

## Welcome!

Welcome to the Fall 2019 PCM newsletter! In keeping with the theme of the 2019 planting season, we're running a little behind preparing it. But we have been BUSY! Today, we've enrolled almost 350 farmers from Illinois and Kentucky in the PCM program representing more than 300,000 acres of commodity crops. PCM Specialists and staff have attended over 130 meetings since April, sharing PCM results and discussing how our partners (and potential partners) can work with us to help farmers successfully adopt conservation practices that will improve soil and water quality and their bottom lines. We also added new staff at PCM. Collin Roemer joined PCM as the North Central region Specialist in January, and Debbie Malloch was added in March as Administrative Manager in the new PCM Champaign office. You can read more about them on pages 3 and 4, respectively. And last but not least, we are happy to introduce Mr. Travis Deppe as the director of the PCM program. Travis formerly worked at IL Corn Growers Assoc. as the Nutrient Watershed Manager; he is a CCA and comes from a farm in Mt. Pulaski, IL. We are excited to have all of our new staff on board; they add a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to our program.

## PCM – New Grants

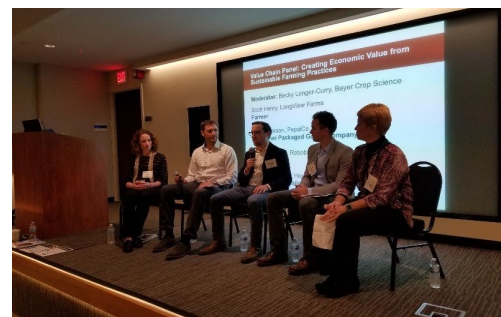
- \$258k National Fish & Wildlife Foundation Conservation Partners grant
- \$2.5M NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant (with NCGA)

(Below top) Pepsi Farmer Meeting in Vermilion County  
(Below bottom) Otter Lake PCM Quarterly Meeting, Carlinville, IL



(Right) Dr. Laura Gentry speaks on a MRCC Conservation Finance Panel, St. Louis, MO.

(Below) PCM Volunteer at State Envirothon, Allerton Park



## CONTACT US

Travis Deppe, CCA  
Director of PCM  
[tdeppe@ilcorn.org](mailto:tdeppe@ilcorn.org)

Dr. Laura Gentry  
Director -Water Quality Research  
[lgentry@ilcorn.org](mailto:lgentry@ilcorn.org)

Debbie Malloch, Admin. Manager  
[dmalloch@ilcorn.org](mailto:dmalloch@ilcorn.org)

## Moving Boundaries

### USDA National Resources Conservation Service Recognizes PCM

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) recognizes successful partnerships based on four common characteristics: innovation, leveraging of partner contributions, offering impactful solutions, and inclusion of a diverse and capable set of partners. PCM was one of four partners recognized out of a field of more than 2000 partners as leaders in conservation efforts through its innovative approaches and use of technology. *(See full article on pg. 5)*



**Left: Cover crops aerially seeded in September coming up through corn near harvest. Right: PCM hosts a meeting for corporate supply chain members at a PCM cooperator's farm.**



### Introducing The Farmer Data Cooperative

The Farmer Data Cooperative is a collaborative effort between IL Corn Growers and University of IL researchers, in partnership with the NASA Harvest program supporting development of new technologies utilizing NASA satellite data to improve field-scale decision-making related to agricultural efficiency. PCM cooperators are a natural fit for this effort and have the first opportunity to join the Farmer Data Cooperative.



### U.S. Senator Richard Durbin Speaks on PCM and Climate Change

Senator Durbin expressed his support for PCM in an editorial in the *Pantagraph* in May. The Senator gave a shout-out to Illinois Corn and recognized PCM as “one of only a handful of Midwest commodities leading the way to address better soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat which help address climate change.” He also praised the cover crop initiatives which reduces carbon emissions from the air and nitrates from waterways. He highlighted how PCM works one-on-one with farmers to explore how reduced tilling and lower nitrogen applications can be done without hurting yields or revenues and producing solid data that persuades even more farmers to adopt these practices. *(See full editorial on Pg. 6)*



## Farmer Highlight—Marty Marr



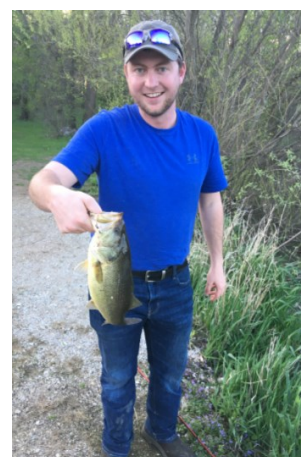
Marty Marr started farming in 1975 with his father and brother on a farm his grandfather began in 1931 in Morgan County. He has two sons who also made farming a career, and his wife, Sheila, is involved in the accounting area of the business. He began no-tilling fields that were prone to erosion in the mid-eighties. On the topics of strip-till and no-till, Marr explains, “Reducing soil erosion with these conservation measures is necessary to protect the nutrients we use and our environment.” He credits his conservation practices to conscientious farmers such as Dale Lepper and John Werries, both of

Morgan County, who had the vision to take steps to make a difference in soil conservation which now includes cover crops. His sons have a strong desire to continue conservation methods because, “..they know it’s the right thing to do.” They have taken the initiative to add row cleaners to their strip bar this fall. Marr stated that the erosion in 2019 was some of the worst many had seen in recent years, and more people are turning their focus towards tools that make conservation practices successful. “As with any business decision, you do your homework and find out what works best for your operations.” Marr appreciates PCM because it shows him how his practices compare to others and how successful we are in making a positive impact.



## PCM Specialist Highlight—Collin Roemer

Collin is the newest of our Specialists joining PCM in January 2019 in the North Central Region which includes Livingston, Mclean, Tazewell and Woodford Counties. He grew up in Cantrall, Illinois and attended Lincoln Land Community College before completing his bachelor’s degree in agronomy management at Illinois State University. Collin thoroughly enjoys hunting, fishing, golfing, and being on the farm.



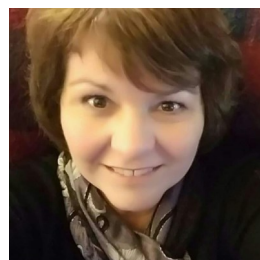
Collin attributes his love of farms to growing up in a farming community, having friends that farmed, as well as spending time on his own farm in Macoupin County. As a PCM Specialist, Collin enjoys learning each different operation and making constructive and mindful decisions that will impact each farm/operation in a positive way, both functionally and economically. He also enjoys the conversations he has with farmers and being out in the countryside sharing a common passion for conservation and agriculture with each farmer.

When asked his favorite fishing hole, his answer is his home farm pond because of fond memories of learning to fish there. His secret bait tip to share? “Rigem and Jig em.”

### New Employee Highlight – Debbie Malloch

Debbie Malloch joined PCM in March 2019 as the Administrative Manager in the Champaign office where she assists staff members with daily operations and data management.

Debbie retired from the University of Illinois in 2018 where she was the Administrative Assistant in the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES) in the Office of Research and later the Office of Administration and Finance. Prior to working at the University of Illinois, Debbie was a 911 dispatcher for Champaign County METCAD for 16 plus years. She is also a graduate of the University of Illinois Gies College of Business with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration.



Debbie lived all over the United States as a child, but in her high school years, her family moved to Oblong, Illinois, a small farming community in southeastern Illinois. Most of her friends lived on farms, and she enjoyed spending time with them and all of their different animals. Debbie lives in Urbana now and adores spending time with her husband, Steve, their dog, Jackson, and their 5 children and 7 grandchildren.

# A Business Case for Conservation

## Innovation through RCPP

Illinois Corn Growers Association (ICGA) has developed Precision Conservation Management (PCM), a farmer service program helping farmers adopt conservation practices in a financially responsible way, as a response to the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. PCM aims to meet the management needs of farmers by making possible the integration of agronomic information with financial and environmental analytics. Through collaborations with more than 30 partners and the development of a farmer-friendly data collection platform, PCM offers one-on-one technical support, data analysis, and an environmental evaluation through the Field to Market's Fieldprint Calculator 3.0.

The project was made possible through a funding agreement between IL Corn and NRCS in the agency's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). In 2015 they were awarded \$5.35 million in RCPP project funds, while bringing an additional \$13.5 million from other partners to help fund the program. Currently, PCM staff work with 250 farmers in 16 Illinois counties and 10 Kentucky counties, representing approximately 250,000 acres of row crop agriculture. As a commodity crop program, IL Corn has the objective of ensuring that PCM data represents most Midwest farming operations and can be applicable to the broader farm population.

"Farmers sometimes have difficulties making good conservation decisions, when there is very little information on the economic benefits of implementing conservation practices," said Shannon Allen, Illinois RCPP Coordinator for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). "This PCM project is providing the economic information to farmers so they can make an informed decision."

By joining PCM, farmers agree to allow IL Corn to collect and anonymize data in a way that demonstrates how conservation practices affect both farm income and local resource concerns. One advantage of PCM to individual farmers is the robust support system available through the Specialists' network. The PCM Specialists' offices are centrally located in local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)/NRCS offices so that they have access to conservation and technical resource systems.

PCM staff work directly with farmers to input management data into the PCM Farmer Portal, a secured and encrypted data platform. Data is then used to generate a comprehensive, sustainability-focused Resource Analysis and Assessment Plan (RAAP) that provides direction to the farmer in evaluating and considering changes to production practices. Currently, the focus of PCM's assessment includes tillage, cover crops, and nutrient management. RAAP reports additionally provide meaningful comparisons to allow an individual farmer to contrast themselves with results of farmers with different farming practices. The PCM Specialist works closely with the farmer to review the results of the RAAP and to identify practices the farmer might consider adopting. Based on the farmer's business and conservation interests, the specialist helps make connections with a wide variety of technical support and local incentive opportunities (e.g., NRCS cost share; cover crop incentives offered by ICGA and ag retailers).

Once conservation practice recommendations have been determined, PCM Specialists then connect the farmer with their NRCS district conservationist to move forward with Farm Bill program applications. PCM data is used to generate a variety of reports that are made available to farmers across the Midwest to assist with financially sound conservation decision-making. For more information about the project, analysis and results, visit [ilcorn.org/PCM](http://ilcorn.org/PCM).

## U.S. Senator Dick Durbin Speaks on PCM in *The Pantagraph*

### Guest Commentary: Fighting Climate Change in Rural America

May 19, 2019



When I was a grade school student, I participated in the mandatory springtime tornado drills -as most Illinoisans still do today. That's why last winter, when I walked through the devastating storm damage in Taylorville, I was alarmed that we had experienced a tornado in December.

According to a recent Northern Illinois University study, over the past 40 years, tornado frequency has increased in the Midwest and Southeast United States. Another report found the frequency of large-scale tornado outbreaks has increased in the U.S. So we must ask ourselves this question: How can we address increasingly damaging and unusual weather events, such as off-season tornadoes, heat waves, and more rain-saturated springs with damaging floods like those in Illinois these past few weeks?

The answer starts with not ignoring the challenge.

The Illinois state climatologist tells us our state is 10 percent wetter than a century ago, with heavier off-season rainfalls, oppressive humidity, hotter nights, milder winters, and premature springs. For Illinois farmers, this makes fertilizer application, the timing of planting, and overall crop development all the more challenging.

As a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I recently asked the Illinois Corn Growers for its thoughts on the Fourth National Climate Assessment, where 13 federal agencies provided forecasts for Midwestern agriculture. The thoughtful answers from our farm leaders illustrate how we all must begin preparing for the future.

The Illinois Corn Growers are among just a handful of commodity groups in the Midwest leading the way toward solutions for better soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat, all of which help to address climate change.

During the past four growing seasons, they have been working to develop and establish more than 80,000 new acres of cover crops in Illinois, and reducing carbon emissions from the air and nitrates from waterways. Their nationally-recognized Precision Conservation Program works one-on-one with farmers in 16 counties to explore how reduced tilling and lower nitrogen applications can be done without hurting yields or revenues, all the while producing solid data that persuades even more farmers to adopt these practices.

They also have invested more than a half million dollars in a Macon County laboratory that uses University of Illinois experts to boost water quality practices.

The corn growers described farming to me as an annual act of faith. I could not agree more. As my colleague, Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts, R-Kan.), recently said, "Nobody in farm country does not realize we have climate change; it's what we do about it." I would add "and how we do it."

Those who believe climate change is real and affected by our activities also know solutions must work for everyone, everywhere, or we will fail. We are two minutes until midnight when it comes to confronting climate change, which means the time for pointing fingers has expired, and the time for cooperation is now.

Hats off to the Illinois Corn Growers for their efforts. As the stewards closest to the land, our farm leaders can be a valuable resource in leaving a livable world to our children.