



HABITAT HONOREE: Scott Stipetich, Pheasant Forever biologist (left), presents Jeff Lake with the Pheasant Forever's first Precision Agriculture Farmer of the Year award.

## Turning losses into profits with precision agriculture

Pheasants Forever helps farmers cut losses on marginal land and boost profits.

[Lon Tonneson](#) | Mar 05, 2018

Jeff Lake is turning some of his red acres green. “Red” acres are those he’s losing money on. “Green” acres produce a profit.

Lake — a corn, soybean and kidney bean grower — teamed up with Pheasants Forever to make the change. They used EFC Systems’ Profit Zone Manager, an online precision agriculture program that combines your input costs with yield maps to calculate return on investment on fractions of an acre. Profit Zone Manager can display the results as profit/loss maps that look like yield maps. It can also display the economics as bushels to break even and commodity price to break even.

### Eye opening numbers

The sub-acre ROI numbers surprised Lake. He knew from experience and watching the yield monitor which parts of his field were poorer, but seeing the ROI map and the total amount of money he would lose over a 10-year period was an eye-opener.

“It put some hard numbers to the problem,” Lake says.

Having good data gave Lake the confidence to convert some of his marginal cropland into grass and full season cover crops, as well as enroll it in a conservation program. Now he thinks he can at least breakeven on the poorer ground. Plus, his average profit margin will be higher since the most productive acres aren’t being dragged by losses

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The fact that planting grasses and cover crops instead of row crops in marginal areas creates a buffer to protect water quality, increases wildlife habitat and improves soil health is a welcome bonus, Lake says.

### Innovation award

Pheasants Forever presented Lake, of Boyceville, Wis., with its first Precision Agriculture Farmer of the Year

award during the 2018 National Pheasant Fest & Quail Classic, held recently in Sioux Falls, S.D. Lake also no-tills and uses variable rate technology to apply fertilizer and vary seeding rates. Pheasants Forever teamed up with the Hay River Farmer-led Watershed Group in Dunn County, Wis., The McKnight Foundation and other partners to offer the precision business planning analysis to Jeff Lake.

### **3 years and 60 projects**

Pheasants Forever started its Precision Agriculture Business Planning Initiative around three years ago. About 60 farmers have made use of the program.

Howard Vincent, Pheasants Forever president and CEO, says he is confident the program will help increase pheasant habitat, even as Conservation Reserve Program acres decline and other conservation programs face federal budget cuts.

Pheasants Forever currently offers the program in Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Washington. It plans to expand the program to Kansas, Nebraska, Illinois and Missouri this year.

We want to “farm the best and conserve the rest,” Vincent says. “It will be a win-win.”

### **Program contacts**

For more information about the program, contact Ryan Heiniger, Pheasants Forever director of agriculture and conservation innovation, at 319-768-8348 or [rheiniger@pheasantforever.org](mailto:rheiniger@pheasantforever.org).