

# Management Tour

## Little Ireland grain farm thrives near the big city

By **KATIE NICKAS**

AgriNews Publications

BROWNSBURG, Ind. — Jack Maloney describes the Little Ireland Farm's sweet corn enterprise as his kids' project that has gotten out of hand.

"When you're reduced to a one-row picker, harvest is a little tough," he said, sparking quick laughter from the audience at the 2010 Purdue University-coordinated Indiana Farm Management Tour, where about 200 producers, Extension and agricultural specialists gathered to hear him talk about his business.

Maloney lost his lower left arm in a farming accident years ago. He continues to educate people about farm safety every chance he gets, but he is focused on the future of his crops and soil and the farm at large, which is organized as a corporation.

Maloney pioneered hands-free steering and driving technology on farm equipment, though "I never got any royalties out of it," he joked.

The farm itself serves as the operating unit for the business and holds all the inventory, machinery and owned farmland.

"Of all the technologies out there, cover crops are the one I'd like to get across to you today, because it's part of farming sustainably," Maloney said. "Of beans, ryegrass and radish, ryegrass is where you need to go for production agriculture."

He and his wife, Rita, are fourth-generation farmers. The Little Ireland Farm was established in 1861 and includes about 2,600 acres. About 500 of the acres are owned, and the rest are rented with a combination of crop-share and fixed cash-rent leases.

His wife, Maloney said, supplied all the income to the family during the leaner years. He remembers 15 or 20 years when there was not much money left when the family finished the year. She has held an off-farm job much of the time, pro-



AgriNews photo/ Katie Nickas

Ron Chamberlain of the Gysoil division of Beneficial Reuse Management Co.; Bruce Erickson, Purdue University director of cropping systems management; and Jack Maloney, operator of the Little Ireland Farm in Brownsburg, Ind., compare root systems on corn plants during the 2010 Indiana Farm Management Tour. This year's tour focused on important soil management techniques, including the use of cover crops and gypsum to enhance the soil profile.

viding the farm with health insurance along the way.

"She collected all the insurance," he said. "Whenever I get overdrawn she gets really mad. She is a lot better manager than me."

While Maloney's father raised hogs in the late 1950s, he decided to liquidate the enterprise in 1996 and shift the farm's focus to cash grains. The family quit raising feeder cattle in 1977 and doubled the size of its operation.

The family has profited from non-GMO crops, waxy corn, Vistive soybeans, seed soybeans, sweet corn, commodity corn and soybeans.

The Little Ireland Farm also is the home of a set of test plots for Bayer CropScience, which currently is promoting products including Corvus and BalanceFlexx and developing new products to respond to glyphosate resistance.

"Last year, we did better than ever with waxy corn," Maloney said. "We've changed the business plan to include all commercial corn."

The family has been no-till farming for almost 25 years — a move that, while reducing labor and machinery costs, "was not all sunshine and roses," he said.

AgSpectrum's Nu-Till and gyp-

sum program have been significant additions to the farm, the farmer said. He applies a ton of gypsum per acre every other year.

"A certain percent of magnesium needs to be met," he said. "We really pay a lot of attention to soil samples. We variable rate technology all our phosphorus and potassium. One ton of gypsum takes eight inches of rain to eat it up."

Maloney said the family is proud of the farm's root system and that he no longer has peaks and valleys with P and K since beginning the program.

"With the gypsum program,

we've backed off P and K and the soils have balanced out. With the soil balanced, yields have gone up dramatically," he noted.

Where the Maloneys used to apply 220 pounds of nitrogen to yield 150 bushels of corn per acre, they now yield more than 200 bushels of corn per acre with a 160-pound application, he said.

"Corn-on-corn has been our highest-yielding strategy," he said. "I had ryegrass flown on Sept. 15, and we had a 40-percent survival rate, but it did its job. We want some growth for hardiness. This here seems to be having a good survivability in the winter."

"Ryegrass supplies a massive amount of organic matter to the root and brings up lost fertility to the top," he added. "It maintains the nitrogen needed for corn. We did it going into beans this year."

Perhaps above his congeniality, knowledge and ease with perfect strangers is Maloney's desire to create a team that communicates.

"We've got the best team in the history of the place — I'm not opposed to someone else's thoughts on how to solve a problem," he said. "We're on a flex system. They're here and they understand that, and I try to give praise where it's deserved."

Maloney said he would like to add more acres to the farm and eventually graduate to Real-Time Kinematic satellite navigation to improve planter work.

"The most important machine on a grain farm is the planter," he said.

Maloney sees challenges ahead concerning government regulation of phosphorus and potassium applications and urges other farmers to listen to and work with environmental groups.

"We just need to keep the farm in the place it needs to be," he said. "We're losing a lot less P and K than we used to."

## Hession Farms headlines popular farm management tour

By **KATIE NICKAS**

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BROWNSBURG, Ind. — Corn is king at Hession Farms Inc., on the western outskirts of Indianapolis, where Anthony and Matt strive for perfection in raising their food-grade corn and expanding their operation.

Hession Farms, which was featured on the 2010 Purdue University Farm Management Tour, only recently embraced strip-till farming, but has hit consistently higher yields in corn over the years by using new management practices, global positioning systems and yield monitors, all in a not-quite-remote community.

The farm doubled to 1,200 acres when Anthony and Matt joined it in 1978, and they now farm 5,000 acres together. They took their assets in 1980 and created a farm corporation and created a limited partnership for all their land holdings.

"It is very challenging farming in a suburban community because we have a lot of development around us," Anthony said.

"I saw it coming 10 years ago. This side of Indianapolis was one of the slowest to develop," he said. "But we live with it and try to be harmonious with our neighbors and keep our operation going."



Anthony Hession

Anthony's wife, Tammy, has been integral to the GPS systems used on the farm today. She grew up in a suburb of Chicago and worked with the technology at St. Vincent Health before becoming involved in finance.

"When I moved here in the 1970s, it was a pea and gravel road," she said. "We haven't had any complaints from the neighbors. People are interested in farming because not many people farm anymore."

"People will ask me what my husband does in the wintertime — they can't believe farming is computerized," she added. "I grew up in a suburb, and I thought everything was sweet corn. If you don't grow up with it, you don't know what it is. Talking to the people in our community has been very important."

The family began using conventional tillage in the 1970s. The Hessions used ridge-till beginning in the 1980s before switching to strip till in the mid-1990s.

"We couldn't consistently get the stands we were looking for," Anthony said. "We have been pretty successful with strip-till, and we wanted to get away from wide-row beans. We really like strip-till because it gives us good soil warm-up, emergence and germination."

The Hessions prefer to do most of their work internally, including pesticide applications with their own sprayers.

"Everything on our grain system is built by members of the team, and everything has

been built by us," Anthony said. "The same is true for farm maintenance. We try to keep everything well-maintained. We do whatever we can, and we're not afraid to take on a challenge."

They have a long-standing relationship with Cargill, and they grow food-grade corn for delivery in Indianapolis. The corn from their farm ends up in General Mills and Kellogg's cereals, as well as other snack foods.

The Hessions currently own all their farm equipment and hope to get into an earlier harvest this year. They endeavor to keep their equipment up-to-date.

Despite their success in Brownsburg, the Hessions anticipate moving their main operations to Clinton County, where they have accumulated about 1,250 acres, funded by selling a small portion of their Hendricks County land for urban development.

"What we will move is a certainty — when remains a question," Anthony said. "If the next guys continue to farm, it probably will not be in Brownsburg. With the economic slowdown, however, we don't have any indication when it will be."

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