Ograin 2018

James (Sandy) Syburg
White Oak Farm
Southeast Wisconsin
Established 1988
300 certified organic acres
100 transitional acres
Grain-corn, barley, rye, wheat
Seed-peas, barley, rye, vetch
Dry Edible Beans, alfalfa
Sunflowers (oil)
Important in my small operation to spread work out over longer timeframe

- 10 year field history
- 36 individual plantings
- 25 different varieties
Why Organic?

We seem to think that working with nature is like being honest in our lives (in that it is a good thing to do).

This is Why...

In fact nature’s need for balance is so powerful that once you begin to seriously work with true ecological integrity, you will be amazed how our efforts will be reciprocated and amplified by nature.”

Alick Bartholomew / Author
Hidden Nature 2003
Organic Transition

The necessary changes need to take place in the mind as well as the fields of the farmer.
CHALLENGES

#1 Fertility

- In transition fields work from a good field history and soil test if possible
- Cannot input your way to success
- Reduced or waived rent in transition years based on soil correctives
- Share in upside with landowner when fertility and yield goal are met
#2 Weed Management

- Takes priority over everything
- Over time add tools to the toolbox
  - 2 types of cultivators
  - Tine Weeder
  - Rotary Hoe
  - Optical (camera) cultivator

- Cultural
  - Interseeding (competitive exclusion)
  - Rotation
  - Read, Read, Read…

Resources I have used

- When Weed Talk
  *Jay McCaman*
- Weed Control Without Poisons
  *Charles Walters*
- Weed Control a textbook and manual
  *Craft & Raynor (1938)*
- Farm Economy
  *twelve courses in agriculture (1915)*
“Feed the Soil, Feed the Soil, Feed the Soil”
So what about yield?

- Not the only (or best) measurement
- I feel that 10% above county average is a starting point
- $$$ Organic premiums are an attractive reason to transition
- Should be based on a fully functioning plant soil system
- not just different inputs

In Just 3 Years...
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Slake Test
Soil Health/Erosion Potential
In 10 Years...

- Increased organic matter 1%  
  • 15-20K gallons of water/acre  
  • $750 additional nutrients

- Reduced soil compaction  
  • Went from less than 6” penitrometer to unrestricted

- Increased P & K 140%  
  without application  
  healthy soil/biological liberation

“Hope gives rise to that, that is contemplated”  
James Godsil

If it’s not broken,  
don’t fix it

If it’s fixed,  
don’t break it
It’s not all rainbows and unicorns

Thank You!

Syburg Family Farm 1904