

Pots, Burlap and the Conservation Partnership

Kent County Nursery Invests in Conservation

Conservation and farming go hand in hand. The lifelines of farm productivity are healthy soils and abundant water, and these precious natural resources cannot be maintained without implementing conservation practices on the farm. For Jim Kohl, a third generation nursery operator, conservation not only makes sense, it runs in his blood. Mr. Kohl co-owns Angelica Nurseries, Inc with his cousin, father, and two uncles.

“Miles and miles of grassed waterways and contoured terraces were implemented long before I was here,” Kohl said. “The investments in conservation are not only my grandfathers, fathers, or mine. They affect all the family and future generations to come.”

“The investments in conservation affect future generations to come.”



Drip irrigation reduces runoff and ensures efficient use of water supplies.

Just as generations before him, Jim relies on his local Soil Conservation District office for technical assistance. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Maryland Department of Agriculture have been integral to planning and implementing conservation practices on the nursery to minimize soil erosion and control water loss from runoff. Multiple local organizations worked in partnership to help make Angelica Nurseries a conservation success.

The Kohl story of conservation goes back to Jim’s grandfather, Thomas J. Kohl, Jr., who worked as a landscaper in Angelica, Pennsylvania in the late 1920’s. Fed up with the lack of quality

plant material available, the elder Mr. Kohl began propagating his own material for landscapes.

Mr. Kohl’s sons, Bernard, LeVerne, and Tim, followed their father’s footsteps and stayed in the planting and landscaping business. The brothers had plans to move into wholesale planting, but the rocky, sloping hillsides of Pennsylvania were less than ideal. Their search for a location with the correct soil types and mild conditions led to Kent County on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, and in 1957 the family relocated to their current site in Kennedyville.

Drawing from their experience with water’s natural path through the hilly

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landscapes of PA, the Kohl's first plantings were contoured to minimize water runoff and erosion potential for their most precious resource, topsoil. As the nursery grew from one to two farms, from two to the current ten, the family continued to expand the range and capacity of conservation practices at the nursery.

With each new farm the first conservation measure is taking the land out of 100 percent tillage and evaluating drainage patterns from the fields.

Nurseries are unique in that rather than having a 100 acre field planted with one crop, they have 100 one-acre plots of different species.

“My goal is to turn a valve on and have every drop of water go where it should.”

Each plot has different requirements for water and drainage. The fields at Angelica Nurseries have been carefully mapped out to allow water to get off of the property without taking the topsoil with it.

Unlike other agricultural products, the nursery crop is a conservation measure in itself. The average life of a plant at Angelica is 7 years. With roots that reach anywhere from 3 to 10 feet into the ground, the plants soak up nitrogen for fuel and mitigate leaching into groundwater.

To control runoff, aside from the grassed waterways and terraces installed since the farm's inception, the Kohl's have installed two large sediment basins to trap sediment resulting from irrigation induced erosion under the

the center pivot systems. The water control structures within the basins provide storm water retention to allow sediment to settle within the basins.

Drip irrigation systems have been installed to replace travelling guns on some fields to apply irrigation water more efficiently, reduce withdrawals from the aquifer, and reduce sediment and water runoff.

Angelica also has a robust soil rebuilding program. After each nursery crop is harvested, a cover crop is grown to rebuild organic matter lost due to fallen foliage and topsoil removed with the plants during harvest. The cover crop is then incorporated back into the soil. Excess inventory and culled plants are ground into mulch and spread back onto the fields to provide additional organic matter to the soil.

The nursery now encompasses over 2000 acres including some of the best Sassafras silt loam in the state. Angelica produces a wide variety of woody ornamentals, broad- and narrow-leaved evergreens, and deciduous shrubs, including many of the original stock plants.

The Kohl's conservation efforts to keep their soil healthy and water clean ensure a clean environment for the community and ensure Angelica Nurseries can be enjoyed by future generations.



Basins retain water to allow sediments to settle.