

# [***ROOTING FOR SOIL HEALTH IN SOUTH CENTRAL MONTANA***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69F3-K0H1-JCBF-S4MJ-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

The following information was released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

"We've just been trying to do what's friendlier to the ***soil*** and the plants and the people that eat the stuff and all that," Vanessa Bays said as we were climbing into her combine set up with a stripper header. Vanessa and John are part of a long lineage of farming and are used to being in a combine, but not with a stripper header attached. As we rapidly moved across the wheat field harvesting grain, Vanessa leaned forward to look and quietly stated, "it took me a while to believe that it actually was doing what it was supposed to," still in awe as residue was left standing tall in the field behind us.

Using the stripper header allows the Bays to meet the specifications of conservation harvest management, a conservation practice that is part of the Rooting for ***Soil Health*** Targeted Implementation Plan. The Bays are also participating in implementing cover crops and had sixteen different species that were used this year.

John and Vanessa Bays run their operation Highland Harmony Farm in Wilsall, Montana. They grow and sell grains, legumes, and oats and raise bees to sell honey. With their wide variety of inventory, they utilize the local farmers markets year-round, run a storefront on their property, and an online store to sell their products. Not only is their business and end product important to them, but they also care about their ***soil***.

The Bays went to ***soil health*** conventions and learned about ***soil health*** practices, including using a stripper header to harvest. Vanessa said, "we thought that looks like it could slow down the wind and keep more snow. It just looked like it was going to be a good thing for ***soil health***." By using the stripper header to harvest, the Bays are keeping cover on the ***soil*** and slowing the central Montana wind. Combined with other conservation practices like no-till and cover crops, they are implementing the ***soil health*** principles maximize ***soil*** cover, minimize disturbance, maximize diversity, keep a living root in the ***soil*** as long as possible, and incorporate livestock. Management choices that focus on the whole system can improve ***soil health*** and improve the ability of any moisture received to infiltrate the ***soil*** and remain there for plants to use instead of running off or evaporating. A win-win for the producer and the land.

NRCS Montana area agronomist, Allison Milodragovich said, "NRCS assistance is helping the Bays decrease some of the inherent risk involved with adopting new equipment on the farm." Vanessa and John are satisfied with their current interaction with NRCS, and the technical and financial assistance has been a great help on their operation.

The Bays are currently in their first year of participating in the Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP), Rooting for ***Soil Health***. Rooting for ***Soil Health*** is a project developed based on input from the local working group process in the 14 counties in south-central Montana that are included in the project area.

The TIP is funded through NRCS's popular Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Bolstered by Inflation Reduction Act funds, the Rooting for ***Soil Health*** project helps the Bays and other producers to implement climate smart ag and forestry practices identified as mitigating climate impacts and building climate resilience.

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