

# 2016 Conservation Farmers of the Year

## The Stahl Family



Stahl family members from left: Sister and brother Melissa and Jason, and parents Duane and Bonny. Not pictured: Jason's wife, Liz.

Not far from the Youghiogheny River in Smithton, three generations of the Stahl family have turned 160 tough acres into a model conservation farm.

The terrain hasn't made it easy. The property is a series of quickly rising slopes, one more than 200 feet from bottom to top.

The soil hasn't made it easy either. It is only moderately suited for pasture and hay, and quite slow in permeability, so it never really dries out.



But the Stahls didn't shrink from the challenges. In 1975, grandfather Everett put contour strips on some of the hilltops so he could grow hay and corn and still keep the topsoil in place.

Everett's contour strips remain today, well-maintained with crop rotation and lime- and manure-spreading, and continuing to do a great job of limiting erosion. Grandson Jason added his own conservation contribution about six years ago when he started using no-till practices to raise the farm's corn crop.

The farm's mud problem – exacerbated by its steep slopes, predominant soil type, and a culvert that dumped water from the road right into the Stahl's pasture – presented an



ongoing challenge to their cow calf herd. "When the cows stood in the field, the mud was up to their bellies," Jason said.

Dad Duane put in a diversion ditch some years ago, but the water problem was so big that it needed a large-scale, multi-pronged effort. Several years ago, the Stahls were able to procure conservation funding and, guided by conservation plans and expert advice, that major work began.



The family added an apron of hard, angular rocks at the end of the culvert to direct the water, a new underground drain to carry it across the property, and two rock outlets to safely release it into either a pond or stream.

They also reconfigured all their pastures, creating 10 paddocks, each with a frost-free hydrant, so they can rotate their 100-animal herd.

A new 40' X 130' roofed heavy-use building provides shelter for the cows to have their calves and spend the winter. Part of this roofed building is used for manure storage so that excess nutrients don't find their way into either of the two streams that flow through the Stahl property on their way to the Youghiogheny River.

A new animal walkway, a stabilized access road, and a stream crossing completed the major four-year conservation project.

