



## Meeker Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) 2021 Accomplishments

**State Cost-Share Program** – Projects including a water and sediment control basin, a grassed waterway, and cover crops utilized \$13,237 in State Cost-Share funds were completed in Meeker County during 2021. All required reports were submitted to the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) in a timely manner.

Meeker SWCD works cooperatively with the West Central Technical Service Area (TSA), and various lake associations and watershed districts to identify critical erosion sites and to assist landowners with funding and technical support for projects to control erosion at these sites.



### **Local Capacity Cost**

**Sharing** – Five projects utilizing over \$26,305 in Local Capacity funding were completed in 2021. These projects include two grassed waterways, one shore land stabilization and cover crops.

**Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)** – The District is the designated local government unit (LGU) for wetland regulation in Meeker County. Meeker SWCD made over 350 landowner contacts regarding wetland regulation, including both on and off site consultations. The LGU made formal decisions on nineteen applications which included nine boundary type, seven exemption applications, and two replacement plans. Four Wetland Banks are in the process of being established in the county. Fourteen 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 5,700 acres in Meeker County are enrolled in perpetual conservation easements with the State of Minnesota. Site inspections were completed on 67 of these easements during 2021. Three new CREP applications were approved totaling nearly 90 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 USDA office.

This year there were 27 new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts for 440 acres and 46 contracts for 725 re-enrolled acres.



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 table top display focusing on CRP, State Cost-Share, easements, and a rain barrel giveaway was done by Meeker SWCD.

**Litchfield Fifth Grade Pollinator Planting Day** - On May 19, 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 110 kids planted over 300 live plants on the two acres.

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

- NRCS – Ran a Slake Soil Test so show how soil health affects water quality.
- 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. This was a great opportunity for the students to learn about habitat first hand.
- The MN DNR - aquatic invasive species.
- Meeker County Pheasants Forever - volunteers Mike Swanson and Gary Duncomb helped the students broadcast the flower seed.
- Three SWCD staff helped the kids plant the seedlings.



**Buffer Law** - In June of 2015, Governor Dayton signed into law a 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. The assessment determined that 99% 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. Additional funding is still available to landowners.

**AgBMP (Best Management Practices) Loan Program** – Meeker SWCD serves as the local government unit for the AgBMP Loan Program in Meeker County. No new loan applications were applied for under this program during 2021. 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 271 feedlots registered in Meeker County at the end of 2021. 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 one complaint during 2021 regarding feedlot issues. One site was issued a letter of reminder.

The Assistant County Feedlot Officer also received one Notice of Construction/Expansion and issued one Construction Short Form Feedlot Permit.

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 17,000 trees were sold in 2021 to landowners for planting. The District completed nine plantings. In addition, over 17,000 feet of weed barrier fabric was installed on seven 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 7 native grass and flower seed mixes and 6 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 1,000 square feet at a time.



**Native Seed Drill Program** – In 2021, the District purchased a new 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. 32 landowners rented the drill in 2021. A total of 371 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 five complaints during 2021 regarding noxious weed issues. Findings revealed noxious weeds at four 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.

Fifty-four Commercial Applicator License Exams were administered.

Required reports were submitted properly and in a timely manner.

**Rain Gauge Program** - Five landowners in Meeker County measure precipitation daily and submitted reports on line or to the SWCD office during 2021. 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.

**Outstanding Conservationist** – The Jonathan Slinden family of Atwater was selected as Meeker County's Outstanding Conservationists for 2021. The Slindens 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.



Poster Contest Winners  
 →  
 Poster judging by the Board  
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In 2021, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class from 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.

**Cover Crop Field Day** Meeker SWCD hosted its first cover crop field day on July 15, 2021. There was a panel discussion with members of the MN Soil Health Coalition, Meeker County farmers, and a Millborn Seed Representative. Attendees learned about the many benefits of utilizing cover crops, and were able to see examples and demonstrations.

**Stewardship Week** - Press releases were sent to local media and churches to publicize and recognize Stewardship Week in late April, 2021.

**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 Committees, One Watershed One Plan Policy Committees, Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force, District managers and various training workshops throughout the year.