



UP STREAM

Swift County Soil & Water Conservation District Newsletter

Winter 2010

Peter Fank Honored as Conservationists of the Year



The Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District is pleased to announce that Peter and Colleen Fank of Kerkhoven have been selected as the Conservation Cooperators of the year for 2009.

The Fanks farm about 1000 acres of their own land and farm together with a brother in-law on a total of about 1800 acres, which are planted to corn, soybeans and some acres of edible beans.

When the Fanks moved to this area in 1974, Peter started using a minimum tillage system of disking and chiseling the land he farmed, leaving about 30 to 40% residue cover on his land. Peter said he was one of the first in the area to leave residue and not moldboard plow. Today Peter continues to conserve soil moisture and control erosion on his fields by updating with modern soil surface residue equipment. This allows for breaking up the soil while still leaving a good residue cover on the surface. When planting corn into bean ground he uses a no-till system which saves on fuel while also providing many other environmental benefits on the farm, a practice that he has been following for over 20 years.

The Fank's livestock operation which is an important part of their overall farm operation consists of 400 to 500 head of fat beef cattle to finish out over the course of the year. In order to keep the feedlots at the farm site as clean as possible,

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Conservation Cooperator 2009 cont'd

to help keep disease problems and flies to a minimum, and for ease of cleaning, cement floors were poured several years ago. Also in order to minimize the amount of water that runs off the feedlots rain gutters were installed to collect water from the roofs of the buildings and directs the water through the gutter system and out into the fields.

Peter has worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through the Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) program to develop a manure management plan to utilize the manure from the feedlots. Test samples from each lot are taken along with soil tests of the fields where the manure is to be applied that year, to get the correct amount of nutrients to each field. Peter says "We want to keep records where manure is spread and only apply the fertilizer that is needed to produce a good crop". A GPS system is used to map the fields. Tissue sampling on the corn is also used in selected areas of the fields to determine if nutrients are lacking.

Taking care of the land is also very important to the Fanks as demonstrated by the use of three water and sediment control basins they installed on land they farmed to control water erosion on two of their most erosive fields. Another way to protect the land is by the use of the CRP program as a cover on their most sensitive land. They have 32 acres of land in CRP which is seeded down to a 15 species mix of native grasses and flowers, which is also very beneficial to the wildlife on their farm. Also 50 acres of bottom land is set aside exclusively for wildlife and is only hayed for feed for the cattle, after the nesting season is over.

Fanks also have a half mile field windbreak to stop wind erosion and are very happy with the evergreen trees and shrubs they added to the farmstead grove several years ago.

Peter is an avid hunter and makes use of the wildlife land he owns to hunt on. He also tries to plan a big game hunting trip somewhere in the United States each year. He is a big believer of value added enterprises and has interest in such enterprises as the CVEC ethanol plant in Benson, Golden Growers Coop, a corn sweetener coop in Wahpeton and MINQUA a Tilapia growing fish farm in Renville

Colleen who works at the West Central Tribune office in Willmar also helps with some of the farm work and does some of the bookkeeping for the farm operations. She is also active in the local garden club and is a member of the CCW group at Sacred Heart Church in Murdock. Peter and Colleen have four children Jason, Anthony, Angela and Rebecca.

The Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Peter and Colleen Fank for being named Conservation Cooperators of the Year in 2009.

Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)

What is the state law (i.e. Wetland Conservation Act)?

The Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) is a state law that regulates activities that result in the draining, filling, or excavating of wetlands in Minnesota, including those on agricultural land. It is administered by local government units; in rural areas this is usually the County or Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). SWCDs also provide technical assistance to landowners.

What should agricultural landowners do before starting a project, including drainage and maintenance, that may impact a wetland?

1. Complete your "AD1026" form for your local USDA office.
2. Bring a copy to the SWCD and explain what you plan to do.

The SWCD can advise you if your project is allowed under the state law, WCA, or if you need to submit an application to the local government. **Involving your local SWCD is the easiest and best way to avoid problems. Request a field visit by the local government that administers WCA.** This can help identify regulated wetlands on your property, and regulations that could affect your project. Many wetlands do not contain standing water or are only saturated for part of the year, and can be difficult for landowners to identify.

Tell your contractor to submit a "Contractor Liability form". Contractors who conduct projects that will impact a wetland are required to notify the local government. The Contractor Responsibility and Landowner Statement Form is available at www.bwsr.state.mn.us/wetlands/forms (see "Replacement Plan Forms") and must be mailed to the local government prior to starting work.

Communication is the key! Compliance with USDA does not mean compliance with other wetland laws. A quick call or stop at your SWCD or local government office prior to beginning your project will help you comply with the laws and save a project from potential additional costs and delays.



RIM BUFFER EASEMENT PROGRAM

NEW EASEMENT PROGRAM AVAILABLE TO LANDOWNERS

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) have announced the beginning of the RIM Reserve riparian buffer conservation easement program. This program consists of putting a RIM easement on top of a new or existing CRP buffer strip contract. The payments for the RIM portion of the easement are based on 100% of the Assessors Average Township Values (AATV) for cropland in the township where the land is enrolled. This lump sum up front payment will be from \$2,000.00 per acre to as much as \$3,600.00 per acre for the highest township value in Swift County. For land in existing CRP contracts, no changes in vegetation cover will be required.

Other Statute requirements / conditions include:

- *Buffer widths must be a minimum of 50 feet and no more than 100 feet maximum average. Width can be less than 50 feet if there is a natural impediment beyond the landowner's control, for example a road or property line.
- *Buffers must be adjacent to public waters defined as: streams, ditches and lakes, excluding wetlands: as shown on the DNR Protected Waters Inventory (PWI) maps.
- *Eligible land must have been owned by the landowner for 1 year prior to application.
- *Whenever possible, cropland on both sides of the stream or ditch must be enrolled.

*Minimum of 3 acres total easement size per application, unless part of a larger project initiative.

If you are interested in this program, or for more information, please contact the Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District at 320-842-7201 Ext. 113

Environmental Quality Incentives Program The 2010 EQIP sign-up begins on February 1, 2010

EQIP is a popular program with Minnesota farmers, assisting them to solve environmental problems. Producers will receive cost-share at a flat rate to implement conservation practices to meet local resource concerns.

EQIP is a competitive program with the most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial projects that will meet Swift County Priority Resource concerns selected for funding. To apply for funding, landowners should visit the Benson NRCS office at the USDA Service Center for Swift county.

Cost share is available for conservation practices up to approximately 75%, based on flat rates.

Erosion Control Practices (Terraces, Sediment Basins, Waterways)

No Till Residue Management

Nutrient Management

Animal composters

Ag. Waste Pits

Prescribed Grazing

Many Other Practices Available

For more information on conservation practices and/or the statewide and county EQIP sign-up, contact Cory Drummond at the Swift County USDA Service Center @ 320-842-7201 ext: #3 or visit the Minnesota NRCS website at: www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov

The United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Swift county Soil and Water Conservation District prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice & TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th & Inde-



Swift County Soil & Water
Conservation District Newsletter

SWCD Offices
1430 Utah Avenue
Benson MN 56215

Phone: 320-843-2458
Fax: 320-843-4168



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SWCD 2009 Water Festival

On September 18 the 5th annual Swift County Water Festival was held at Ambush Park Outdoor Learning Center in Benson, MN. Approximately 245 students from Benson and Kerkhoven - Murdock - Sunburg Schools attended. The theme for the day was concentrating on Water. The students spent the day learning about the environment and water quality issues through hands-on activities and interactive presentations. This year there were 18 learning stations. The highlight of the day was the presentation by the Science Museum of Minnesota.

The Swift County Soil and Water Conservation district offer a

sincere thanks to the local and state organizations that contributed to the Water Festival. Without these contributions the Water Festival would not have been possible.

Rick Gronseth is giving a demonstration on Forestry

