



USDA Climate Change Solutions: Farmer Profiles

Donn Branton

Photo Credit: [USDA NRCS](#)

Farm Stats:

- > Le Roy, New York
- > 1,500 Acres
- > Growing grain crops and vegetables

Conservation Practices:

- > No-till, zone-till, and strip-till
- > Cover crops
- > Nutrient management
- > Drainage management



Donn uses cover crops, like these coming up through a wheat residue, to improve his soil health.

Photo Credit: [USDA NRCS](#)

Donn's Story:

Donn Branton and his son Chad farm about 1,500 acres of grain crops and vegetables in Le Roy, New York. Since he began his farm in 1979, Donn transitioned from full tillage to no-till, zone-till and strip-till. He views his farm as an experiment and is constantly changing to improve his bottom line and conservation outcomes.

“When I started farming, I used conventional tillage. It’s what we did, and what everybody else did—if it wasn’t tilled, you didn’t plant.” Donn said. “In 1988, I decided to adjust my planter and try no-till on a 3-acre strip you couldn’t see from the road. The outcome encouraged me.”

Since then, Donn has transformed his farm from conventional tillage and tried other conservation practices, too—including cover crops, nutrient management, and drainage management. And he’s seen these practices pay off.

“There have been years when we’ve harvested sweet corn on reduced till, while our conventional till corn failed. We’ve seen improvements in our soil health and quality, improved our yields, and improved our grain quality.”

Commenting on the use of cover crops, Donn noted that, “We’ve found we can reduce our nitrogen applications by half after planting a clover cover crop. We’ve also seen improvement in the number of worms and the infiltration of our soils.”

There are many reasons Donn uses conservation practices. The greenhouse gas benefits from reduced tillage, cover crops, and nutrient management are a bonus.

“Every decision we make on the farm is an investment. The reason we’ve stuck with low-till, cover crops, and other practices is because they improve the soil, our yields, the environment, and our bottom line.”



Practices like no-till and cover crops can improve soil health.

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