

Outstanding conservationists

Redwood SWCD recognizes efforts of Wabasso couple

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Taking care of the land for future generations is important business in a heavily agricultural area, such as ours. That's why Paul and Candy Sobocinski of Wabasso were honored when they were named the 2008 Redwood County Outstanding Conservationists.

The Sobocinski's are no Johnny-come-lately's when it comes to using conservation in their farming techniques. Paul Sobocinski said he started using land conservation when he first started farming in the Wabasso area back in 1977.

In fact, Sobocinski saw good land management practices growing up on his parent's Sleepy Eye farm.

"I like the challenge of farming," Sobocinski said. "I got to help a lot growing up on my dad's farm. We had cattle and pigs. And he did some grazing back then.

"He had a farm that half of it was hills. Not only did he have good crop rotation, but he worked with the Brown County Soil and Water District and got contour strips set up to reduce erosion." In their 31 years of farming near Wabasso, the Sobocinski's have tried many different and diverse plans.

They currently rotate between four crops, which allow them to pasture cattle and hogs once they remove the crops.

"We do corn and soybeans, of course," Sobocinski said. "But we have small grains – oats, wheat – in our rotation. And we have alfalfa in our rotation, too."

"So we are pretty diversified with the idea that that's a good way to protect the soil."

Over the years the Sobocinski's have established several tree plantings.

The 2,100 trees and shrubs they have planted consist of a living snow fence, a farmstead shelterbelt and a field windbreak with the neighbor.

When the Sobocinski's started farming they realized the establishment of trees would be essential for wind erosion, wildlife and farmstead protection.

Much of the Sobocinski's plantings have been completed using cost share through the district programs. Their living snow fence was established by enrollment in the Continuous CRP program.

Utilizing the EQIP program, the Sobocinski's have removed 30 acres of cropland and placed it into permanent pasture.

Some of the 30 acres of permanent pasture has been fenced into three separate paddocks, so they can rotate the grazing of the cows between the different sections. By rotating the grazing they give the other sections time to re-grow.

Paul and Candy also have a unique rotational grazing operation as they have fenced in their entire quarter.

They leave the residue from the current crop to help with erosion over the winter and allow for grazing of cattle and hogs.

By this method of having their entire fields fenced in it takes pressure off their other pastureland and allows for additional pasture rotation.

As part of their EQIP contract they have nutrient management component.

They currently have a 500-head farrow-to-finish hog operation.

They also have a small cattle operation, which continues to increase; however, is never going to become very large. All livestock are raised naturally and are given no antibiotics. When the cattle and hogs are allowed to pasture on a field, Paul feels that this is a natural way to spread the manure.

“My animals are raised in deep straw, not in confinement,” Sobocinski said. “When you use straw based manure like that, your nutrients value can hook to that straw and doesn’t leach away as fast as liquid manure would.”

In 2009 one of their CRP contracts is going to expire, and rather than bringing the area into production he is going to add this parcel into his rotational grazing.

The Sobocinski’s believe in the continuation of the independent family farm, with an emphasis on understanding water, wildlife, soil and the ethics of stewardship and passing on the knowledge with the next generation.

“I think the important piece is to protect the soil for future generations,” Sobocinski said. “The land is an asset, and if you deplete it, you are depleting an asset for the future generations. We are only here for a short period, and we have the choice of being stewards of the land, or not.”