

2026 Conservation Farmer of the Year Award The Smail Family Roots and Rumen Farm



The Smail Family by their rotational grazing pastures.

When Billy and Chelsey Smail purchased their Salem Township farm approximately 4 years ago, the land had not been actively farmed in decades. The pastures were overgrazed, and the acidic soil had contributed to reduced diversity in plant life. In just a few short years, the Smails have begun restoring their 76-acre farm. Through rotational grazing, soil improvements, and thoughtful stewardship, Roots and Rumen Regenerative Farm is living up to its name.

Their free-range chickens and two dogs aren't the only ones who enjoy spending time outdoors. Their son Beau and daughter Sukey happily trail their parents as they work around the farm, while newborn son, Briggs, will have to wait a little longer before joining them in the fields. While they do sell eggs, the farm's primary future operation is their herd of cattle - approximately 20 cow-calf pairs - and their bull, Ronnie, who they hope will help make the operation profitable in the years ahead. Their market focus is selling freezer beef directly to consumers, and they are just beginning to reach the point where they have animals available for sale.



Billy selected a mix of cattle based on genetics from breeds that perform well on a grass-only diet. Their herd is strictly grass-fed and grass-finished. During the summer, the cattle are rotated through pastures, and in the winter, they have access to the barn where they are fed hay, 95% of which is grown on the farm, making it a largely self-sustaining operation.



Billy Smail with "Ronnie" the bull and cattle in a pasture.

Though it is a newer farm, the Smails already have several conservation measures in place. Billy practices rotational grazing, allowing the soil and pastures time to recover and remain healthy. During their first year on the farm, they applied lime by the tons to reduce the soil's acidity

and improve growing conditions for pasture species. They also have a neighbor planting corn on several acres this year because Billy found it to be one of the fastest ways to rebuild organic matter in the depleted soils. Next spring, those acres will be planted with a spring grazing mix, creating yet another pasture for the herd to rotate through.

A thick riparian buffer already existed along the stream when they purchased the property, and Billy chose to leave the buffer intact. Although it would be easier to allow the cattle direct access the stream, he instead installed fencing to keep them out and pumps and hauls water to them twice a day.



Streambank fencing and a lush riparian buffer protect a nearby stream.

Part of their future plans have been made possible through their willingness to work with the District. Billy had previously worked with the District to develop a manure management plan. Later, he and the District successfully applied for Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP) funding to support additional conservation improvements. Future projects include expanding the rotational grazing system to further improve soil health and pasture management. The ACAP contract also includes installing additional perimeter and paddock fencing to increase available grazing acreage to around 30 acres. An animal walkway will also be installed to aid in cattle rotation, and a pressurized watering system with watering troughs will provide water access throughout all pastures.



Rotational grazing keeps cattle well fed and the pastures healthy.

Though both Billy and Chelsey work full time, their love of farming keeps them busy long after the workday ends. Together they have planted an orchard with peaches, sweet cherries, pears, and apples that they hope will one day provide another source of homegrown food. Chelsey's love of flowers is reflected in the beautifully maintained flower bed that adds warmth and color to the farm. Someday, they'd love to open a farm stand and sell the products they raise and produce.



Fruit trees for the future.



Westmoreland Conservation District

