

Local Champions for Conservation Recognized at MASWCD State Convention

On Wednesday December 20th, Wabasha County locals were recognized for their commitment to conservation at the Minnesota Association for Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) State Convention. Jake and Gretchen Meyer were recognized as Wabasha County's Outstanding Conservationist and Larry Gates received Minnesota's Outstanding Forest Steward Award.

The Outstanding Conservationist Award is to recognize individuals, conservation organizations, and others for outstanding accomplishments with implementing conservation practices and improving natural resources. Jake and Gretchen took over operations at Bluff View Farms around 2019 and it wasn't long before they contacted us to discuss options for conservation. With farm located upland of West Indian Creek, their family enjoys spending time by the water where there are plenty of rocks for the kids to turn over and trails to explore. They've made conservation a priority on their farm to protect this resource. In addition to planting on the contour, they have been implementing no-till and cover crops as a regular part of their cropping system. Their goal is to improve soil health to decrease surface runoff, and encourage water infiltration to filter nutrients before reaching lakes, streams, and groundwater. As part of this effort, they have volunteered to participate in a lysimeter study to monitor nitrate leaching. Congratulations to Jake and Gretchen for their award - we appreciate their work to improve our natural resources!

The Minnesota Outstanding Forest Steward award honors landowners who have implemented innovative forestry conservation activities, demonstrated leadership and achieved significant results in the protection of Minnesota's forestry resources. Larry Gates dedicated his entire career to conservation and continues that passion into retirement. He is generous with his time, volunteering to provide input on plans, programs, host or participate in field days, workshops and more. Larry also manages ~520 acres in East Indian Creek valley that encompasses permanent hay, tillable ground, permanent pasture, a cold water stream supporting brown and brook trout, and several bluff prairies the he regularly burns, and forested bluffs. Several tillable fields have been permanently retired and seeded to a mix of hardwood trees and shrubs. The remaining tillable fields will be permanently retired by 2027. Larry's goal is to enhance ecosystems to improve water quality and support wildlife, recreation, and future generations. Congratulations to Larry - we are grateful for his dedication to conservation in SE MN!



Gretchen and Jake Meyer family of Bluff View Farms



Larry Gates accepts award from Terri Peters at MASWCD awards in Bloomington



Planning for Plant 2024? Don't let cover crops be an afterthought

We received more interest than ever for cover crop cost share programs in the fall of 2023, and we anticipate having more funds available for cover crop cost share for 2024. As you start planning for the 2024 growing season, keep cover crops in mind.

Although most of us typically start thinking about cover crops around August and September, planning for cover crops like we plan for our cash crops can make a big difference in the success of our cover crop. Start thinking about your goals, and what you want your cover crop to do for you. Do you have soil erosion concerns? Do you struggle with soil compaction? Are you wanting forage for your livestock?

Accomplishing these goals is all about timing and species selection, especially when you're planting cover crops after harvest. To get the most bang for your buck, getting a good establishment of your cover crop is key. Each year is different, and this year we had a warm fall that made ideal conditions for cover crop

establishment and we saw a lot of above ground growth going into winter. But even in a warm fall, most cover crop species need to be planted by the end of September. Once we get into October, you're limited to cereal grains like rye, wheat, and triticale or the cold hardy brassica, winter camelina.

If your goal is to plant a cover crop in 2024, some factors to consider now include crop maturity, seeding date for covers, which areas of your farm to prioritize cover, forage needs, and current equipment or budget for custom planting. The more you can plan ahead, the better your opportunity for a successful cover crop will be.

We can't control the weather, and input costs seem to only be increasing, which is why there are cost share programs available. The goal for cost share is to reduce financial risk while you work to fit cover crops in your rotation. For technical assistance, contact Jenna by phone at (651) 560-2051 or email jenna.rasmusson@mn.nacdnet.net.