



## Meeker Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) 2023 Accomplishments

**State Cost-Share Program** – Projects including water and sediment control basins, cover crops, and an underground outlet utilized \$7,143 in State Cost-Share funds were completed in Meeker County during 2023. 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** – Two projects utilizing over \$8,900 in Local Capacity funding were completed in 2023. These projects included a water and sediment control basin project and an underground outlet project.

**Wetland Conservation Act (WCA)** – The District is the designated local government unit (LGU) for wetland regulation in Meeker County. Meeker SWCD made over 400 landowner contacts regarding wetland regulation, including both on and off site consultations. The LGU made formal decisions on seventeen applications which included five boundary type, seven exemption applications, five No-Loss, and one replacement plan. Seven Wetland Banks are in the process of being established in the county. Twenty four 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 55 of these easements during 2023.

**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 31 new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts for 643.39 acres and 32 contracts for 545.58 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.

**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.

**Litchfield Fifth Grade Pollinator Planting Day** - On May 17, Meeker SWCD partnered with Meeker Pheasants Forever, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Litchfield fifth grade class to seed two acres of the Forest City Waterfowl Production Area to a high diversity pollinator planting. The 130 kids planted over 440 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, Mike Williams, Mike Solbrack, 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, 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. There were 7 new loan applications that were applied for under this program during 2023. 4 applications were followed through on and funded, loaning out \$222,261.28. Staff continues to stay abreast of requirements and opportunities in this program and promotes it to landowners who could benefit from the program.

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

There were a total of 276 feedlots registered in Meeker County at the end of 2023. During the year, 38 inspections revealed 38 feedlots in compliance upon first inspection. The Assistant County Feedlot Officer responded to one complaint during 2023 regarding feedlot issues. One site was issued a letter of reminder.

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 20,000 trees were sold in 2023 to landowners for planting. The District completed three plantings. In addition, over 3,000 feet of weed barrier fabric was installed on two tree planting sites.

Each spring Meeker SWCD offers a wide variety of shrubs, deciduous and evergreen trees for sale at reasonable prices. This year 31 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. With 7 native grass and flower seed mixes and 6 seedling plant kits for sale, 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** – The District has 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. 29 landowners rented the drill in 2023. A total of 711 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 2023 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. Seventy one Commercial Applicator License Exams were administered. Required reports were submitted properly and in a timely manner.

**Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP)** –MAWQCP is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect our water. Those who implement and maintain approved farm management practices will be certified and in turn obtain regulatory certainty for a period of ten years, as well as financial aid for implementing approved conservation practices. To date, 15 producers have been MAWQCP certified on over 6,270 acres in Meeker County.

**Rain Gauge Program** - Three landowners in Meeker County measure precipitation daily and submitted reports on line or to the SWCD office during 2023. 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** – Jay Hedtke and family were selected as Meeker County's Outstanding Conservationists for 2023. The Hedtke's 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 fapage.



**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 Poster Contest Winners



EVW Poster Contest Winners



In 2023, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes from Eden Valley-Watkins and Litchfield 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, 2023.

**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.