

Conservation District Helps Out with Tillage Survey

From June 8 through June 10, 2015, some people may have noticed a silver truck traveling or parked alongside the road with a flashing light and “Farm Survey” signs on its back and sides. What were they looking for?

Snyder County Conservation District (SCCD), along with thirteen other conservation districts throughout Pennsylvania’s Chesapeake Bay watershed, participated with Capital Resource Conservation & Development Area Council, Inc. (Capital RC&D) in their cropland roadside transect survey this year.



Left: Helping out with tillage survey in Snyder County (standing, left to right): Jack Clark, Technician Contractor & Retired NRCS District Conservationist; Barry Spangler, Local Logistics Coordinator & SCCD Agricultural Conservation Technician; and Evan Rubin, Capital RC&D Intern and Data Recorder & Millersville University Student. Below: Typical no-till field of soybeans planted after corn grain.



Taken from a Capital RC&D letter written to participating conservation districts and technician contractors hired for the survey (with additional notes in brackets):

“Soil tillage affects our environment and community in major ways. For example, tillage stimulates soil erosion and reduces water infiltration which can negatively impact water quality. Tillage also increases the loss of carbon from the soil, releasing the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide [CO₂]. The cropland roadside transect survey is designed to gather information to determine the type of tillage practices and crop residue management systems used by farmers in Pennsylvania. The surveys are performed by teams consisting of employees of the County Conservation Districts and Capital RC&D. [RC&D employees are typically retired Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) or conservation district staff as technician contractors and college students as interns.] The teams drive a predetermined route throughout the county and record a few observations of farm fields at regular intervals (typically every 0.2 miles). Our goal is ... to be able to determine how much soil tillage is taking place in the region’s farm communities.”



Data collected from this and prior surveys have resulted in tillage information for 28 PA counties in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Survey protocols, established by the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) of West Lafayette, IN, and used in the past, allow results to have a confidence level of 90%. Survey results go to CTIC as well as PA's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to update their conservation tillage estimates for the Chesapeake Bay watershed. (Information based on a Capital RC&D 2013 News Release) DEP will also give this information to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for their use in modeling and tracking of water quality improvements.

Additional inquiries and questions about the survey may be forwarded to Susan Richards, Capital RC&D Executive Director, at 717-241-4361, srichards@capitalrcd.org, 401 East Louther Street, Suite 307, Carlisle, PA 17013.



The Capital Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Area Council is a seven-county, non-profit that provides leadership to promote regional partnerships for the responsible use and conservation of our natural, community, and economic resources. The Capital RC&D serves Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Lancaster, Lebanon, and York. Website: www.capitalrcd.org

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Version: 6-15-2015