



Long Term Conservation on Bel Park Farm

By Ain Welmon

John W. Parks, of Hickory Grove in Susquehanna County Pennsylvania, currently operates a 75-head Holstein dairy operation on about 230 acres of owned and 150 acres of rented ground. He grows silage corn, alfalfa, mixed grass hay and sweet corn. The dairy herd seasonally grazes 50 acres of pasture. There are 40 acres of flat well drained crop producing soils along the Susquehanna River where the sweet corn, silage corn and alfalfa grow.



Bel Park Farm and farmstead.

The farm has a custom firewood cutting business run by his son Wes who does with the milking and haying in addition to being a full time school teacher. Parks noted that, "I grew up on this family farm milking cows. Since 1867 there have been 6 generations on this farm, I'm the 5th and my son, Wes is the sixth." Parks, now 71, worked off of the farm as a civil engineer for International Paper Corporation (IPC). When he was not engineering for the IPC or dairy

farming at home Parks was a dirt track race car driver at several local race tracks in Northern Pennsylvania and Southern New York.

The Parks farm, "Bel Park Farm," has been working with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) since 1948 when the Soil Conservation Service first came to Susquehanna County. The first farm conservation plan was written, (Plan

#36 according to Susquehanna Conservation District records) for J. L. Parks (John's father). Updates to the original farm plan were completed in 1991 and 2001.

In 2010, Parks started a new round of soil and water conservation efforts by working with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) District Conservationist (DC) Ain Welmon. Parks and DC Welmon worked together to identify the resource concerns on the land, the needs of the landowner in the development of a new farm conservation plan.

Mr. Parks applied to the USDA NRCS for an Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Livestock contract, in 2012. The new farm conservation plan, the timely EQIP application, and site consultations (engineering inventory and evaluations) with Mr. Parks by NRCS Engineers and Technicians put the operation on the right road to getting a livestock contract. The Engineering Inventory and Evaluation (I & E) provided technical (engineering) assistance



Protective streambank riprap to protect against erosion.



that was needed to identify specific conservation practices that would help the operation better manage its cows and manure, combat erosion, and improve water and air quality.

In 2013 Parks was notified that he would receive financial assistance from the Susquehanna Conservation District via a Growing Greener Grant and from the USDA NRCS for an EQIP Livestock contract. The new contracts would provide financial and technical assistance to build the roofed concrete floored hua and manure storage facility, improved access road, animal trail and walkways, structures for water control, underground outlets, subsurface drainage, rain gutters and downspouts, fencing and two acres of pollinator habitat. NRCS

supplied technical assistance (onsite inspection) and follow-up during the construction of the various conservation projects over the next three years.

In 2017, Parks continued to improve his operation by installing over 6,000 feet of four strand hi-tensile fencing around a 20 acre pasture field. The Parks family continues to actively manage their 90 acres of woodland as they have done so since the first conservation plan (1948) identified woodland management as a priority.

Plans for 2018 include working with both the Susquehanna Conservation District (financial assistance) and the NRCS (technical assistance) on plans to complete a new watering system that will supply water

(improved water quality) for over 35 acres of pasture. The watering system conservation practices include: new round concrete water troughs, reinforced gravel pad around the water trough area to prevent erosion (mud), underground outlets, water collection lines and livestock pipeline.

John reflected for a moment when asked what he thinks of his heavy use area concrete floor and roofed areas (barnyard and manure storage) before he strongly stated, "I love it! It has worked out great. There is nothing I want to change on it, nothing at all. I would definitely recommend NRCS to other farmers. They do great work."