Conservation Projects on Plain Sect Farms

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Plain Sect Farms in the Northeast

• Plain sect can refer to Amish & Mennonite Communities
• Approximately 318,500 adults and children living in North America
  • Half the population is under 18 years of age
• Communities are present in at least 30 states and some Canadian provinces.
  • Over 60% of the US population lives in Pennsylvania, Ohio, & Indiana
  • NYS is the fastest growing area
• Plain Sect trace their roots to the Anabaptist movement in Switzerland in 1525 at the time of the Protestant Reformation. The Anabaptists emphasized voluntary adult baptism and a church that was free from state control.
Plain Sect Farms in the Northeast

- Schooling - About 90 percent attend one or two-room private schools; the others go to rural public schools.
  - Children typically end their formal schooling at the end of eighth grade.
- Most Amish and Mennonites speak the Pennsylvania German dialect popularly known as Pennsylvania Dutch
- Types of communities –
  - There are many different affiliations or sects, each of which has its own dress styles, carriages, occupations, and rules about technology.
  - Enormous cultural diversity among groups and church districts makes it risky to generalize
Plain Sect Farms in the Northeast

• Differences in farm size depending on church adaption of technology
  • Farms with horse-drawn equipment will be smaller than farms with tractor adaption.
  • Community milk center for pick-up vs individual farm pick-up

• Differences in the communities will depend on whether or not it is associated with a conference or a church district
  • Individual church districts can come up with their own set of guidelines.
  • Larger conference makes the rules and guidelines for the entire area
Plain Sect Communities

• In general Amish sects tend to be more conservative then Mennonite sects
• Horse drawn equipment vs. Steel wheel tractors vs. Regular tractors
Plain Sect Communities

- Plain sect farms generally do not participate in any federal or state cost-share programs.
- Do not pay into Social Security
  - 1970’s meeting with congress
  - Churches and Conferences fill out an IRS 4029 form
- The main reason why they don’t participate in government programs is because they don’t pay into them
- Oversite by the church elders on obeying sect rules
Conservation Projects on Plain Sect Farms

• A good conservation plan is the basis to determine priority projects
  • YOUR conservation plan for YOUR farm – not a government agency directing the conservation
    • We are not doing the plan to make you eligible for a grant project
    • What can we do to help you preserve the farm for your future generations

• Projects for soil improvements are sometimes more appealing than farmstead projects
  • No HEL / FSA plan in place
  • Field layout may need to be adjusted
    • Contours / Strip Cropping
    • Items normally completed through HEL plans
Conservation Projects on Plain Sect Farms

Project Implementation
• Can be more difficult to accomplish as cost-share / grant funding is out
• Need to come up options that can be cheaper but still have some control
  • Explain the engineering standards and why they exist
  • Try and meet the standard as much as possible
• May need to do projects in phases over time
  • Larger tiles into farmstead
  • Roof water
  • Concrete
  • Roof over barnyard or grass filter area
• Very difficult to achieve 100% control from farmstead
Conservation Projects on Plain Sect Farms

• Younger farming community
  • Explanation of basic agronomy, nutrient management, contour farming, strip cropping
  • Higher implementation of cover crops (Lancaster, PA / Susquehanna Basin influence)

• A lot of self-funded and built projects
  • Some will be built well with good O &M
  • Others not built well depending on input at time of construction

• Horse-drawn farms – Tillage adjustments?
  • Reduced / No-till equipment not as plentiful
  • No-till cover crop seeders?

• Farms that have no adoption of electricity mainly run through diesel generators
  • Changes mind-set on some conservation practices that may require pumping
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- Focus conservation efforts on simpler projects to gain trust that you are not selling a government program
  - Grazing practices
  - Drainage and general water management
  - Erosion control
  - Soil Health – Cover crops, reduced tillage
  - Roof water management
  - Nutrient Management
- Larger projects can talk about for several years with the farm knowing it’s a needed project but farm income doesn’t exist to implement
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• Higher percentage of farms utilize organic practices
  • Appeals to the nature of an “older style” of farming practices

• Little adoption of modern technology on equipment
  • GPS / Satellite technologies
  • More progressive sects may see some
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• Example - Build in phases over time
  • Contacted by a farm with drainage issues
  • Steep hill above farm
  • Multiple barnyard areas
  • No manure storage
  • Would like to improve the area for cattle health
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Control clean water first

Phase in 2 barnyard projects plus manure storage
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• Farm is planning on installing clean water controls and heifer barnyard this fall

• Dairy cow barnyard might be a couple years away but plan the whole farmstead out so one barnyard can flow onto the next

• Manure storage is “on the wish list” for the farm but uncertain future construction due to poor milk prices.
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How do make contact with the community?
• Very difficult to go to their farm and offer services without appearing to be a government employee
• Use existing times where you make contact with them
  • Ag assessments
  • Workshops
  • Have a handout showing technical services your office can offer
    • Soil Health / Cover cropping
    • Grazing services
    • Erosion control / Drainage
    • GIS field mapping
• Cornell Cooperative Extension field agents
• Other local farmers
QUESTIONS?

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