

# Cultivating Conservation

Vol. 1, No. 1



A publication of the  
Cannon River Watershed Partnership

## Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of the Cannon River Watershed Partnership's newsletter focusing on agriculture and clean water. Cannon River Watershed Partnership (CRWP) is a twenty year old nonprofit organization with a mission of engaging people to protect and improve water. We believe that having productive farms and clean water can and in fact must go hand in hand.

For the past twenty years we have worked to provide financial assistance, demonstration projects of new practices, connect farmers with each other and provide information you can use to ensure your farm is economically viable while protecting the environment. We have been doing a lot of listening to farmers and those that advise them over the past six months. Based on what we learned, we decided to create this newsletter to help us do a better job of connecting farmers, crop advisors, cooperatives and government agencies with information and ideas to help us achieve this goal.

I hope you find that this first edition provides you with some useful information and stimulates some conversations. We'll be publishing this newsletter in summer and winter each year. In between times, look for additional information on our website at <http://www.crwp.net>. If you have any questions, comments, or would like to submit information please contact me at (507) 786-3913 or via email at [beth@crwp.net](mailto:beth@crwp.net). Please recycle this when you're done by sharing with a friend.

**Beth Kallestad**  
Executive Director

## Grants to Fund Innovative Ideas for Farm Efficiency, Water Quality

The Southern Minnesota Nutrient Efficiency Coalition will award competitive grants to individuals and/or organizations demonstrating new techniques and tools for managing nutrients, such as fertilizer, on the farm. The grants program will award selected projects for the 2011 cropping season, with a total of \$25,000 available. Grants will be awarded for nutrient management methods to improve water quality within the Mississippi River Basin, within Minnesota. Successful applications will further environmental stewardship and nutrient efficiency, and will support innovative ideas for reducing nutrient losses to surface and groundwater

To obtain a grant application, visit <http://www.mawrc.org> and click on "Nutrient Management Grants." For more information contact Brian Williams at (507) 665-6806 or [brian.c.williams@state.mn.us](mailto:brian.c.williams@state.mn.us).



*An innovative Northfield-area farmer put together his own custom ripper from an old row crop cultivator tool bar, plow parts, and some new points.*

## Conservation Corner

On a beautiful summer day in July I had the pleasure of visiting with Dave Carlson from Carlson Brothers Farm in Welch, Minnesota. This 150 head dairy farm is located in the rolling hills of the Belle Creek watershed in Goodhue County. I learned about this farm because they were recently recognized for being the 10,000th recipient of an Ag BMP Loan and the first to complete the new Livestock Environmental Quality Assurance Program (LEQA) for Farm, Farmstead, Feedlot and Fields standard.

The barn, pasture, and newly constructed pit storage sit, on the side of a hill that drains down toward Belle Creek. One of the first things Dave mentioned to me was the difference he sees in the water in a small pond further downhill that empties into Belle Creek. "It is a lot less green this year, not as much phosphorus is getting to it,"



*The Carlson Brothers Farm near Belle Creek*



*The newly constructed manure storage pit can hold 500,000 gallons of manure.*

Dave noted. "Clean water is probably going to be more important than oil soon." It was clear that Dave knew it was important he play his role in keeping water clean.

With an earthen berm on the downhill side and lots of vegetation surrounding it, the clay lined pit blends in well with the landscape. No longer do they have to do daily hauling of manure, a real bonus during a Minnesota winter. The pit has a 500,000 gallon capacity which could accommodate seven to eight months of storage if need be. Dave and Mike are putting this manure to work nourishing their corn crop which is then fed back to the cows. They decided to go this route after the sharp rise in fertilizer costs a few years back.

To help them protect water and manage the farm the brothers took part in the LEQA program – a new initiative being undertaken by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and Ag Resource Strategies, LLC to help livestock producers take the initiative on a non-regulatory basis to evaluate water quality issues and implement appropriate practices. I asked Dave what he thought about LEQA. He responded "It brought up a lot of things we hadn't thought about. It's a good tool and helpful for us to know how much manure to put on, what the pH should be, etc. The balance of all these is important."

To learn more about LEQA go to <http://www.agresourcestrategies.com> or contact Tim Gieseke at (507) 359-1889.

Sincere thanks to the Carlson Brothers Farm for your work to help keep our water clean!

**Beth Kallestad**  
Executive Director

# Improving the Cost-effectiveness of Agricultural Pollution Control: The Use of Performance-based Incentives

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, agriculture remains the leading contributor of nonpoint source (NPS) pollution to ground and surface waters in the U.S. Current programs for controlling agricultural NPS pollution are focused on cost-sharing best management practices (BMPs) and paying farmers to idle tracts of working land. Unfortunately, these programs have several shortcomings. First, they do not utilize farmers' knowledge and abilities as first-class problem solvers nor do they encourage farmers to find the most appropriate or cost-effective actions specific to their farming operations. Second, they do not provide flexibility or any clear goals that can motivate farmers to participate. Third, noticeable changes in water quality conditions have been lacking. A different approach is needed that motivates farmer participation, innovative solutions, and results in cost-effective improvements in water quality.

Performance-based incentives are designed to reward farmers for achieving specific environmental performance targets (i.e. outcomes). The payments, based on outcomes, are not tied to the use or cost of any specific BMPs. Farmers who elect to participate would have the flexibility to achieve the outcome in whatever way makes the most sense to them. They would also have the incentive to seek out the most cost-effective way to achieve the outcome, leaving more of the incentive payment in their pocket. This approach has the potential to improve water quality, enhance farm income, and provide greater accountability to tax payers.

Winrock International, a non-profit organization based in Arkansas, has been working with watershed groups around the country to develop specific recommendations for using performance-based incentives in their watersheds. The first and most important issue to be determined in these recommendations is how and where the outcomes will be measured or estimated. After developing the recommendations, grant funds can be sought to pilot-test the approach with farmers in the watershed. The pilot-testing results will be valuable information for USDA to determine if and how to incorporate performance-based incentives into their suite of water quality programs.

The Cannon River Watershed Partnership will be working with Winrock International to develop a performance based incentives program for our watershed. If you are interested in participating in this process or would like more information please contact Beth Kallestad at (507) 786-3913 or [beth@crwp.net](mailto:beth@crwp.net). Check the CRWP website for monthly updates <http://www.cwrp.net>.

## Jonathan R. Winsten, Ph.D.

Agricultural Economist/Program Officer, Winrock International

### **Dakota County Extension Buffer Tour**

*Join us Saturday, September 18th for the bus tour. Meet at the Dakota Extension Office at 4100 220th St. W, Suite 101 in Farmington. The event will start at 11:30AM with registration, lunch and a short orientation then hop on the bus at 12:30PM. We will be back no later than 4:30PM. Stops will include the forest buffer demonstration, a prairie buffer, streambank stabilization projects, likely buffer grazing and a bioretention basin project. For more information or to register contact Phyllis Bongard, Dakota County Extension, (651) 480-7757 or [Phyllis.bongard@co.dakota.mn.us](mailto:Phyllis.bongard@co.dakota.mn.us).*

### **Vegetated Buffer Incentive Available to Landowners in Goodhue, Rice, Steele and Waseca Counties**

A new program will provide incentives for landowners to install 50 foot wide perennial vegetation strips along streams, rivers and drainage ditches in the counties of Goodhue, Rice, Steele and Waseca. Funding for this project is from a grant from the Minnesota Clean Water Fund.

All eligible acres will receive \$600 per acre for

non-harvestable land or \$800 per acre for harvestable land. The land must be kept in a vegetated state for 10 years. Landowners decide what type of vegetation to plant and whether or not to harvest the vegetation. Due to limited funds, sign-up will take place on a first come basis with priority given to landowners willing to plant natives.

Research has shown that vegetated strips along water bodies provide a natural buffer, trapping soil, nutrients and reducing herbicide and pesticide drift into our lakes and streams. They also extend the life of drainage ditches and provide wildlife habitat for many species of animals.

Work has already begun to contact potential landowners to inform them of the incentive. Data from the Cannon River Watershed Partnership agriculture shoreline mapping project will be used to determine potential buffer sites. Those landowners identified will be contacted.

To sign up or for more information contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District. A conservation technician will review the area you are interested in enrolling and determine eligibility.

Contact info number for each SWCD:

Rice SWCD: (507) 332-5408

Steele SWCD: (507) 451-6730

Waseca SWCD: (507) 835-4800

Goodhue SWCD: (651) 923-5300

**Danielle Waldschmidt**

**Rice, Steele, and Waseca Counties Farm Bill  
Technician**

***Soil and Water Conservation  
District Supervisor Elections***

*Check with your county Soil and Water Conservation District to find out who the candidates are for this election, learn about their ideas for conserving soil and water, and don't forget to vote!!*

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