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**TEAM JEFFRES:** Front: Robert and Shirley Jeffres. Back (from left): Karen, Chris, Kristi, Tom, Jim and Alex. Jim's oldest son, Jack, is not pictured.

# Top soil savers

By **JOHN VOGEL**

**S**UCCESS follows smart-working, hardworking people. And that's why R.L. Jeffres and Sons Inc., of Wyoming, N.Y., is this year's winner of New York's 2007 Agricultural Environmental Management Award.

The Jeffres family and Wyoming County Soil and Water Conservation District will receive the 2007 AEM Award for exceptional and exemplary environmental stewardship at Empire Farm Days. See related story on Page 7.

Today, working smart also includes environmentally conscious management. With six dairies to supply 50,000 tons of corn silage to, and 7,800 acres of cropland to manage, a comprehensive nutrient management plan was a natural for R.L. Jeffres Farms. As partners in the 1,700-cow Synergy Dairy, they manage manure resources according to its concentrated animal feeding operation permit.

## Key Points

- R.L. Jeffres family chose to be proactive environmental managers.
- Three generations of family are involved in diverse crop production.
- Jeffres family produces dairy-feed crops, vegetables and organic crops.

"To farm and work with other farms, it's important to maintain the soil and preserve the environment," insists Jim Jeffres, who co-manages the many-faceted business with his brother, Tom. Their parents, Robert and Shirley Jeffres, have turned over day-to-day operations to Jim and Tom and their fifth-generation families.

"We raise a lot of corn silage and handle a lot of manure," notes Jim. "We saw the rising importance of soil and water quality coming." And Tom adds, "We decided to be proactive."

Since 2000, the farm has worked

through the state's AEM process to complete Tier 4 implementation. More than 2,000 acres are no-tilled, zone-tilled or strip-tilled. Over the years, the Jeffreses installed more than 100 miles of drainage tile, diversions, grass waterways and terraces to minimize erosion and stream silting.

Cover crops of wheat and oats are increasingly used to hold soil and plant nutrients. The family also maintains 30 acres of riparian herbaceous buffer strips to protect streams from potential pesticide runoff.

## Conservation tillage shines

"Conservation tillage minimizes erosion and nutrient runoff, and preserves soil structure. It's also fewer trips across the fields, saving time, labor and fuel," points out Jim.

"Zone-till yields are close to the same as with conventional tillage. That's what scared us to begin with. But zone-

till fields seem to yield better in wet or dry years," Jim says. It's been a good fit with dry beans and snap beans. "We're experimenting with beets and carrots," he adds.

Besides corn silage, the Jeffreses produce peas, alfalfa, dry beans, snap beans, beets, carrots and wheat. Last year, they began raising organic corn (grain), alfalfa, soybeans and snap beans; tilling dairy manure into alfalfa; then applying pelleted chicken litter as an organic fertilizer at planting.

Nearly 1,500 acres of cropland is irrigated for crop assurance, as Jim terms it. Seven low-pressure center pivots cover 400 acres. The rest is covered by hose reels, "which keeps us very busy," he adds.

Close to 30% of their crop fertilizer needs are met by liquid dairy manure. "We're planning to run dairy gray water (solids separated out) to our lagoon, then to center pivots," reports Jim.

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