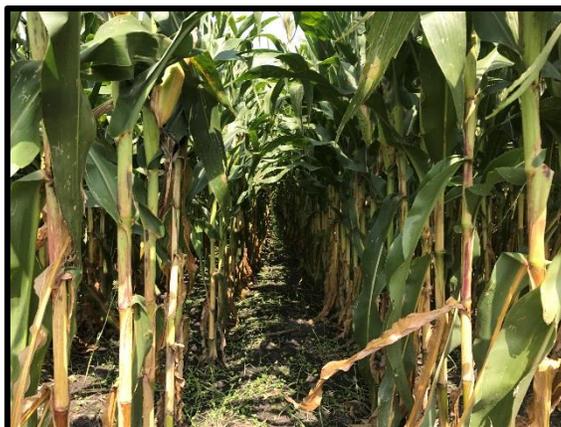


Meeker Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) 2018 Accomplishments

State Cost-Share Program – Seven cover crop projects, and one wetland restoration project utilizing over \$14,300 in State Cost-Share funds were completed in Meeker County during 2018. All required reports were submitted to the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in a timely manner.

Meeker SWCD works cooperatively with the Crow River Organization of Water (CROW), West Central Technical Service Area (TSA), and various lake associations and watersheds to identify critical erosion sites and assist landowners with funding and technical support for projects to control erosion at these sites.



Local Capacity Cost

Sharing – Eight projects utilizing over \$21,000 in Local Capacity funding were completed in 2018. These projects included five water and sediment control basin projects, one rain garden and two wetland restorations.

Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) – The District is the designated local government unit (LGU) for wetland regulation in Meeker County. Meeker

SWCD made over 200 landowner contacts regarding wetland regulation, including both on and off site consultations. The LGU made formal decisions on 17 applications which included 9 boundary type, 2 exemption, 3 No-loss and 3 replacement plan applications. Four Wetland Banks are in the process of being established in the county. Over 30 potential wetland violations were also investigated by the LGU.

All required reports were submitted to the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in a timely manner.

Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) - Over 5,650 acres in Meeker County are enrolled in perpetual conservation easements with the State of Minnesota. Site inspections were completed on 53 of these easements during 2018. Seventeen new CREP applications were approved totaling over 606 acres that will be perpetually protected to enhance wildlife value and provide water quality benefits.



Pheasants Forever Collaboration – Meeker SWCD collaborates with Pheasants Forever through a Farm Bill Biologist (FBB) based full time at the Meeker conservation office.

This year there were 125 Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) contracts enrolled for a total of 2,683 acres. In addition to new sign-ups, we are actively pursuing landowners who are interested in enhancing up to 10% of their existing cover to a pollinator plot.

A local outreach project was setting up a booth at the Meeker County Fair. General conservation programs were the focus of the booth display. The display included a backdrop from Farm Service Agency, a Weber grill giveaway from Meeker Pheasants Forever chapter, a table top display focusing on CRP, State Cost-Share and easements and a rain barrel giveaway from Meeker SWCD.

Litchfield Fifth Grade Pollinator Planting Day - On May 22, Meeker SWCD partnered with Meeker Pheasants Forever, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Litchfield fifth grade class to seed two acres of the Greenleaf Waterfowl Production Area to a high diversity pollinator planting. The kids planted over 600 live plants and 140 blazingstar corms on the two acres.

Students also spent 20 minutes at each of the following stations:

- Rusch Farms - honey bees and the important role they play in our food supply.
- Monarch Joint Venture - other forms of pollinators that one would not normally think of such as bats and moths.
- Fish & Wildlife Service - the importance of habitat. The first group flushed a hen mallard off her nest and revealed about eight eggs in the nest. This was a great opportunity for the students to learn about habitat first hand.
- The CROW River organization of Waters - aquatic invasive species.
- Meeker County Pheasants Forever - volunteers Mike Swanson and Gary Duncomb helped the students broadcast the flower seed.
- Two SWCD staff and one NRCS staff helped the kids plant the seedlings and corms.



Soils & Sod Field Day -

On Wednesday, June 6, the Meeker SWCD partnered with Meeker County Pheasants Forever Chapter to host an educational field day on the effects of CRP cover on the soil. The research project that spearheaded the field day was conducted by University of Wisconsin River Falls Soil Scientist Holly Dolliver and her undergraduate student, Stella Pey. Stella, Holly, and several other students spent the summer of 2017 analyzing the soils at a farm south of Watkins, Minnesota, in Meeker County. They carefully selected four plots of similar Koronis (Mollic Hapludalfs) soil type, slope aspect and position on the landscape. One plot had been under continuous crop for over 80 years, one plot had been under CRP cover for 5 years, one plot had been under CRP cover for 30 years, and one plot has never been disturbed as it is a



Far Left: Undisturbed fence line – 24 inches of A horizon topsoil
 2nd from left: 30 years of CRP – 14 inches of A horizon topsoil
 3rd from left: 5 years of CRP – nearly 10 inches of A horizon topsoil
 Far right: continuous row-crop – 8 inches of A horizon topsoil



fence line between two properties. At each plot the following tests were performed: water-infiltration rate, carbon-dioxide flux, bulk density, aggregate stability, total microbial biomass, and total organic carbon. The final published results won't be available for general release until late summer of 2019, but the preliminary results are very positive.

← At left, Stella Pey is demonstrating the water infiltration rate test.

Buffer Law - In June of 2015, Governor Dayton signed into law a new buffer initiative aimed at enhancing protection of Minnesota's waters. The buffer initiative will help protect the state's water resources from erosion and runoff pollution by establishing roughly 110,000 acres of buffer along waterways. Meeker SWCD has completed an off site assessment of 4,600 parcels for buffer compliance. The assessment determined that 98% of parcels affected by the law are in compliance with the buffer law requirements. Meeker SWCD has cost-share programs, seed, grass drill rental, and technical assistance available to Meeker County landowners who need to become compliant with the buffer law. During 2018, 16 landowners/operators signed up for cost share dollars to meet buffer law compliance. Additional funding is still available to landowners to become compliant.

AgBMP (Best Management Practices) Loan Program – Meeker SWCD serves as the local government unit for the AgBMP Loan Program in Meeker County. One new loan application was applied for under this program during 2018. Staff continues to stay abreast of requirements and opportunities in this program and promotes it to landowners who could benefit from the program.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Well Observation - Water levels are taken on 14 wells in Meeker County for the Department of Natural Resources. Thirteen test wells are measured quarterly during the year and one irrigation well is measured twice a year.

Feedlot Program – The Assistant County Feedlot Officer is on staff at Meeker SWCD.

There were a total of 286 feedlots registered in Meeker County at the end of 2018. During the year, 27 inspections revealed 26 feedlots in compliance and 1 out of compliance upon first inspection.

The Assistant County Feedlot Officer responded to two complaints during 2018 regarding feedlot issues. Both sites were issued notices of non-compliance.

The Assistant County Feedlot Officer also received two Notices of Construction/Expansion and issued three Construction Short Form Feedlot Permits.

The District provides information to feedlot owners/producers seeking funding to help them improve their sites. The Assistant Feedlot Officer also helps plan and conduct informational meetings that pertain to topics relevant to our County.

State reporting has been completed, audited and found to be current.

Tree Program - Over 11,500 trees were sold in 2018 to landowners for planting. The District completed four plantings. In addition, 9,060 feet of weed barrier fabric was installed on four tree planting sites.

Each spring Meeker SWCD offers a wide variety of shrubs, deciduous and evergreen trees for sale at reasonable prices. This year 27 different species of trees and shrubs were sold. Technical assistance is provided to landowners in selecting correct tree species and design of field windbreaks, shelter belts and wildlife plantings.

The tree program is promoted on the District's Website, Facebook, through press releases to local media and via fliers mailed to previous customers.

This year the Meeker SWCD continued a pollinator seed and plant sale with their annual spring tree sale. By adding the 10 native grass and flower seed mixes and 11 seedling plant kits, landowners could add a pollinator plot to nearly any area of their property. These orders will add valuable native flowers to the Meeker County landscape 500 square feet at a time.



Native Seed Drill Program – In 2016 the District purchased an eight foot native grass and flower seed drill for landowners of Meeker and surrounding counties to rent. With this drill landowners are able to install food plots, cover crops, and native grass and flower plantings. Twenty-nine of the landowners seeded their CRP plantings. A total of 753 acres were seeded this year. The District delivers the drill to all renters, helps them set up the drill, and picks up the drill once they are finished. This program is very successful. It gives District staff one more opportunity to interact with the landowners to ensure they are seeding the correct seed mix, that the site is adequately prepared, and to give additional guidance on ongoing management.

Noxious Weeds – The District published the required weed notice in Meeker County newspapers and responded to citizen complaints regarding noxious weeds.

The County Ag Inspector responded to seven complaints during 2018 regarding noxious weed issues. Findings revealed no noxious weeds at all of the sites, having an infestation of Wild Parsnip. The County Ag Inspector worked with the landowners to develop a plan for controlling the noxious weeds.

The District has developed a Cooperative Weed Management Area strategic management plan through the Cooperative Weed Management Area Grant received from the Board of Water & Soil Resources and received additional funding for cost share from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Nine projects totaling \$2,063.16 were completed using grant funds to control noxious weeds. Funding will also be available in 2019 to assist with noxious weed control.

Twenty-three Commercial Applicator License Exams were administered.

Required reports were submitted properly and in a timely manner.

Rain Gauge Program - Eight landowners in Meeker County measure precipitation daily and submitted reports on line or to the SWCD office during 2018. The District mails submitted reports to the State Climatology Office and gathers additional information from the rain gauge program participants as requested by the Climatology Office when special needs arise.

The District acts as liaison between the Climatology Office and program participants, sharing information with and providing materials to program participants.

Department of Agriculture Well Testing – Meeker SWCD partnered with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to test private wells in Darwin and Litchfield townships of Meeker County for nitrate-nitrogen concentrations. Testing was offered to 588 households. Of the 245 wells tested, 2% were over the health standard of 10 mg/L for nitrate-N in drinking water.

Homeowners whose wells tested over the health standard will now be offered an opportunity to do a follow-up nitrate test, pesticide test and well site visit.

Outstanding Conservationist – John and Lisa Holmquist of rural Dassel were selected as Meeker County's Outstanding Conservationists for 2018. The Holmquists were honored at a luncheon during the state convention of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in December.

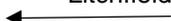


An article about their conservation practices and photographs of them with one of those practices were sent to local media and presented on the District's Website and Facebook page.

Poster Contest – All schools in Meeker County are invited to conduct a conservation poster contest with their sixth-grade students, sponsored by Meeker SWCD.



Litchfield



Eden Valley-Watkins



In 2018, 200 students from Litchfield and Eden Valley-Watkins schools, participated in the contest. Each participating student received a participation ribbon. The posters were judged by the Meeker Board of Supervisors with potted evergreens and cash prizes being awarded to the first and second place winners from each class. The top three posters advanced to Area competition.

A press release including photographs of the winners was sent to local media and published on our website and Facebook page.

Stewardship Week - Press releases were sent to local media and churches to publicize and recognize Stewardship Week in late April, 2018.

Envirothon – The District provided contact information for Meeker County schools to the organizers of the Area Envirothon, an outdoor learning event for school students, and provided financial support for the program.

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Meeker SWCD maintained active membership in the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD), MASWCD Area 2, Minnesota Association of County Ag Inspectors (MACIA), and Minnesota Association of County Feedlot Officers (MACFO).

SWCD staff and supervisors attended meetings of watersheds, West Central Technical Service Area (WCTSA), MASWCD Area II, State and Regional Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), County Ag Inspectors, One Watershed One Plan Technical Committee, One Watershed One Plan Policy Committee, Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force, and various training workshops throughout the year.