPlus 101 training. Along with participants from the basic class, she gets farmers looking for new NMP and SNAPPlus information who sign up for the advanced class every year.

## Farmer Developed Plans in 2017

**1,841** farmers wrote their own plans

**536,515** acres covered by plans written by farmers

**8%** increase in farmer-written plans from 2016

**24%** of all nutrient management plans are written by farmers

Farmers are assisted with plan development by the county’s conservation professionals, state nutrient management specialists, UW-Extension educators, and agronomists.



She chose the two farmers based on their differences and their similarities. Hodorff and his family operate a dairy CAFO, milking about 950 cows, in the Town of Eden -- Kettle Moraine country. Hiemstra milks about 170 cows in the flat lands of the Town of Springvale.

“Both are doing rather innovative things that increase the value of their farm business. They both thoroughly think through the ‘why’ they do something when they manage their cropping system. The ‘why’ is different for everyone. They also have found that adding those strategies to their crop management system has helped them manage manure and their crops in many different ways and has resulted in positive outcomes,” Wagner said.

“I asked them if they wanted to share their own data or use a sample farm, and they both were willing to share their own information with the class,” she said. Both put together data and photos for PowerPoint presentations, and each had the floor for an hour. They opened the floor up to questions,



*A forage pea/radish cover crop planted on Joel Hiemstra's farm after winter wheat and manure application*

and along with telling their own stories, they were able to answer participants’ questions about using SnapPlus, too.

Along with his dairy herd, Josh Hiemstra raises about 100 heifers and 120 crossbred Angus, with 530 acres – half owned and half rented. He farms with his dad and his wife, Bobbie. It’s a hands-on operation, with only some high schoolers hired to help with general chores. The farm has seven months of storage space for liquid manure.

He started nutrient management planning in 2000, about the same time they expanded to a free stall barn. The county had a grant for the Rock River watershed. For the first four years, he worked with a crop advisor and then he decided to download the software and do his own plans. He worked with Wagner over the years, appreciating the direction from someone who had nothing to gain financially from how he managed nutrients.

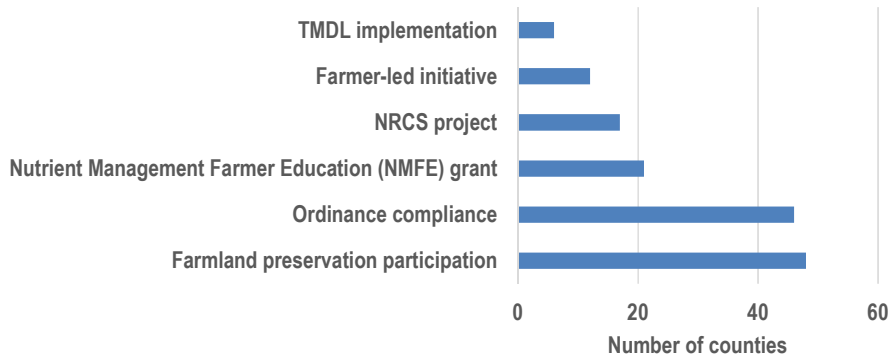
### Nutrient Management Plans Reported in 2017

**7,774** nutrient management plans reported by farmers

**3,345,174** million acres covered by these plans

**36%** of Wisconsin’s 9 million cropland acres

### Activities and Programs That Encouraged Nutrient Management Plan Development in 2017



“I learned from her. She allowed me to try stuff,” he said. One of the things they tried was establishing cover crops and then spreading manure, or spreading and then planting the crop, rather than incorporating manure. Using the right rate and timing, on their flat land, it works. They no longer do any moldboard plowing, staying off the fields as much as possible. Ten years ago, they started planting rye both as a winter cover crop and for



forage. Now they plant radishes, barley, peas and other cover crops in a variety of mixes to curb erosion and hold nutrients in place. “I’m trying to get living cover on the whole farm,” he said.

The benefits of trying all that stuff? “Obviously, we’re more efficient with money spent on fertilizer,” he said. He takes manure and legume credits in his plan, so he’s not buying more fertilizer than he needs. But overall soil health is the biggest benefit, he says.

That’s what impressed Wagner and led her to ask him to host that field day last summer, and then to present his results to the December class.

“I’m a big numbers guy. I want to prove what I’m doing economically,” he said, and he takes photos throughout the growing season to paste into the “note box” that’s part of SnapPlus. So, getting prepared didn’t take him that much time.

Clint Hodorff returned to his family farm two years ago after a career as a crop advisor. The family has been through three CAFO license cycles, so they have a 15-year history with nutrient management planning. They have 1,300 acres in crops -- 1,200 for manure application included in their plan. They had 100 fields, averaging 12 acres, with up to six different soil types in some fields and many 10 percent slopes. That’s a nutrient management challenge.

They’d been working with an agronomist, but now Hodorff handles the planning. He sees a world of difference in doing the plan himself, knowing everything that goes into it, rather than getting a plan handed to him by someone else. It’s hard



*A split between deep tillage and seeded cover crop one month after planting on Hodorff’s farm, useful for tillage checks to see if there is a difference in the crop throughout the season, or just a savings on fewer passes through the field*



*Hodorff’s Turbo Max vertical tillage unit with Turbo Seeder for applying cover crops in one pass after silage harvest*

to find the time to go through it when you don’t write it yourself, he said. He finds the plan to be a good baseline and a good way to know what’s happening with the soil.

Like Hiemstra, Hodorff’s planting cover crops, with plans to go to minimum till and minimum till manure injection.

## Nutrient Management Farmer Education Grants Awarded in 2017

Nutrient Management Farmer Education grants support educational programs used to teach farmers to develop their own nutrient management plans.

**\$175,814** awarded to 17 entities.

**Tier 1** grants went to 11 entities, totaling **\$163,944**. Tier 1 funding can be used for participant payments to complete soil testing, attend training, conduct manure spread calibration, and provide workshops.

**Tier 2** grants went to 6 entities, totaling **\$11,820**. Tier 2 funding provides education for nutrient management planning and related activities.

“The main thing I was looking at was water quality, based on erosion. Even with strip crops, a heavy rainfall can take away key nutrients,” he said.

The Hodorff farm is also part of the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers, a group that was recently funded by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer

