ANCILLA
Beef & Grain Farm

ANCILLA BEEF & GRAIN FARM
2022 IMPACT REPORT

Moving from conventional to regenerative farming practices has the potential to revolutionize our agricultural systems and profoundly impact and improve our environment, communities, and food security. This change represents a crucial step towards a sustainable future. Transitioning from conventional to regenerative farming practices holds the key to revitalizing our ecosystem, enhancing soil health, reducing climate impact, promoting biodiversity, improving water quality, making farms more profitable, and providing nutritious food now and for future generations. We can restore the balance between human activity and nature and pave the way for a more resilient and equitable agricultural system.

Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm is committed to building a more sustainable practice of raising cattle and growing critical food resources. We are currently in the process of transitioning from a conventional Midwest Corn and Soybean system to a Regenerative practice of growing these same foods using methods that reduce our dependence on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, builds soil health, and integrates livestock on the land in a manner that mimics historic grazing habits of ruminant animal species.

In 2022, Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm took some critical steps forward to begin our transition process. This year (2023), on our previously designated 30 acres of organic fields, we planted a diverse species of cover crops with the goal of building soil health, scavenging available nutrients, increasing biological activity in the soil, and protecting the soil from erosion, thereby protecting our air and nearby waterways. The program was so successful that on the acres dedicated to organic corn, we were able to use a thin layer of (on-farm produced) compost and cattle manure to meet our nutrient input needs. We did not require additional nutrient inputs on the fields dedicated to organic soybeans! This saved the farm money and reduced our reliance on harmful synthetic fertilizers and the burning of fossil fuels by eliminating multiple tractors passing over the same fields.

This year we saw the introduction of in-field pollinator habitats sowed into these same organic fields. These perennial habitats will provide a half-acre of flowering plants and grasses to encourage beneficial insects to not only pollinate our crops but predate on harmful, plant-destroying insects through a process known as integrated pest management (IPM). By managing beneficial insects, we hope to reduce our reliance on the use of harmful pesticides.

7 people were killed and at least 37 others injured in motor vehicle crashes on May 1, 2023 along Interstate 55, when a rare dust storm swept through nearby farms and onto a highway in a rural section of Illinois, causing “zero visibility” conditions. This situation was caused by high winds and topsoil blowing from recently tilled fields.

Soil erosion due to agricultural practices is a significant problem in the United States and Worldwide. With 74% of our farm fields listed in a “degraded state,” we lose approximately 1% of our topsoil yearly due to wind and water erosion. This is generally caused by excessive tilling and leaving soil bare between cash crop seasons. Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm is committed to reducing tillage and leaving soil covered between cash crops with crop residue from the previous year’s harvest or by planting cover crops. At the end of the 2022 growing season, we eliminated all post-season tillage from our farming practices. As we moved into the 2023 growing season, we further reduced our tillage passes and will bring a new system of planting no-till soybeans after cover crops starting in the 2024 growing season.

Regenerative agriculture has the potential to transform agricultural systems, mitigate climate change, conserve biodiversity, improve water resources, and promote social and economic well-being. Our farmers can contribute to a more sustainable and resilient future by adopting regenerative practices.