

**For Immediate Release:
February 24, 2014**

ILLINOIS GROWER RECOGNIZED AS 4R ADVOCATE

Optimizing input application makes right source, right rate, right time, right place nutrient management practices a natural fit for Chris VonHolten's operation

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Using nitrogen as a system, rather than an application, effectively timing applications, using new homogenized phosphate sources, managing residue and always seeking better ways to enhance productivity are hallmarks of Chris VonHolten's way of farming.

He farms 1,080 acres near Walnut, Ill., where he started in 1979 after college graduation. He makes his 75 percent corn and 25 percent bean rotation productive by using the latest conservation, tilling, production and nutrient management practices. He's constantly scrutinizing them, too.

"I'm always evaluating new products and technology," he says. "I adopt those that improve the overall efficiency of my farm. If you're not trying to learn something, you'll get into a rut."

VonHolten's commitment to innovation, while still practicing sound crop production techniques that are environmentally, economically and socially sound, has been cited by The Fertilizer Institute's 4R Advocate program. As one of five U.S. winners, he was awarded an expense-paid trip to the 2012 Commodity Classic in San Antonio, Texas. February 27 – March 1. During the event, VonHolten and the other winners, along with the fertilizer retailers that nominated them, will be honored during an awards banquet hosted by TFI. The grower advocates will also be part of TFI's communications efforts to promote science-based nutrient stewardship practices.

The 4R Nutrient Stewardship program focuses on nutrient best management practices that address the right fertilizer source, at the right rate, the right time and in the right place.

Malcolm Stambaugh of Ag View FS, also of Walnut, nominated VonHolten for the award. The retailer helps with the farm's nutrient management program and provides a wide range of services to help producers grow crops more efficiently and profitably.

"Chris' outlook about effective stewardship practices and the value associated with them has had a positive influence on our relationship with him," says Malcom Stambaugh, local crop specialist with Ag View FS. "He's earned recognition locally as a wise source of production practices that meet many of the criteria within the 4R program."

VonHolten used conservation tillage from the start and now all acres are no-till or strip-till. Waterways that help control erosion make up 16 acres of the property.

"Our ground rolls quite a bit. The waterways control erosion between the hills and catch sediment that runs off during hard rains. Even though we've no-tilled and strip-tilled for 20 years, we get some erosion. Fortunately, the water that does run off is very light, not dark at all.

"Tiling has alleviated some of these problems," he adds. "It's easier for water to go out in the tile, so when we get a hard rain, the ground isn't saturated so much."

By controlling runoff, VonHolten helps keep nutrients in place. His nutrient application process complements this.

"We've been soil testing using 2.5 acre grids since 1992," VonHolten says. "Variable rate application has lowered the cost of production and our rates are 20 to 25 percent lower than if we blanket spread. We also do some tissue sampling in the summer, primarily for micronutrients."

He applies nitrogen with stabilizer in strips in the fall and side dresses the rest in spring. A strip-till applicator applies dry fertilizer into strips, along with micronutrients, potash, phosphorus and urea. The latter is applied just before planting to ensure nothing is lost to volatilization.

Still searching for better ways to manage nutrients, VonHolten joined the Bureau County Conservation Tillage Club in the 90s to learn how to improve conservation on the farm. District Conservations helped members grow plots with various conservation methods.

“I had several plots with different rates of starter, including some where I added zinc and side dressed nitrogen at different rates,” VonHolten says. “After comparing data with club members, I started side dressing all corn acres. Ag View FS personnel helped me make these practices work. I’m currently involved in its Pursuit for Maximum Yield program, which involves trying various practices to push corn and beans to their highest yield potential.”

Managing details helps ensure that yield keeps rising. VonHolten or an AgView FS staffer scouts fields weekly during growing season to identify weed, insect or disease issues. Pesticides are mixed at the local plant, which helps control possible contamination.

VonHolten helps ensure the environment is protected, as well. Waterways and roadsides aren’t mowed until nesting season is over to protect wildlife. Last fall, he tested a cover crop mix on two locations to help absorb excess nutrients and prevent soil erosion.

“I chose radishes and oats because they winterkill, so a spring burn down doesn’t need to be applied, which further protects the environment,” he says.

Whether it’s planting, applying pesticide or applying nutrients, all practices are mapped and monitored to ensure correct application amounts for each product.

“Each of these practices has its role, but combined, they all work together for the benefit of the farm, the environment and the community,” VonHolten adds.

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The Fertilizer Institute (TFI) is the leading voice of the nation’s fertilizer industry. Tracing its roots back to 1883, TFI’s membership includes fertilizer producers, wholesalers, retailers and trading firms. TFI’s

full-time staff, based in Washington, D.C., serves its members through legislative, educational, technical, economic information and public communication programs. Find more information about TFI online at TFI.org and follow us on Twitter at [@Fertilizer_Inst](https://twitter.com/Fertilizer_Inst) and [SlideShare](https://slideshare.net/TFI). Learn more about TFI's nutrient stewardship initiatives at nutrientstewardship.org and on Twitter at [@4rnutrients](https://twitter.com/4rnutrients).

Contact information:

Chris VonHolten, 815-866-2798, cjvonh@frontier.com

Malcom Stambaugh, 815-379-2123, mstambaugh@agviewfs.com

Laura Kubitz, TFI Manager, Public Affairs, 202-515-2716, lkubitz@tfi.org

4R Website: <http://www.nutrientstewardship.com/>