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ILLINOIS GROWER RECOGNIZED AS 4R ADVOCATE

*Right source, right rate, right time, right place nutrient management practices
ensure long-term improvement for a farm's greatest asset - soil*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Improving tillage practices, adding cover crops and sharing nutrient management practices with fellow farmers and the general public are standard operating procedures for The Werries, who've farmed for nearly 50 years near Chapin, Ill.

John and Ruthie Werries operate Werries Farms, LLC, a 3,800-acre business with their son, Dean and daughter-in-law, Karen. It includes a mixture of productive black soil, as well as rolling ground that is less productive.

Their continual improvements on the farm, especially in nutrient management, haven't gone unnoticed. They've been recognized by the fertilizer industry as 4R advocates. These are growers who excel at using science-based, site-specific nutrient stewardship practices and who can be good spokespersons for these practices in their communities. The honor includes an expense-paid trip to the 2014 Commodity Classic, February 27 – March 1 in San Antonio, Texas. During this event, the Werries, four other national winners and the fertilizer retailers who nominated them, will be honored during an awards banquet hosted by The Fertilizer Institute (TFI). This group will go on to be part of the fertilizer industry's outreach and communications efforts to encourage nutrient stewardship practices that benefit farm profitability and the environment.

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

Historically, the Werries employed tillage and fertilization practices common to their region, broadcasting DAP and potash in the fall, followed by a full rate of nitrogen applied as anhydrous ammonia. That changed nearly 25 years ago.

“We started using no-till on soybeans in 1990,” John says. “We were half beans and half corn then. In 1996, we started strip-tilling corn acres to retain organic matter and reduce soil erosion.

“Erosion always bothered me, even as a youngster,” he says. “My dad was an early adopter of minimum tillage. Even after we got a one-pass chisel plow, we still had erosion.”

Still focused on keeping soil in place, the Werries worked with their longtime retailer, Verne “Tinker” Bader, owner of Bader Agricultural Service, Inc., in 2011 to develop a new strategy for managing fertility. He nominated the Werries for the 4R Advocate award.

The team decided on split nitrogen applications. For the first time, they split the nitrogen on a portion of acres for the 2011 crop and focused on nutrient source, rate, timing and placement in the strip tillage system. Since then, they’ve phased in the 4R system on the now mostly corn-on-corn operation. They continue to use grid sampling on the soil, as they’ve done since its infancy.

That 4R system consists of five fertilizer applications, which includes nitrification and urea inhibitors. They are:

- 1) Bader Ag applies variable-rate DAP and potash broadcast right behind the combine with rates based on soil test, removal rates and yield maps.
- 2) A portion of the N rate is applied as strip till, variable-rate anhydrous ammonia stabilized with N-Serve[®] after soil temperatures fall to 50°F.
- 3) Another portion of the nitrogen rate is applied as “pop up” 10-34-0 at spring planting.
- 4) Pre-emergent herbicide is applied with a 28 percent UAN solution with nitrogen stabilizer as weed and feed.
- 5) The final nitrogen application is side dressed as 28 percent UAN after corn emerges.

Last year’s harvest proved the effectiveness of this approach. Despite a lack of rain in August

2013, Werries' average corn yield was 233.8 bushels/acre. The average regional yield was 185 bushels per acre.

“The 4R approach just makes sense,” John says. “If you apply everything in the fall and get a big rain event, you run the risk of losing it to surface runoff and through the tile. By spreading it out, you're more likely to keep it for the crop. You're more likely to keep your nutrients in place if you keep your soil where it belongs.”

Always seeking improvements, the Werries sowed cover crops on all 3,800 acres in 2012, starting with ryegrass and cereal rye.

“We're enthused about the cover crops,” John says. “They reduce erosion, sequester the nutrients, reduce compaction and when they die, add organic matter to the soil. When we had excessive rains, our cover crops were in good shape and kept our soil from washing away. Last April, we had 5.8 inches of rain and in May we had 9.6 inches. Yes, water ran off our fields, but it wasn't muddy water. When we terminated the cover crops, we still had our soil. It was like a gift from heaven. My only regret is that we didn't start using cover crops sooner.”

John doesn't isolate his 4R practices to the family farm. He shares them. In November 2013, he and fellow conservation advocates worked together to tape a segment for the Peoria, Ill., PBS affiliate in which they discussed 4R nitrogen management and cover crops. They demonstrated how farmers and retailers can work together to reduce environmental impact, improve yields and get the most from nutrients.

“Our biggest asset in the Midwest is our soil,” John says. “We've got to take care of it. Cover crops can be used on a large scale and I encourage farmers to fully consider doing it. Many of us have the equipment and the management skills to do it. There's tons of good advice out there, so you don't have to learn by your own mistakes. Keep your ground covered and protected.”

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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).

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