

Ford and Kreitlow named Outstanding Conservationists for 2014

By

Wright Soil and Water Conservation District

The recipient of the Outstanding Conservationist's Award is selected by the landowner's local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Board and awarded by "The Farmer" magazine at the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's annual meeting in early December. The 2014 award recipients selected by the Wright Soil and Water Conservation District were Jerry Ford and his wife Mariénne Kreitlow of Middleville Township. This is an important recognition because it acknowledges the accomplishments and efforts of a local cooperater in the area of soil and water protection and conservation



Photo Credit: MASWCD

Left to Right – Mariénne Kreitlow, Jerry Ford, Paula Mohr

Jerry and Mariénne run Living Song Farm, 288 acre farm, managing conservation practices on an 80 acre homestead and working with Kevin Stokes on the remaining 108 acres, which he rents, to maintain and enhance the conservation practices there. Living Song Farm is a 4th generation family farmstead (116 years) in which Mariénne's father, Willard Kreitlow, still works on at the age of 92. Jerry continues Willard's conservation practices; such as, grass waterways, contour farming and a rotation of crops that started in the 1940s. Since Jerry and Mariénne's return in 2002, they have renovated windbreaks through the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), converted 33.5 acres of pasture into a rotational grazing system which combines his own beef cattle, and his neighbor Kevin Stoke's dairy cattle through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and has 70 acres which are certified organic as of September, 2014.

"Jerry considers himself a conservationist who has the good fortune to also be a farmer". "We use sustainable practices so we don't have to squeeze every bit of profit out of the land." Willard's low impact, low input practices have created a highly sustainable farm. Jerry explained that "when we take care of the land, we become more financially robust because there is a reduction in the "fixing" costs (such as adding fertilizer, spraying herbicides, and mending erosion issues)."

Mariénne and Jerry have also used their farm to support new young farmers who want to get started, renting land to two different Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) start-ups, and hosting several interns.

Not only does Jerry demonstrate conservation on his own farm, but he is the Events Coordinator for the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA). SFA is a statewide non-profit conservation education organization, and the Crow River Chapter covers the Twin Cities and the Crow River watershed. The SFA believes in environmental stewardship, profitability, and strong rural communities. In addition, Jerry is the Director of the Minnesota Garlic Festival.

One of Jerry's short term plans includes implementing more cover crop practices for his fields. A long term plan is to find the next generation to continue the conservation practices.

Mariénne and Jerry's passion for the land is the driving force behind their sustainable farming practices and they plan to continue them for future generations to enjoy.

They love farming, but believe that "conservation of the land comes first". Jerry notes that none of this would have been possible without the help of Willard, his father-in-law and mentor.

The Wright SWCD would like to congratulate Jerry and Mariénne for their continued efforts towards farming with the environment in mind.



Photo Credit: Wright SWCD

Jerry moving cows to a different paddock