



Through their nearly 30-year partnership, Trey Hill (left) and Joe Hickman have shown that no-till farming, cover crops and nutrient management can dramatically improve soil health—leading to both a cleaner environment and a healthier financial bottom line. © Katie Schuler

Improving Soil Health Through Partnership

“If you own a farm, it’s not like owning alphabet stocks. It’s a long-term play. We’ve realized if you’re going to keep in it, you’ve got to treat soil health, conservation and your environment.”

— Joe Hickman, Maryland Farmland Owner

The Hill family has been farming in Rock Hall, Maryland along the Chesapeake Bay since the early 1900’s. Today, Trey Hill carries on his family’s legacy by farming 10,000 acres of corn, wheat, and soybeans. Along with his farther, Trey owns and manages Harborview Farms, but as a seasoned grower, he also works with 60 non-operating farmland owners to increase the productivity and the sustainability of their land.

Trey’s business arrangement is not an anomaly. More than 40 percent of U.S. farmlands are rented lands. “It’s really a collaboration between the farmer and the landowner,” says Trey. “If we fail with the crops, then neither one of us makes any money.”

One of the landowners that Trey works with is Joe Hickman, owner of Black Horse Flag Farm. Working together for nearly 30 years, Trey and Joe have proven that when landowners and farmers collaborate to adopt soil health practices, everyone wins. Not only do their respective bottom lines improve, but together, they are ensuring a healthier landscape for growing our food, safeguarding our waterways and creating a sustainable food system for a growing world.

By implementing a no-till system, managing nutrients and planting increasingly diverse cover cropping techniques, their work has significantly improved soil health and water quality, while also locking more carbon into restored soil. These practices also save money by reducing the amount of nitrogen fertilizer needed to grow the crops.



Trey Hill farms 10,000 acres of rented land in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay region.
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A Conservation Ripple Effect

Like a ripple effect, the fish and wildlife of the region have flourished, too. Large fish nurseries, horseshoe crabs and dolphins are now a part of the ecosystem, heralding a healthy working relationship between the farmland and nature.

Many landowners do not even meet the farmers working on their land. But Joe Hickman has realized that collaborating closely with them and understanding the processes behind what makes a farm and its surrounding lands stay healthy and vibrant is the key to sustained success—both economically and for nature.

“Farms are a long-term play. The more you keep at it the more you realize you have to care about soil health, conservation and the environment,” says Hickman, and by continuing to work with Trey Hill, he is definitely headed for an even brighter future.



Watch a short video about
Trey Hill and Joe Hickman's
successful collaboration:
[nature.org/rentedfarmland](https://www.nature.org/rentedfarmland).

Let's Talk

An estimated 41 percent of U.S. farmlands are rented lands. For generations, these farms have run on trust and handshakes between farmers and landowners. This trust remains the farm's greatest untapped resource. All it takes to unleash its potential is a conversation.

Visit [nature.org/rentedfarmland](https://www.nature.org/rentedfarmland) for resources to help farmers and landowners start conversations about the benefits of soil health practices.



Soil health practices help everyone's bottom line. © Chris Helzer/TNC