

Minnesota NewsWatch



Soil and water conservation a priority

MAINTAINING FLOW: The Nordicks have a one-mile waterway cutting through their property. To keep water clean and flowing, they shaped the ditch and bermed it.

By **PAULA MOHR**

PROTECTING and maintaining high water quality and healthy soils have been long-term priorities on the corn-soybean family farm of Gerald and Jared Nordick, southwest of Rothsay in the Red River Valley.

Officials with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture took a tour of the farm last month and agreed that the Nordicks have implemented and maintained important soil and water conservation on their farm. Accordingly, officials signed the first-ever Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program contract with them.

Currently a pilot program, MAWQCP is

Key Points

- First certified MAWQCP farm is involved with Discovery Farms Minnesota.
- Nordicks are longtime conservationists, investing cost-share and own funds.
- The assessment process involves examining extensive records.

a voluntary program to accelerate adoption of on-farm conservation practices. Certified farms are granted regulatory certainty for 10 years, meaning that they will not be subject to new water-quality rules during that time. Once certified, farmers must maintain compliance with existing regulations at the time of certification.

Gerald started farming at their current location in 1972 and gradually made improvements to reduce soil and wind erosion. By the mid-1980s, he was active on various local and state soil, water and environmental boards and committees.

Today, his son Jared follows in his footsteps for the Wilkin County Soil and Water Conservation District. Jared also was the one who suggested to his dad that they look into participating in Discovery Farms Minnesota, an on-farm, farmer-led effort to gather water-quality data from various farming systems and landscapes across the state, and to share that site-specific information with other farmers to help them improve farm management.

Becoming a Discovery Farm made sense to Gerald. Too often, agriculture gets the blame for statewide water pollution. The Nordicks, as do most farmers across the state, believe this assumption is untrue and unfair. Specific to their farm, they want



MONITORING CONSERVATION: Along with being the first certified farm in the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program pilot, the Nordick farm at Rothsay also is involved with Discovery Farms Minnesota. Standing in the monitored field are (from left) Gerald Van Amburg, chairman, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District; Gerald and Jared Nordick; Bruce Albright, Buffalo-Red River Watershed office administrator; and Peter Fjestad, Buffalo-Red River Watershed District manager.

MDA makes water advisory committee appointments

FIFTEEN citizens were appointed by Minnesota Department of Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson to serve on the second advisory committee for the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program.

The committee members will serve from July 1 to June 30, 2016.

Their main charge for this term will be to evaluate how the program is working in the four pilot areas of the state, and to continue to make recommendations to the commissioner.

Committee members are:

- Douglas Albin, farmer and member of the Minnesota Corn Research and Promotion Council
 - Duane Bakke, Fillmore County commissioner
 - Dennis Berglund, CEO and general manager, Central Crop Consulting
 - Nathan Collins, district representative, Minnesota Farm Bureau board of directors
 - Elizabeth Croteau-Kallestad, executive director, Cannon River Watershed Partnership
 - Dean Fairchild, plant nutrition and protection specialist
 - Dennis Fuchs, district administrator, Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District
 - Kirby Hettver, farmer and member of the Minnesota Corn Growers Association board of directors
 - Jim Kleinschmit, director of climate and energy initiatives, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
 - Doug Peterson, president, Minnesota Farmers Union
 - Kris Sigford, water-quality director, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
 - Joe Smentek, director of environmental affairs, Minnesota Soybean
 - Tony Thompson, farmer and member of the North Heron Lake Game Producers Association
 - James Riddle, supervisor, Winona County Soil and Water Conservation District
 - Bill Zurn, farmer and past president of Minnesota Soybean Growers
- All but two of the committee members are reappointments. The new members are Bakke and Smentek.
- For more information about the MAWQCP, visit the MDA's website at www.mda.state.mn.us/awqcp.

to know if and how their farm management practices impact sediment, nitrogen and phosphorus movement through tile lines in the southern Red River Valley. Water flows into Whiskey Creek, a tributary of the Red River, from their farm. Once the water reaches the Red River, it flows north into Canada.

"We wanted to help develop data and show what we have happening on our farm," Gerald says. "We want to know so we can fix problems if we have them. We in agriculture need to be good stewards, be proactive [in environmental issues and practices] and not reactive."