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Franks honored for conservation farming

Mower SWCD recognizes Dexter family; awards Jacobsens for habitat

Aug. 9, 2017, Austin, Minn. – Farming in the headwaters of Rose Creek has presented soil-erosion challenges to the Frank family while operating 1,100 acres for corn, soybeans and hay near Dexter.

Frank Family Farms LLC, however, has worked strongly to address those issues by using a variety of conservation practices that today includes six grass waterways (about 18 acres total); cover crops incorporated into a 300-acre corn field; buffers established voluntarily; a sediment-control drop structure in a waterway to prevent erosion; and strip tillage used on all cropland.

For its efforts, Frank Family Farms is the 2017 Conservationist of the Year for Mower County as chosen by Mower Soil & Water Conservation District’s Board of Supervisors. The family was honored Tuesday by Mower SWCD at the Mower County Fair’s opening event.

Mower SWCD also gave its Outstanding Wildlife Conservationist award to the Ben Jacobsen Family, owner of Three Arrows Hunting Preserve in LeRoy Township.

For the Franks, the family will be honored in December at the 81st annual convention of the Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts. Local SWCDs annually nominate farmers, individuals, conservation organizations and other groups for implementing conservation practices and improving the natural resources.

“The Franks care a lot about the land and that really shows when you drive around their fields,” said Aaron Gamm, a Mower SWCD district technician who has worked with the family on projects. “They have done a lot of conservation work but still continue to seek and try new ways of managing their fields even better.”

Frank Family Farms – Outstanding Conservationist of the Year

Started in 1974 on 480 acres, the farm began after Herman and Marge Frank moved from farming in Illinois to Mower County with children, Ed, Ted and Eileen.

Today, Frank Family Farms is led by Ed & Cindy Frank and Ted & Kim Frank with their son, Tom Frank, and wife, Kelsey. They farm mostly in Dexter Township with some in Grand Meadow Township and also operate a birth-to-market hog operation, including 600 sows.

In 2010, the Franks started converting their farming to strip till in corn and soybeans to address soil erosion. Strip till is a practice that disturbs less soil by not tilling the entire field – only strips for planting row crops. It leaves more crop residue on the soil to act as a protective layer and slow down stormwater runoff.

Several reasons drove the decision to switch to strip till, including labor, fuel and machinery savings, Tom Frank said. A major reason, however, was to slow erosion and improve soil structure to enable the soil to absorb and hold more moisture.

“We believe a big part of being farmers is to be good stewards of what God has given us to be in charge of,” Tom Frank said. “That is not only doing our best to run a profitable, sustainable farming operation but also to care for the land.”

For grass waterways, the Franks have worked with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). After some trial years, they also now are in their first season using cover crops on a large scale.

“We are grateful for the help and advice from all who have helped us on our journey this far and hope we can keep learning and caring for the land as best as we can,” said Tom Frank, who also raises beef cattle with his brother, Caleb.

Ben Jacobsen Family/Three Arrows – Outstanding Wildlife Conservationist Award

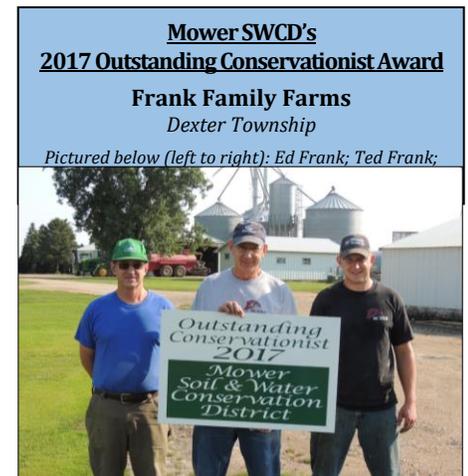
Jacobsen and his family own 60 acres of land in LeRoy Township and manages an adjacent 100 acres owned by his father, Robert, all for hunting and dog training. His grandfather bought the land in the 1920s, starting as cropland and pasture then cropland before going into conservation land.

“I grew up hunting and fishing and wanted to ensure my kids, and someday grandkids, would have a place to hunt,” he said.

Three Arrows, which annually releases about 3,000 pheasants and 500 quail, is a “dream come true” for Jacobsen; his wife, Diane; and four children: Elizabeth, Christian, Haley and James. They all love being outdoors and interacting with their prairie.

“We like to think of Three Arrows not only as a business but as stewards of the natural land we have,” Jacobsen said. “We pride ourselves in the fact that we can share it with people who don’t normally get to experience nature and wildlife.”

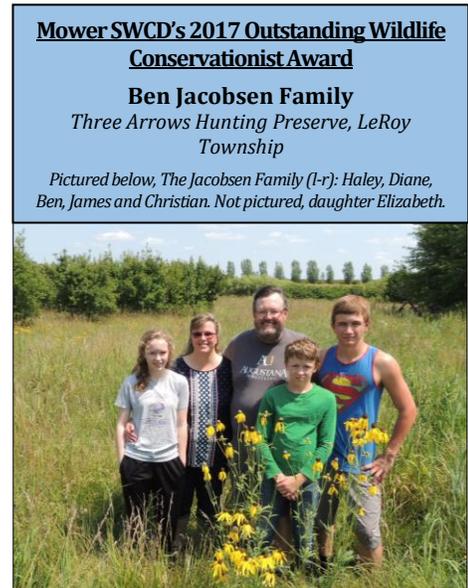
Three Arrows helps host youth hunts with two Pheasants Forever chapters and a fall hunt with Mower County’s Pheasants Forever to support breast cancer research. This year, Jacobsen plans to add a third youth hunt with NAVHDA, a dog-testing group.



Mower SWCD's 2017 Outstanding Conservationist Award

Frank Family Farms
Dexter Township

Pictured below (left to right): Ed Frank; Ted Frank;



Mower SWCD's 2017 Outstanding Wildlife Conservationist Award

Ben Jacobsen Family

Three Arrows Hunting Preserve, LeRoy Township

Pictured below, The Jacobsen Family (l-r): Haley, Diane, Ben, James and Christian. Not pictured, daughter Elizabeth.