

RITA In Action

## **SEPAC Field Day - Edge Feathering and Edge of Field Practices**

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RITA Tech 9

Resilient Indiana Technicians are useful for many things in the soil and water conservation districts that we are assigned to. To make sure we are better able to discuss Best Management Practices with producers, this includes attending different training and field days across the state.

This month, two RITA Technicians, Will Yoder and I, were able to attend Purdue's Field Day, Edge Feathering and Edge of Field, at the Southeastern Indiana Purdue Agriculture Center (SEPAC). This training offered a real-world view of several different practices that can be applied at the edges of the field with presentations of several different perspectives on why they might be adopted. Edge of field practices are conservation practices performed at the edge of agricultural fields that enhance the efficiency, productivity, or ecology of the field they are adjacent to.

For this field day we were given the opportunity to visit several sites on the farm where SEPAC is implementing edge of field practices. The practices we viewed included edge feathering, field borders, grassed waterways, prairie strips, a pollinator planting, a riparian forest buffer, and a planting of annual grains for wildlife. Farm superintendent, Joel Wahlman, Extension Forester, Ron Rathfon, and Extension Wildlife Specialist, Jarred Brooke, discussed implementing these practices and some of the challenges they overcame like invasive species, differing priorities, and selecting practices for locations.



After we were done in the field for the day, Joel gave a presentation about SEPAC's history. He also explained that in southern Indiana, many farmers face the challenge of farming fields that have border trees. These trees can prove problematic because they cause "yield drag", which is where crops are less productive in an area due to conditions like ponding, shading, or nutrient deficiencies. They decided to implement some edge of field practices because SEPAC's crop fields' yield data indicated a ring of lowered productivity around the edges of the fields.

Their decision to implement some edge of field practices has led to a yield increase within the ring and additional income from the trees that their edge feathering removed. They have also observed more beneficial wildlife adjacent to their fields.

Jarred presented on the benefits of these edge of field practices on wildlife. They allow early successional habitat to occur on the landscape which provide food and shelter for wildlife like northern bobwhite, meadowlark, field sparrows, turkey, indigo bunting, and deer.



The last presentation was a breakdown of how to sell these practices to farmers by Pheasants/Quail Forever Precision Agriculture and Conservation Specialist, Aubrey Pond. One of the more persuasive reasons is the improved profitability of the land. If a piece of ground is yielding less money than is being invested on it, that makes the entire operation less profitable. By increasing the yield of those areas or by taking those areas and putting them into conservation plantings, farmers actually improve the value of the land that remains by reducing the amount of lost profit on lower yielding ground.

Edge of field practices are important to both conservation professionals and farmers as a method of improving the profitability of the farms, as well as introducing habitat for wildlife, and controlling soil erosion. It is important to have a complete understanding of these practices in order to best present them to farmers and landowners.