How Feeding Cows Created Environmental Benefits

John Maxwell began his dairy farm business after graduating from college in 1984 and immediately faced a challenge: He needed cow feed.

Maxwell used his ingenuity and found a way grow feed and benefit the environment by using cover crops. Many farmers may not keep a crop in the ground all year because of unfavorable growing conditions during certain months.

Maxwell began experimenting and found that rye grass survived the winter and was a great feed option for his herd of Jersey cows.

The 400-acre cover crop offers a destination for his cows’ manure as a natural fertilizer. Maxwell saw that opting not to till minimized soil and earthworm disruption, thereby preventing nutrient runoff and erosion. This created fertile ground for the ensuing corn or soybean crops to thrive while cutting his feed bill in half.

Having a variety of crops for feed allows for a higher-quality and balanced diet for the cows, resulting in increased milk production for the farm.

Maxwell enjoys sharing his cover crops story with other farmers and sees momentum growing.

The dairy, Cinnamon Ridge Farms, also repurposes food for its cows that couldn’t be sold at retail, such as products that simply may have been mislabeled. One such product was coffee creamer. The Maxwells checked with their cow nutritionist, who determined the creamer was a good addition to the cows’ diet as a carbohydrate source. The creamer also gives the feed an added flavor the cows love. Now, about 2,000 pounds of creamer arrive at the farm each week instead of a landfill.

Successes such as these keep the Maxwells seeking more.

“It’s important to be curious in everything you do,” Maxwell said. “Don’t be satisfied where you are. What fuels me is not only how can we grow but how can we educate others.”