

# Hog Manure A WINNING CONSERVATION EFFORT



## Hermstad and Reints Families Recognized as Environmental Leaders

*Injecting hog manure from Iowa Select Farms led to Greg and David Hermstad and Clay Reints being recognized as environmental leaders committed to healthy soils and improved water quality. The families were honored as Iowa Farm Environmental Leaders during the Iowa State Fair.*

The **Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award** is a joint effort of the Governor, Lt. Governor, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, and Iowa Department of Natural Resources to recognize the exemplary voluntary efforts of Iowa's farmers as environmental leaders committed to healthy soils and improved water quality. It recognizes those who have taken steps in their farming operations to improve or protect the environment and natural resources of our state while also serving as local leaders to encourage other farmers to follow in their footsteps by building success upon success.



### KEY FACTS ON MANURE

- Manure increases the amount of water soil can hold, which reduces nutrient run-off
- Manure better restores soil health by increasing organic matter
- Using injected manure as a crop fertilizer is part of Iowa's overall effort to reduce nutrient loss



# WITH ROOTS IN THE PAST

AND EYES TO THE FUTURE, HERMSTAD BROTHERS  
RECOGNIZED FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP



*The use of injected hog manure is helping David and Greg Hermstad build soil organic matter, improve soil health and increase yields.*



*Since taking over the farm in 2010, David and Greg Hermstad have grown and diversified their operation. In addition to farming and trucking, they offer custom planting, harvesting, feeding, haying and snow removal services.*

"Old school values with new school practices." It's the business philosophy the Hermstad brothers apply to everything they do on their farm, and it's this approach that enabled them to capture recognition from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Greg and David Hermstad, fourth-generation farmers from Webb, were recognized for their land and water stewardship efforts during a ceremony at the Iowa State Fair August 14. The Iowa Farm Environmental Leader award recognizes the exemplary voluntary efforts of Iowa farmers as environmental leaders committed to healthy soils and improved water quality.

The brothers' farm in northwest Iowa is a diverse operation that includes grain and silage corn, soybeans, bromegrass, alfalfa, cover crops and a cow-calf herd. What makes their story remarkable is that they have succeeded as farmers and land stewards despite some cruel turns of fate during their early years of farming.

Greg and David took over management of the family farm nine years ago after their father passed away unexpectedly. At 18, David had just finished high school and Greg, who was 20, had just graduated from Iowa Lakes Community College. Neither was prepared to take over the farm, but the two immediately formed a partnership that has withstood multiple trials. In the first few years after taking over the farm, the young men dealt with a tornado, a house fire, floods and one of the worst droughts in decades.

"Failure is not an option," said Greg. "Great-grandpa, grandpa and dad didn't work so hard to build this farm for us to fail."

They credit their success as farmers and good stewards of the land to the three generations that preceded them, the goodwill of landlords and ag lenders who took a leap of faith with them, their passion for agriculture, and a drive to always improve.

"Grandpa and dad had a great toolbox, but we've added a few more tools," said David. "We'll never forget their old-school practices. They had years of experience proving these techniques, but now we have new tools and new-school practices we can add to what they did."

Greg says their passion for land stewardship has been handed down from their father and grandfather. "They may be gone, but it's almost like you can hear them on your shoulder and their words coming through to take care of the land."

Today the brothers are grid sampling, injecting hog manure from Iowa Select Farms, applying chicken and duck litter, adding terraces, growing cover crops, no-tilling soybeans, and strip-tilling corn. These practices enable them to improve soil and water quality, build organic matter, reduce runoff, enhance farming efficiency, and increase yields.

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Greg and David Hermstad, fourth-generation farmers from Webb

Since taking over the farm, the brothers have been able to build upon their father's work and expand it. David attributes their expansion to landlords recognizing their commitment to land and water stewardship. "They are coming to us and asking us to take on new land."

The secrets to the brothers' stewardship success include managing each field differently, using manure to build organic matter, never having "naked" soil, and not being afraid to always try new things. Due to the changing topography and soils across their farm they manage every field individually. "There is definitely no one-size-fits-all," said Greg.

Regardless of their accomplishments, their drive to improve continues. The brothers plan to build more farmable terraces,



**As they continue to grow and diversify, the Hermstads hope to expand back into pork production as their grandfather had done on the farm two generations earlier.**

begin utilizing low-disturbance injection knives offered by Iowa Select Farms, add cover crop mixes, increase their strip till corn acres, and utilize more hog manure.

The brothers continue to focus on improving land stewardship because they want to be able to leave it in better shape for the next generation, just as their predecessors did. "If our dad, grandpa and great-grandpa had not done what they had, we wouldn't be here today," said Greg.

## HOG MANURE A KEY INGREDIENT FOR LAND STEWARDSHIP

The Hermstad brothers began using hog manure from Iowa Select Farms in 2011 to reduce runoff and leaching, increase organic matter, build soil health, and improve yields.

"Hog manure is a preferred, value-added product you can't buy at your local elevator," said David. "It's one product that contains macro- and micronutrients, is slow-release nitrogen that stays put, and increases soil organic matter."

"We've seen increased yields on the fields where we've used hog manure. What were once our highest yields are now the norm where we are using manure."

Hog manure helps the Hermstads farm more efficiently as well. Because it's an organic source of nitrogen, it is released to the soil more slowly. The brothers tissue sample corn fields to determine nutrient needs and have found they can often skip side-dressing nitrogen on the fields that receive manure.

Iowa Select Farms works closely with the Hermstads on nutrient management planning, soil testing, and delivery and application of manure. Greg explains that Max Gransow, their local Iowa Select Farms Environmental Services Manager, has been a great partner in their operation and will frequently drop by the farm to check in with them to ensure everything is going well. "Max totally understands our needs and is with us every step of the way."

David explains that Iowa Select Farms is extremely conscientious of the environment and respectful of their needs. The company takes pit samples to clearly understand nutrient content of loads and uses the newest technology to inject manure. "They know exactly what goes on every field. When they apply, there's no overlap, no overuse and they're good about the waterways."

The brothers use manure because they are continually looking for ways to improve their yields, land and the environment. Beginning next year, they hope to increase their use of hog manure and start using low-disturbance injection knives. They also will be working with Iowa Select Farms, Iowa Soybean Association and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship on a pilot project to evaluate cover crops and hog manure.



**The Hermstads are building soil health with the use of hog manure and by never leaving the soil naked.**

# SHELL ROCK FARMER

## WITH A PASSION FOR IMPROVEMENT RECOGNIZED FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP



**Clay Reints of Shell Rock, Iowa, was awarded the Iowa Farm Environmental Leader award for his work to reduce erosion and improve soil health and water quality.**



Clay Reints doesn't settle for "good enough." He is always searching for ways to improve upon his work — whether it's enhancing farming efficiency, yields, or soils and water. That strong drive to make things better is why he was recognized as a good steward of the land and water by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the Department of Natural Resources. Clay received the Iowa Environmental Farm Leader award during a ceremony August 14 at the Iowa State Fair.

The fourth-generation farmer from Shell Rock comes by his passion for improvement honestly. He is the second generation in his family to receive the award. As an early adopter of no-till soybeans and strip-till corn, his father Jeff was recognized as a farm environmental leader in 2015.

Clay joined his father on their corn-bean operation in 2007 and began pouring his innate passion into the farm. His knowledge of farming and his college education in manufacturing helped him build on what his father started. "We take a continuous approach to stay ahead of the curve," he says.

Clay farms because he loves ag and enjoys taking on new challenges. "There are always hurdles that get thrown in your way and there are moments when I ask, 'Why am I doing this?' But you learn more every year — every day. I love it!"

As a father of two young children, Clay explains that his motivation to be a good steward of the land is to leave it better for his kids. "We're not in it for the short run. The soil is a lifelong asset that we need to continue to build for future generations."

Beyond soil and water conservation, his stewardship practices have additional benefits. Clay uses injected hog manure, strip-till, no-till, cover crops and split applications of nitrogen through the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program. Together, these practices help him build soil health, increase

productivity, improve efficiency, and protect his crop from major weather events like drought and floods. "These practices are protecting us from potential weather-related risks," he explains.

Clay continues to improve his strip-tilling technology and techniques to enhance the tillage in the planting zone and refine the timing of his tillage operation. Today he runs his 24-row strip-till rig a few days prior to planting corn to develop the ideal planting and growing environment. The method allows him to maximize corn emergence, keep residue on the field as long as possible, and preserve soil moisture through the season.



**The use of strip-tillage and injected hog manure enables Clay Reints to reduce erosion, build soil health and produce a high-yielding corn crop.**

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Homegrown Iowa



**Clay Reints' use of injected hog manure from Iowa Select Farms provides his corn with macro- and micronutrients throughout the growing season to help him produce higher yields.**



Every season, Clay's goal is to plant rye cover crops on 2/3 of his acres going into soybeans and 20% of his corn ground. The practice has enabled him to improve the soil, cut erosion, and reduce weed pressure. He has overcome the challenges of corn planted into rye by managing it differently than he does with soybeans, terminating it well ahead of the planter.

## MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF HOG MANURE

Clay added injected hog manure from Iowa Select Farms to his operation in 2016. In the spring of 2019, cool, wet conditions delayed planting and slowed the growth of the corn crop, but the benefits of manure were obvious.

"Despite a tough start, the corn really shined this spring on the farms where we used hog manure and strip-tilled," he explains. Injected hog manure provided much-needed phosphorous and nitrogen to Clay's developing corn crop, enabling it to thrive in the harsh conditions.

The use of injected hog manure is one of several stewardship practices that led to Clay's recognition as an environmental leader. "We've had really good luck with it," he says. "The fields that receive manure are fantastic."

Clay reports that manure is a great value because it's delivering both macronutrients and key micronutrients while building the soil profile. He works with Iowa Select Farms to develop a nutrient management plan and schedule application to coordinate timing and placement of injected manure. "Our applicators understand our farm and our conservation practices."

Despite the award, Clay has no plans to settle on his current practices as being "good enough." For the coming growing season, he plans to increase his use of manure and add cover crop mixes to his operation.



**The use of waterways, terraces, strip-till, no-till, injected hog manure, and cover crops are part of Clay Reints' equation to improve soil and water quality.**



**"Manure application is often credited with improving physical soil properties (organic matter) and associated benefits such as reduced runoff and erosion."**

*Dr. Dan Andersen, assistant professor, Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering, Iowa State University – October, 2017*



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