

# State 2nd

November 2, 2014

Dear Ian,

Wow! What an unbelievable year this has been with the crazy weather and unstable grain market! I thought taking over the family farm was going to be a lot easier than this; boy, was I wrong! I heard you had your own troubles on the farm this year with crop numbers down and that two-month dry spell. That sure didn't help! I was able to go to several meetings at the Extension Office to get some great tips from our Agriculture Agent on soil conservation. I would love to share these ideas with you in this letter.

I know you have always used conventional tillage, but our Ag Agent showed us some great soil and crop improvements by using no-till. In this type of planting, the farmer interseeds the crop into existing ground cover without having to open up the soil. You can reduce soil erosion, but you can also conserve water, and that sure helped me during the drought. The way our farm lays, we can use all kinds of help keeping our soil on top of the ridges. I know it's not always easy trying new things, but I think my whole crop will be no-till next year. The Ag Agent also talked about crop rotation, diversion ditches, grass waterways, contour farming and cover crops. All of these are beneficial ways to help us farmers protect soil and increase our profit. These are not new tips but are valuable for farmers like us trying to protect the earth.

Crop rotation is just planting different crops on the same area of land over a period of years. Right now I have a rotation of three years of corn, followed by a winter wheat crop, then soybeans. I have noticed higher corn numbers, and as a result, I have less weed and pest problems. I would be glad to help you in planning the best rotation for your farm.

Another way to protect your soil is by establishing diversion ditches. These are places to capture a large amount of run-off water and to move the water away from the crop lands. Since

diversion ditches are kind of new to me, I am going to try to build one at the end of a field where I have a lot of runoff water. I believe this will slow the water down and cause less erosion in my grass waterways. I created grass waterways in my fields also to slow down water and reduce soil movement.

Just the other day, I was reading about contour farming in one of my farming magazines. Did you know this practice has been used in foreign countries for years? People grow their crops with the curves of the land. This is best way to plant on lands that are rolling and not flat. I think next year that you should try that on your land. I am for sure this will slow down water and cause you less problems with soil movement.

I understand you didn't use a cover crop last year. Cover crops are so important for protecting and enriching the soil because they preserve the soil from harsh weather conditions in the winter months, In addition, they provide soil enrichment if they are plowed under in the spring. I have been using wheat and rye for years. This cover also provides some grazing for my steers in the early spring. I noticed with that rough winter we had last year, the cover crop protected me from wind erosion as well.

I am so excited for next year's crop season; I would love to help you in any way I can to improve your farming operation, as well as getting some great tips from you! There is another extension meeting coming up next month; we should both attend! Soil is a natural resource that we have to protect. In the Bible, God charges us to be stewards of the land! Let's work together to protect our future!

Sincerely, Benjamin Kinsey

Sources:

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2. Mother Earth News,  
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4. Interview with Mark Kinsey, farmer with B.S. in Production Agriculture from University of Kentucky (1990)