



Dairyman wins award for conservation tillage efforts

Updated: Tuesday, December 18, 2012 10:51 AM

By TIM HEARDEN

Capital Press

Hanford, Calif., dairyman Dino Giacomazzi says he just wanted to leave his farm in better condition for his son than when he inherited it.

Giacomazzi, who double-crops with wheat and corn on his 900-acre dairy farm, is being given an award for participating in one of the first conservation tillage projects in California and helping others adopt the practice.

By reducing passes with the tractor, he's been able to enhance soil, water and particularly air quality in an area that often experiences high levels of air pollution.

"Primarily it's a method here that helps to improve air quality by reducing the amount of dust emissions and amount of diesel emissions from tractors," said Giacomazzi, a fourth-generation farmer who grows the grains to feed his 900 cows.

"This part of the San Joaquin Valley is one of the worst air districts in California, so farmers have been trying to find ways to do what we do with less impact on air quality," he said. "That was our original purpose for looking at doing this."

For his efforts, Giacomazzi will be honored as the statewide 2012 Leopold Conservation Award winner during the California Farm Bureau Federation's annual conference Dec. 1-5 in Pasadena.

The \$10,000 award is co-sponsored by the Sand County Foundation and Sustainable Conservation and is named after Aldo Leopold, a world renowned conservationist. The award is presented to private landowners in eight states.

Conservation tillage seeks to reduce the number of times that tractors cross the field, to protect the soil from erosion and compaction and save time, fuel and labor costs, the University of California Cooperative Extension explains.

In a 12-year study completed this year, UC growers using conservation tillage found they could achieve cotton yields similar to standard cultivation methods and at lower cost.

Giacomazzi said he started the practice when the Natural Resources Conservation Service offered incentive money for finding ways to cut passes in fields. He said he's used less fertilizer as plants have used nutrients more effectively and he's seen an increase in biological activity.

Over the past eight years, Giacomazzi has been working with extension scientists to do trials in his fields, and he's spoken to other farmers at about 20 different events.

"Obviously I'm very honored" to receive the award, he said. "In a sense it sort of feels odd being given an award for just doing what's really the best thing to be doing as a farmer. For us it seemed like the right way to go."

Giacomazzi was one of three finalists for California's Leopold Award. The others were organic dairy farmers Ward and Rosie Burroughs of the Modesto area and organic produce farming partners Stephen Pedersen and Jeanne Byrne of Santa Cruz County.

Online

CFBF Annual Meeting: <http://www.cfbf.com/am2012/default.aspx>

Sand County Foundation: <http://sandcounty.net/>

Sustainable Conservation: <http://www.suscon.org/>