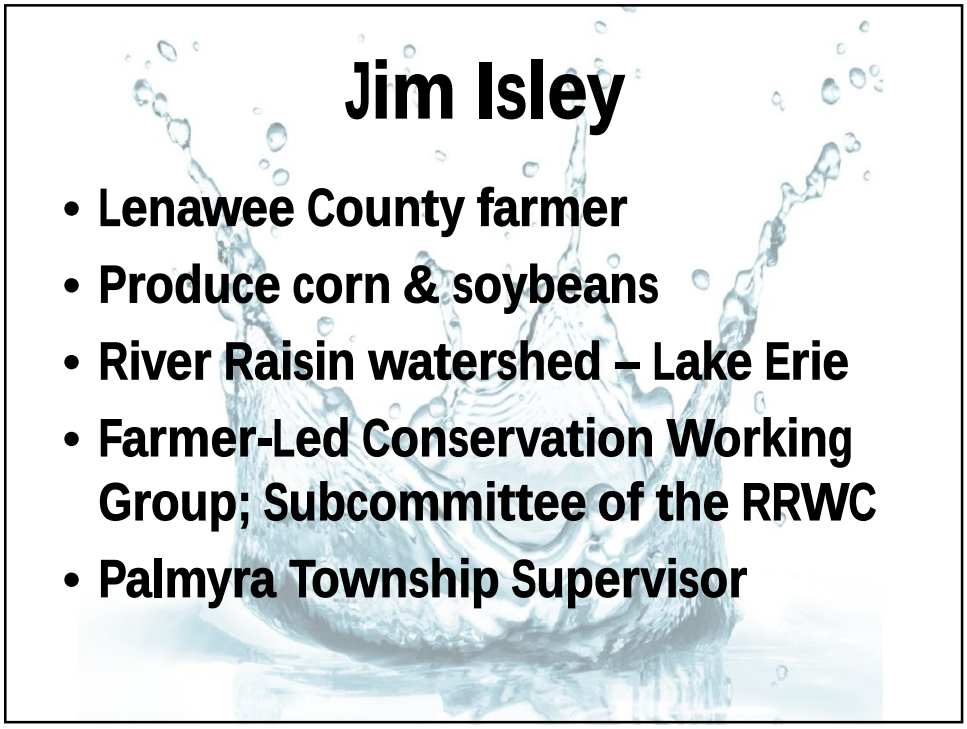
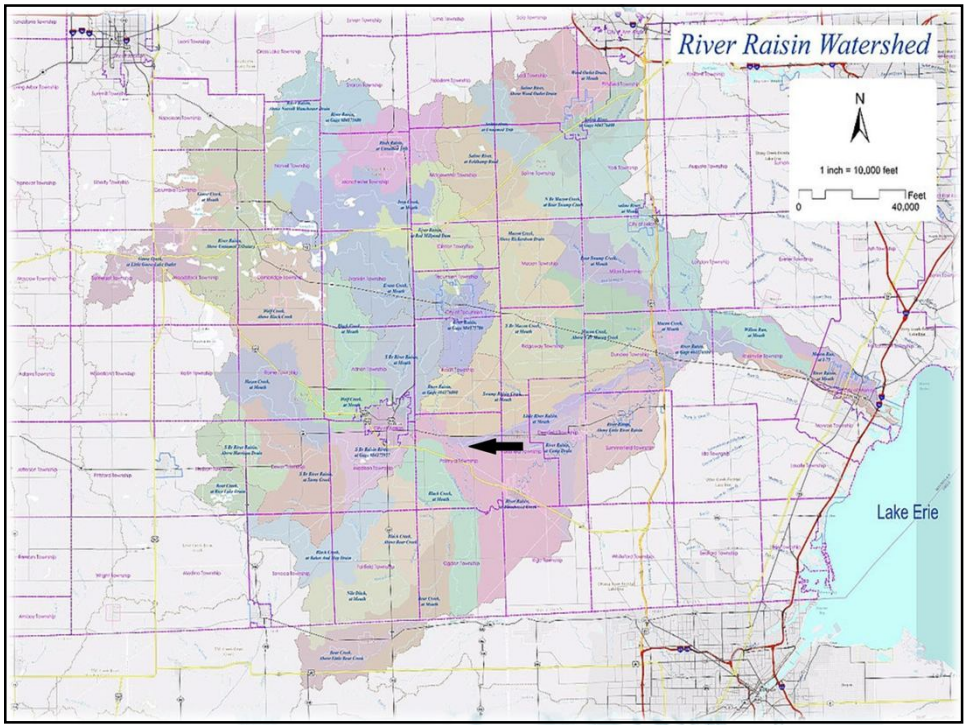
Why Conservation?

Engaging Farmers in Soil & Water Conservation



Jim Isley

- Lenawee County farmer
- Produce corn & soybeans
- River Raisin watershed – Lake Erie
- Farmer-Led Conservation Working Group; Subcommittee of the RRWC
- Palmyra Township Supervisor



Who's here?

- Producers?
- FSA staff?
- NRCS staff?
- Educators?
- County Extension?
- People that drink water & eat food?


FARMALL

What's all this have to do with Conservation?

- Conservation is a legacy – it's what we leave for the next generation
- Conservation is profitable
- Conservation can be challenging
- Conservation can be fun!

The River Raisin Watershed is:

- River Raisin is 150 miles long
- 1,072 Square Miles -686,080 acres
- Home to 178,000 people in 2010
- Lenawee, Monroe Washtenaw, Jackson & Hillsdale plus a portion of Fulton Co., Ohio
- 429 lakes & ponds
- ***3,000 miles*** of man-made drainage systems
- 22 mainstream dams & 38 tributary dams
- The "*crookedest*" river in the world
- River Raisin watershed land uses in 2010:
  - Agriculture – 65%
  - Urbanized Areas – 11%
  - Wetlands – 8%
  - Forest – 7%
  - Grassland – 7%

The River Raisin Watershed Council:

- Established in 1974
- Membership includes 50 of the 63 municipalities in the watershed
- 31 individual memberships
- 10 corporate memberships

Farmer-Led Working Group

"Farmers Helping Farmers to Protect Water Quality"

- Consists of local producers from within the watershed
- Goal – Engage other local producers and lead constructive conversations about agriculture's role in water quality and conservation
- To communicate the benefits of conservation practices to the larger community
- To assist in educating landowners & producers about BMP's (best management practices)
- To increase the number of MAEAP (Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program) verified farms

Challenges

- "Age" challenge – "we've never done it that way before"
- Negative conservation "attitude" – "Conservation and profitability don't go together"
- Depressed commodity prices

Opportunities

- Work with the "younger" generation of producers
- Be an example of "conservation" – take the financial risk
- Encourage other producers to "take the next conservation step"

How do we accomplish these goals?

- Communication with other producers

ShopTalk meetings

How do we accomplish these goals?

- Communication with other producers
- **Communication with the non-ag community**

Rotary

How do we accomplish these goals?

- Communication with other producers
- Communication with the non-ag community
- **Communication with our political leadership**

How do we accomplish these goals?

- Communication with other producers
- Communication with the non-ag community
- Communication with our political leadership
- **Be a "Conservation Leader"**

On our farm:

- **Soil sample (by zones) ½ of total acres each year**
- **Strip-till all corn**
- **No-till all soybeans**
- **Apply cover crops to 85% of all acres**
- **Manage 22 drainage water management structures on 300+ acres**
- **Have the ability to use VRT with all inputs**
- **Manage 8+ miles of filter strips**
- **Manage .4 miles of saturated buffer**
- **Sponsor 2 "edge-of-field" water collection sites managed by MSU**
- **Digitally record all field operations**

Conservation benefits

- Reduced labor requirements
- Reduced fuel consumption
- Reduced tillage “iron” – equipment & parts
- Decreased compaction
- Decreased soil & water erosion
- Increased moisture retention – increased crop residue on the surface
- Increased water absorption

Where does one start?

1) Soil sample
2) Yield monitor
3) Calibrate the yield monitor
4) Download yield data
5) Study the variations in yield across the field
6) Question the variations in yield
7) Find the answers
8) Repeat steps 7 & 8

*Disclaimer

- One size does not fit all
- See what other conservation practices work in your area
- Attend field days sponsored by Conservation Districts and manufacturers
- Talk to your neighbors
- Don't be afraid to fail – knowledge is gained through perceived failure

Why Conservation?

Our motto:

Let's find out what we don't know and make it better.

Thank You!

GO SPARTANS