



Kentucky National Farmers member Myrel Trunnell is proud, but not boastful that he won a prestigious conservation award July 10.

He earned the prestigious Sand County Foundation Award dedicated to voluntary conservation while raising awareness of Aldo Leopold's land ethic. Trunnell received \$10,000 and a crystal award.

Achieving soil health through the use of no-till farming and cover crops is nothing new to Trunnell, who began farming more than six decades ago. Conservation is synonymous with his idea of farming.

On the no-till scene, Trunnell was an early adopter. He rented a planter from Production Credit Association in 1970, to save soil. He bought his own the next year and never looked back. Today, 98 percent of the 1,400 acres he owns, and 500 acres he custom farms, is no-tilled.

The former tobacco grower even worked with the University of Kentucky to design a no-till tobacco planter. Today he and his family grow corn, wheat, hay, soybeans, pumpkins, fruits and vegetables at Trunnell Family Farm.

Beyond no-till, Trunnell uses cover crops to avoid what he calls 'liquid soil' that flows to creeks during large rain events. Cover crops help build up organic matter in soil, feed microorganisms, break up compaction, scavenge nutrients for future crops, shade out weeds and provide food for wildlife.

A rotation of crops breaks disease and pest cycles, and a soybean-to-corn rotation reduces his costs and need for nitrogen application. His farming costs have also been reduced by the use of soil testing and precision farming technology. Trunnell believes that crops can be produced more efficiently, natural resources can be preserved, and the environment can be protected using agriculture's technological advances.

After his son, Kevin, joined the farm business in 1990, the family diversified the farm by growing fruits and vegetables. They established Trunnell Farm Market and Fun-Acres, an agritourism business that provides entertainment and educational opportunities to the public.

In addition to grass waterways and border strips, the Trunnells have constructed hundreds of control basins and diversion structures. These actions have provided benefits to soil and water quality. Substantial wooded areas on the farm provide wildlife habitat.

Myrel and Shirley Trunnell live on the same farm where Myrel was born. His grandfather bought the place in 1889. Shortly after graduating from high school, Myrel began farming full-time and later purchased the farm from his father, Gilbert, in 1978.

A Soil Health Ambassador in Kentucky, Trunnell serves on the Daviess County Conservation District board. He received its Master Conservationist Award and the Kentucky No-Till Hero Award in 2007.

Source: Sand County Foundation, Madison, Wis.