



# UP STREAM

Swift County Soil & Water Conservation District Newsletter

Winter 2017

1430 Utah Ave  
Benson, MN 56215  
320-842-7201 x3  
www.swiftswcd.org

### District Supervisors

**Dale Schlieman**

Chairman

**Mark Weimerskirch**

Vice Chairman

**Orvin Gronseth**

Treasurer

**Clinton Schuerman**

Secretary

**Carl Ahrndt**

PR & I

### District Employees

**Andy Albertsen**

Conservation

Technician

**Gemma Kleinschmidt**

PF Farm Bill Biologist

**Tom Orr**

Ag Inspector/District

Technician

**Sheri Gades**

Office Manager

### NRCS Employees

**Vacant**

District

Conservationist

**Rick Gronseth**

Soil Conservationist

## Wentzel Family Farms Outstanding Conservationist



The Swift County Soil and Water Conservation District has named Wentzel Family Farm as the 2016 Outstanding Conservationists. Wentzel Family Farm consists of Melvin and Elaine, Craig and Bonnie and Todd and Shari Wentzel of DeGraff.

The Wentzels farm about 2800 acres each year, which mainly consists of a corn and soybean rotation, with about 10% planted to wheat each year. Putting some wheat in the rotation enables them to more easily manage the weeds and pests that may be persistent in the fields.

The landscape that Wentzels farm is diverse and has a variety of soil types that require additional management to be able to maintain healthy soils while reducing erosion. Because of the diversity of soils and landscapes Wentzels will use less aggressive tillage equipment on lighter soils such as reduced tillage or no till in the fall. On their heavier flat soils a more aggressive tillage, like the use of vertical tillage, can be used for erosion and runoff control.



## Conservation Cooperator 2016 (cont'd)

In 2016 the Wentzels were successful in getting accepted into the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). As part of the program, they selected enhancements on their operation to meet resource concerns identified in a resource assessment of the annual farming practices conducted on their farm. Through this assessment some of the practices the Wentzels selected are the use of drift reducing nozzles, GPS accuracy when applying herbicides and pesticides, and using plant tissue tests and analysis to improve nitrogen management on their fields.

About 18 years ago Melvin decided to start putting filter strips along some of their ditches and enrolled in the CRP program and then made the buffers permanent by putting a RIM easement on those acres. Since then the Wentzel Family Farm have applied a minimum of one rod buffer strips on all of their ditches, approximately 43,000 feet of buffers protecting about eight miles of ditches and wetland edges.

The Wentzels enjoy seeing wildlife in their area and have dedicated about 100 acres into permanent grass cover. Some of this land is in programs such as the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) or CRP program, and other acres of old gravel pits or land that is just too poor to farm. These areas are left wild but if mowing or clipping are necessary to control weeds the areas are mowed in a manner that allows the animals to escape. Although very busy managing the farm, the Wentzels are also active in the community. Todd is a director for the Swift County Corn and Soybean Growers. He also serves on the KMS FFA Alumni / Ag Boosters as a director, and has a seed sales business as an advisor, and is an usher in their church. Craig is on the township board, and also is an usher in the church.

Shari and Bonnie both work in the fields in the spring and the fall driving tractors and trucks and doing whatever is needed during those very busy times of year. Bonnie also works at the KMS School as a Paraprofessional.

Over the years the Wentzels have had a good working relationship with the SWCD as they have worked together to plant trees for windbreaks and have used the drill to install buffer strips, on their land. Join us in congratulating Wentzel Family Farm as Swift County Outstanding Conservationists for 2016.

## State Cost-Share Funds Available

The State Cost Share Program provides grants to SWCDs so they can help landowners offset the costs of installing conservation practices to improve water quality by reducing soil erosion and sedimentation.

Landowner's or operators can come in and apply for up to **75%** cost share for their project. Once approved by the local SWCD Board, work can begin. Most practices can be completed in a few weeks. These funds help the local SWCD to implement state-approved conservation practices. Some of the practices include: rain gardens, streambank and shoreline protection, water and sediment control structures, side inlets, and cover crops. Practices have a life span of 10 years, which means that they must be maintained for that length of time.

If you would like more information please contact the Swift SWCD office at 320-842-7201 ext. 101.

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 & Independence Ave. SW, Washington DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964 voice & TDD. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



## Updates on Minnesota's Buffer Law

- Signed into law in June 2015, Governor Mark Dayton's landmark buffer initiative designated an estimated 110,000 acres of land for water quality buffer strips statewide. The law establishes new perennial vegetation buffers of up to 50 feet along rivers, streams, and ditches that will help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment, as well as help stabilize soils.
- There are over 1,500 parcels in Swift County that are affected by the buffer law.
- The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) was charged with producing maps of the waters that require a buffer under the MN Buffer Law. The map was recently updated in mid-November 2016, with another update coming in early 2017.
- There is a MNDNR webpage dedicated to buffer information that contains frequently asked questions and a link to the buffer map. It is available at [www.dnr.state.mn.us/buffers/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/buffers/index.html).
- 50-foot average, 30-foot minimum, buffers consisting of perennial vegetation must be installed on mapped public waters by November 1, 2017. This means seed must be planted by this date.
- 16 1/2-foot buffers consisting of perennial vegetation must be installed on public ditches by November 1, 2018 (Minnesota Statute 103 E). This means seed must be planted by this date.
- It is recommended that you contact Andy Albertsen at the Swift SWCD office so he can assist you with verifying buffer locations, determining buffer compliance, and identifying your options.
- The SWCD staff can also assist you on site when determining the buffer width requirement and if any buffer needs to be added. The law requires the buffer on a public watercourse start at the top or crown of the bank and public drainage ditch buffers are outlined in statute 103E ([www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=103E](http://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=103E)). Where there is no definable bank, measurement is from the edge of the normal water level.
- If you are eligible, enrolling in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is an option to become compliant with the MN Buffer Law, as there is a CRP exemption. The CRP Filter Strip practice (CP 21) has a 30-foot minimum, 120-foot maximum width. CRP rental rate payments are based on the soil types in your area. CRP Filter Strips are eligible to receive a 20% incentive bonus on top of their rental rate payment. You may choose the length of your contract, from 10-15 years. For more information on CRP, talk to Gemma Kleinschmidt at the Swift SWCD office.
- Landowners could adopt other practices to protect water quality if they provide the same level of protection as a buffer. Please contact the SWCD office to discuss if an alternative practice fits your situation. The SWCD must certify that these alternatives will be accepted for the site.
- Becoming certified through the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) is an acceptable alternative practice. See the article in this newsletter for more information about the MAWQCP.
- Landowners can seed the buffer on their own without cost share, as long as perennial vegetation is maintained.
- An alfalfa rotation is an acceptable use to become compliant with the buffer law.
- Regulatory entities (County, Watershed District, BWSR) can issue fines to landowners if they do not comply. The amount and frequency of the fines are currently under review, with a decision coming Spring 2017.
- Many small streams, headwaters and ditches aren't public. It will be up to the SWCD's to identify those that would be benefited by having buffers and promote buffering on a voluntary basis on these private systems as we have in the past. This other waters list will be incorporated into the county water plan for voluntary program implementation. Areas designated as "other waters" will NOT require a buffer.

### **NO-TILL DRILLS AVAILABLE FOR RENT!**

#### **RATES FOR DRILL RENTAL:**

10 ft. Drill—\$7.50 per acre

12 ft. Drill—\$10.00 per acre

Collaborating/Mobilization fee—\$100





## Water Quality Certification Expands to Farms Across Minnesota

Farmers across Minnesota are now taking advantage of the state program that celebrates and ensures protection of the state's water resources. With the help of a five year, \$9 million award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and legislation enacted earlier this year, the Minnesota Agriculture Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) is formally transitioning from four pilot areas to being available to any agricultural producer state wide.

**Currently, there are no farms or producers certified in Swift County. If you are interested in being the FIRST farm or individual in the county to become certified, we would love to speak with you!** MAWQCP was designated by an advisory committee of independent stakeholders and implemented by the Minnesota Department of Ag, in partnership with Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Conservation Services, and local public, private and non-profit partners. The program is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect our water. Farmers and landowners who implement and maintain approved farm management practices are certified and in turn obtain regulatory certainty for a period of 10 years.

The MAWQCP certifies farmers and landowners for managing their land in a way that protects water quality through a whole farm assessment that evaluates:

**Physical Field Characteristics  
Pest Management Factor**

**Nutrient Management Factor  
Irrigation and Tile Drainage Management**

**Tillage Management Factors  
Conservation Practices**

Producers interested in becoming certified also receive priority status for technical and financial assistance, acquire regulatory certainty for 10 years, and receive recognition for their efforts (which can be a powerful marketing tool). The MAWQCP puts producers together with local professionals and the new online field assessment tool to determine where risks to water quality exist on their farm, and empowers them to fix those risks when they're found, at the same time avoiding expense, time and trouble of applying half measure of implementing misplaced action



Anyone interested in learning more about MAWQCP, the assessment process, or becoming certified should contact the Swift County SWCD at 320-842-7201 ext. 3 or [aalbertsen338@gmail.com](mailto:aalbertsen338@gmail.com). Swift County SWCD Contact: Andy Albertsen, Conservation Technician



## 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](http://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.



## USDA Applications Available for Conservation Stewardship Program

Starting in November 2016, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will accept and process applications for enrollment in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the nation's largest conservation program. Applications will be made available in local service centers. NRCS has made several updates to the program this year to help producers better evaluate their conservation options and the benefits to their operations and natural resources. New methods and software for evaluating applications will help producers see up front why they are or are not meeting stewardship thresholds, and allow them to pick practices and enhancements that work for their conservation objectives. These new tools also allow producers to see potential payment scenarios for conservation early in the process.

**NRCS offices will begin processing applications for the program on November 14, 2016, with sign-up running through February 3, 2017.** People interested in the additional opportunities the updated CSP will offer can find information on the new CSP portal, located at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/csp>. This one-stop shop, which provides information to help producers determine whether CSP is right for them, will be continually updated as more information becomes available. Changes that producers can expect to see include nearly double the enhancements and conservation practices offered and better reporting tools to tell producers the results of their conservation efforts on their land.

Through CSP, agricultural producers earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, ecologically-based pest management, buffer strips, and pollinator and beneficial insect habitat – all while maintaining active agriculture production on their land. CSP also encourages the adoption of cutting-edge technologies and new management techniques such as precision agriculture applications, on-site carbon storage and planting for high carbon sequestration rate, and new soil amendments to improve water quality.

NRCS has addressed producer and stakeholder input requesting greater flexibility to address local resource concerns. Now, NRCS will more effectively utilize input from farmers, ranchers and partners in State Technical Committees and local workgroups to inform and expand conservation strategies under the program. Producers will be better prepared to apply because they will know these local ranking priorities and targeted resource concerns in advance. CSP is for producers who are already established conservation stewards, helping them to deliver multiple conservation benefits on working lands, including improved water and soil quality and enhanced wildlife habitat. Information Producers interested in the program should contact Rick Gronseth at Benson NRCS Field office 320-842-7201 ext. 3 for more information.



### Walk-In Access



Are you looking to generate extra income off of your existing conservation acres or other non-farmed acres? If so, the Walk-In Access program may be something to consider. The WIA program compensates landowners for providing public hunting access on their land from Sept. 1 to May 31. WIA targets parcels of 40 acres or more with high quality natural cover, which may include parcels already in a conservation program such as Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Other high quality habitat may also be eligible to enroll.

WIA compensates landowners \$10-\$13 per acre to provide public hunting access on the parcel. Landowner agreements can be up to three years in length and include a no-hassle opt-out clause. All landowners in the program are afforded liability protection through the Minnesota Recreational Use Statutes. When you enroll land in the WIA program you are leasing the land to the state of Minnesota for the public to hunt. Hunters who have purchased a WIA Validation can access the land one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset from Sept. 1 to May 31. Other uses by the public are prohibited without your written permission.

Enrollment period for the WIA program will be open from **January 23 to April 28, 2017**. If you would like to learn more about the Walk-In Access program, contact Gemma Kleinschmidt at the Swift County SWCD office by stopping in or calling 320-842-7201 ext. 3. More information is also available at [www.mndnr.gov/walkin](http://www.mndnr.gov/walkin).

**SWCD Office  
1430 Utah Avenue  
Benson, MN 56215**

**Phone: 320-842-7201, ext. 3**



**We're on the Web!  
[www.swiftswcd.org](http://www.swiftswcd.org)**

## **Pope-Swift Cooperative Weed Management Area**

This year it is the goal of the Pope-Swift Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) to focus on invasive noxious weed treatments. Noxious weeds in Pope and Swift counties include, but are not limited to, plumeless thistle, leafy spurge, wild parsnip and spotted knapweed.

Late spring to early summer is a good time to focus on control of new growth weeds. Once the heat of summer is upon us we sometimes see that the opportune moment for chemical control has passed. If this has occurred, the best way to control mature plants is to mow or clip the plants before the seed matures.

Most of the noxious weeds in Minnesota are biennial plants. Biennial means that the plant has a life cycle of two years. In the first year the plant will grow into a rosette form and in the second year it will bolt and produce seed. Therefore, with this type of plant lifecycle, when the weeds create a rosette in the fall, it opens up a second opportune time to use chemical control.

This spring Pope and Swift Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD's) and their partners have started treatment of plumeless thistle and wild parsnip. Swift SWCD has a healthy population of leafy spurge beetles, which work as an effective biological control to help combat the spread of leafy spurge. Biological controls are a great way to control invasive weeds without the need to use chemicals. Pope-Swift CWMA will continue to scout for new sites, implement more treatment of invasive noxious weeds, and will continue to assist landowners with any questions or concerns you may have.



**Leafy Spurge**

If you have any questions about invasive plants or would like to report the location of invasive plants, please feel free to contact Tom Orr, Swift SWCD District Technician/County Ag-Inspector, at 320-842-7201, ext. 113

**More information is available online about these invasive plants at our Pope-Swift Cooperative Weed Management website: [weedwatchers.org](http://weedwatchers.org)**



**Wild Parsnip**