**New District Employee**

My name is Spencer Herbert and I am the new Nutrient Management Specialist, covering Rice, Goodhue, Wabasha, Dodge, Steele, and Freeborn Counties.

My primary duty is working with producers to write nutrient management plans and manure management plans for those who use livestock manure as fertilizer. A manure management or nutrient management plan is a written document that gives nutrient application recommendations (rate, timing, method of application, etc) based specifically upon your farming operation. These recommendations are aimed to reduce nutrient loss and resulting environmental pollution, while still providing your crops with optimal nutrient levels to insure high yields and profitability. Additionally, I will work to provide educational opportunities through news articles, demonstrations, and field days to assist in nutrient management planning awareness.

Prior to this position, I spent the past two years working as an NRCS Soil Conservationist in Storm Lake, IA, assisting landowners and operators with various soil and water conservation programs and practices. I was raised on a corn and soybean farm near Lake Park, IA, located in the northwest part of the state. I have always been drawn to farming and the outdoors, which lead me to pursue degrees in agronomy and environmental science at Iowa State University. While attending school, I spent time working with both a certified crop advisor and a precision agriculture business, assisting in soil sampling, crop scouting, and crop consulting.
Flood Relief Update

Last June a large storm caused significant damage across the northern tier of Rice County. After harvest, SWCD staff assisted landowners with repairing conservation practices, providing funding on over 80 basin repairs. We have more funding to continue the repairs and also build new conservation practices that help reduce future flood damage. If you suffered damage from last summer's June storm, we can still help you come up with a plan to fix the damage and develop a plan to help control soil erosion on your farm.

Preparing for future rain events requires landowners to have multiple forms of protection. Your first line of defense is going to be residue on the soil surface. Practices such as no-till will also help more water infiltrate. Decreasing the amount of runoff, lessens the risk of erosion. Your second line of defense is structural practices such as basins and grassed waterways. We need to armor our farms for the next big rain event.

Cost share is available in most cases. Please contact us now to get on the list.

Is Your Soil Healthy?

A healthy soil readily absorbs and holds more water. A healthy soil does not erode. A healthy soil provides tremendous benefits to growing plants. Here are some principles to follow to make your soil healthy:

1. Rotate your crops to increase diversity in the soil.
2. Manage soils more by disturbing less.
3. Keep plants growing as many months out of the year as possible.
4. Keep the soil covered as much as possible.

Soil Health is all about increasing organic matter in the soil. Organic matter, comprised of decomposed plant and animal residue and other compounds synthesized by soil microbes, is the natural glue that holds soil particles together.

Read more at www.nrcs.usda.gov (Topics/Soils/Soil Health)

Nutrient Management Plans

Nutrient management planning is all about efficiency: utilizing the available nutrients held in the soil, and adding additional nutrients in a timely form and appropriate rate to supply the growing crop with sufficient food to develop into high yielding plants. Also key to effective nutrient management is preventing nutrient losses and the resulting environmental pollution.

Delivering an optimal, but not excessive, rate of manure or fertilizer will help to minimize nutrient loss and maximize profit potential.

When producers plant corn and soybeans, they aim to provide excellent growing conditions from germination to maturity. They expect the seeds they plant to provide a profitable return to their investment. The concept is exactly the same in regards to manure and commercial fertilizer. Both are an investment, and one that producers should strive to use efficiently and cost effectively in order to maximize the return to their investment. Providing appropriate conditions for manure and fertilizer to be utilized by plants is money in the pocket of producers.
Sand Creek Watershed Project

If you live in the north west corner of Rice County you may be eligible for extra funding for conservation practices. Money has been dedicated to the Sand Creek watershed to improve water quality. Small tributaries around Lonsdale, including Porter Creek, and Cody Lake all drain into Sand Creek, which travels through Scott County and eventually drains into the Minnesota River.

The list of eligible conservation practices contains typical practices such as filter strips, basins, and grassed waterways. If you own livestock, you might be interested in cost-share for manure testing or a waste storage facility. If you are a small acreage owner, you may want to consider native grass planting, or maintaining existing grass with a prescribed burn. There is even money available for innovative practices such as rock tile inlets. Depending upon the practice, cost-share ranges from 50% to 100% of the total cost. This grant is in its final year, and money is available on a first come, first serve basis.

Map shows Sand Creek Watershed in light purple

Welcome NRCS Employees

Please welcome Colin Williams, Nicole Shaffer, and Jim Jirik to Rice County! The NRCS staff has doubled in recent months. Colin is a Soil Conservationist Technician, and comes to us most recently from Goodhue County. He has been with NRCS for 20 years and is eager to help Rice Co. landowners with their conservation needs. Nicole has worked for NRCS for about 3 years, and is a Soil Conservationist. She has worked in Farmington and Detroit Lakes, and is glad to be back home in SE MN. Jim has been with NRCS for over 25 years and is now an Area Resource Conservationist. His work includes wetland determinations for much of SE Minnesota.

Stop by and welcome all our new employees, and ask them how they can help you put together a conservation plan for your farm.

Native Plant Sale

Rice SWCD is having its annual native plants sale. We have a butterfly garden or raingarden mix available. Each mix contains 48 plugs and costs $60.

The raingarden mix contains plants that are well suited for moist soils. A raingarden will help filter stormwater runoff, and provide beauty to any yard.

The butterfly mix contains plants that will attract butterflies, as well as other pollinators. Our pollinators are declining due to decreasing habitat. A butterfly mix will create native habitat and add some color to any landscape.

To place an order visit our website, stop on in, or give us a call. Orders are due by May 10th. Plants will be available for pick up on May 17th.
The EnviroScape is an interactive watershed model that helps demonstrate different sources of point and non-point water pollution. In this model, point source pollution includes a factory and a wastewater treatment plant, while non-point pollution sources include a farm, urban areas, a construction site, a golf course and more. This model shows cases the whole landscape approach that is needed in order for us to improve the quality of our soil and water resources.

This is a great visual for children of all ages and even adults. Programs can be developed for any age group, and could range from 15 minutes to a few hours. If you have an event that you would like us to bring the EnviroScape to, please contact us!

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