



Farmers Improving Soil Health

NO-TILL NUGGETS

Pennsylvania No-Till Alliance

June 2026

A Pair of Unique Farms to Host Our Field Days

It is once again my pleasure to invite you to our Soil Health Field Days on July 21 at Ernst Conservation Seeds farm in Meadville and on July 23 at Flinchbaugh Farm and Orchard in Hellam. Pages two and three of this newsletter provide full information on the program and other details, so I'd like to take the opportunity here to highlight and thank our host farms.

- Jim Hershey, President

Ernst Conservation Seeds

I've learned that what is now Ernst Conservation Seeds actually began with five-acres and \$1,000 worth of crownvetch foundation seed in 1963. This coincided with the accelerated growth in the interstate highway system and crownvetch became the go-to plant for erosion control on road banks and median strips. As demand grew, so did the farm, as what is now the 180-acre home farm was purchased in the late 1960s.

When the demand for crownvetch dwindled in the early 70s the farm expanded by approximately 500-acres and began growing grain crops no-, tilled into the vetch, which as a legume provided a ready source of nitrogen.

The next shift in the operation occurred in the mid-80s with the introduction of native deertongue as the first native species crop. This part of the operation grew rapidly leading to the name change to Ernst Conservation Seeds.

Then in 2005 an additional 5,000-acres of marginal land was leased in order to grow switchgrass as a source of biomass for energy, another integral part of this uniquely diverse farm.

Today, with over 10,000 acres in production and over 80 employees, Ernst grows hundreds of diverse crops for conservation, ecological restoration, beautification, energy feedstock, and wildlife habitat, all in rotation with traditional row crops.



Photo credit: www.ernstseed.com
Calvin Ernst

Flinchbaugh's Orchard and Farm Market

Flinchbaugh's Orchard and Farm Market also has an interesting story to tell as a 4th generation family farm. Originally purchased by the family in 1951, the first fruit trees were planted shortly thereafter and have been an integral part of the operation ever since. However, a variety of row crops including small grains, corn, hay, milo, soybeans, sorghum and snapbeans dominate most of the 2,000-acres of owned and rented ground which comprise the farm operation.

Conservation has always been a critical aspect of their farm management with cover crops, grass buffers and waterways, and no-till practices embraced since the 80s. More recently, precision agriculture technology has become central to how their crop fields and orchards are managed. This led to the farm receiving the coveted Leopold Award for Conservation Excellence in 2022.

What sets the Flinchbaughs apart from many farms is their on-farm retail farm market, picnic pavilion, and seasonal events that attract thousands of visitors each year. The market is serviced by 52-acres of specialty crops including fruit, pumpkins, tomatoes, and flowers. Included in these acres is the innovative high density growing of apples on wire, improving fruit quality and labor efficiency.

The farm and market is managed by siblings Mike, Andrew and Julie, but their recently retired parents Ritchie and Sonia remain active as well.



Photo credit: www.facebook.com/FlinchbaughsOrchard/photos

Find registration info. on page 2
and agendas on page 3.

What to Expect at the Alliance Soil Health Field Days

As always, the program will include two presentations by the internationally known Keynote Speaker, Egon Zunckel, who revived what he calls a “tired worn out farm” using no-till and cover cropping programs. He and his sons now farm over 5,000-hectares (approximately 12,355-acres) of highly productive ground.

Another highlight will be a presentation on Genomic DNA soil testing, a cutting edge approach to soil testing that focuses on the biological and

microbial makeup of the soil instead of merely the chemical.

And since it is truly a “Field Day” a block of time will be devoted to outside breakout sessions. These will include live no-till planter and drill demonstrating planting into standing cover and other demonstration related to water infiltration and soil profiles.

The rainfall simulator will be in operation, demonstrating differing water infiltration vs. runoff amounts when different soil management practices are used. Along with that, a deep

soil pit will show what’s happening underground and compare infiltration rates.

Finally, there will be an extensive cover crop plot showcasing the attributes of various mixed species cover crops.

And of course, don’t overlook the abundance of good food, numerous vendor and agency displays and maybe most important, the opportunity to network with other like-minded farmers!

We hope to see you there!

How to Register for the Alliance Field Days

The easiest way to register is by using one of these two links or scanning the QR codes:

July 21,
2026

Ernst Conservation Seeds

8884 Mercer Pike
Meadville, PA 16335



https://bit.ly/FieldDay_July21

At the links and codes above, you will find options for registering for free as a member, paying the \$25 registration fee as a non-member or signing up for a membership and free registration.

These links will be active until five days prior to the event. After that, late registrations will be accepted at the \$30 fee by contacting Jay Howes at jhowes@pennag.com

July 23,
2026

Flinchbaugh Farms and Orchard

110 Ducktown Road
Hellam, PA 17406



https://bit.ly/FieldDay_July23

Advertising, including information on registering will also appear in farm publications such as Lancaster Farming, Farmshine and Farm and Dairy prior to the events.

You may also register by emailing Jay Howes at jhowes@pennag.com with your name, which event and how many will be attending.

Free to Members • \$25 for Non-Members • \$30 Late Registration

Penn State Farming For Success – June 25

Billed as an “agronomic field day featuring crop research, best practices, and expert insights, with opportunities to explore field plots and connect with industry professionals and sponsors,” it will take place at 9 a.m. at the Southeast Agricultural Research and Extension Center located at 1446

Auction Rd. in Manheim, PA 17545.

During the day long program attendees will learn about current research and best management recommendations, considerations to promote high-yielding production systems and strategies for handling emergencies and stress on the farm.

Three pesticide applicator credits and up to four Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) credits can be earned as well.

Registration fee is \$15 in advance and \$20 after June 22.

For more details and to register use this link <https://extension.psu.edu/farming-for-success>

Soil Health Field Days Agendas

Western Field Day Program

Ernst Conservation Seeds

8884 Mercer Pike • Meadville, PA 16335

July 20 – 6 pm – Meeting of the Minds Dinner

The Ernst Seed Farm Story and Tour

July 21 – Schedule of Events

- 8 a.m. Registration Opens and Refreshments
- 8:45 a.m. – 9 a.m. Opening remarks and Introductions
- 9 a.m. – 10 a.m. “My Journey Toward Soil Health with No-Till and Cover Crops”
Presented by Egon Zunckel
- 10 a.m. – 10:45 a.m. Genomic Microbial Soil Health Profiling
Presented by Al Toops
- 10:45 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. Breakout Sessions
- In field Equipment Demonstration
 - Soil Pit Comparison –
 - o Long Term Cover Crops and No-Till vs Long-Term Conventional Tillage
 - Water Infiltration Demonstration
 - Rainfall Simulator
 - Cover Crop Plots
- 12:15 p.m.– 1:15 p.m.. Lunch
- 1:15 p.m. – 1:30 p.m... Sponsor and Guest Comments
- 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m... Farmer Panel – “Yes, No-Till Does Work in Western PA”
- 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m... “Above Average Yields from Below Average Soils”
Presented by Egon Zunckel
- 3:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m... Ernst Seed Farm Story and Optional Tour
- 4 p.m. Closing Comments

Eastern Field Day Program

Flinchbaugh Farms and Orchard

110 Ducktown Road • Hellam, PA 17406

July 22 – 6 p m – Meeting of the Minds Dinner

The Flinchbaugh Farm Story and Tour

July 23 – Schedule of Events

- 8 a.m. Registration Opens and Refreshments
- 8:45 a.m. – 9 a.m. Opening remarks and Introductions
- 9:00 a.m. – 10 a.m. “My Journey Toward Soil Health with No-Till and Cover Crops”
Presented by Egon Zunckel
- 10 a.m.– 10:45 a.m. Genomic Microbial Soil Health Profiling
Presented by Al Toops
- 10:45 a.m.– 12:15 p.m. Breakout Sessions
- In Field Equipment Demonstrations
 - Soil Pit
 - Water Infiltration Demonstration
 - Rainfall Simulator
 - Cover Crop Plots
- 12:15 p.m. – 1:15 p.m. Lunch
- 1:15 p.m. – 1:45 p.m... Sponsor and
Sec. Russell Redding Comments
- 1:45 p.m.– 2:45 p.m. Panel — Nitrogen Reduction Strategies
- Charlie White — Penn State Nitrogen Tool
 - Ben Hushon — The Mill Nitrogen Strategy Trials
 - Flinchbaugh On-farm Nitrogen Trials
- 2:45 p.m.– 3:45 p.m. “Above Average Yields from Below Average Soils”
Presented by Egon Zunckel
- 3:45 p.m.– 4 p.m. Closing Comments
- 4:30 p.m. No-Till Alliance Annual Meeting

Thank You to Field Day Sponsors!

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- Bayer/Channell Seeds
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- Hoobers, Inc
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Pennsylvania No-Till Alliance
2215 Forest Hills Dr., Suite 39
Harrisburg, PA 17112

Thank You to Our Sponsors & Supporters

*Support of Alliance activities by our annual sponsors is crucial to our ability to fulfill our mission and is much appreciated.
Thank you!*

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All you need to know about Soil Health Field Days inside!

July 21,
2026

&

July 23,
2026

Our Mission

To promote the successful application of no till, cover crops and other soil health principles through shared ideas, experiences, education and new technology, resulting in improvements in soil health, water quality, productivity, and profitability for future generations.