



Hard Work Pays Off

Nettekoven Farm Produces Healthy, Nutrient-Rich Food, While Preserving Land for Future Generations

Above: Greg Nettekoven (right) and his wife, Karon (left), on their 800-acre farm.

Some people are born to farm. Others grow to love it. Greg Nettekoven was born into a farm family; and he and his wife, Karon, have grown to love farming. Greg is a second generation farmer who grew up working on his family's 760 acres of tillable land. The Nettekoven family farm, established in the 1940s, started with milk cows, and eventually led to raising beef and hogs. Spending days in the sunshine tending to livestock and tilling fields as a child, grew into a passion for farming and conservation of the land. Greg and his wife, Karon, took over the farm in 1988, turning the beef and hog operation into working the land to grow vegetable crops, including peas, sweet corn, and beans. A true family business, Greg works the land and Karon assists, while also doing the bookwork. He and his wife have changed their operation over the years, from livestock to maintaining crop diversity with a corn, bean, winter wheat, and alfalfa rotation that includes cover crops. Greg's willingness to try new crops and practices has contributed to his farming success. Greg always has conservation and soil health as a high priority. He remembers a time when plowing led to washing, gullies, and erosion in his fields. In years past, driving his tractor through fields with a cloud of dust around him, watching his top soil blow away, had an impact. Greg says of the experience, "We were one of the first ones in the area to get a soil saver chisel plow to help reduce tillage and start utilizing conservation practices actively." The Nettekovens interest in soil health, and a goal of

revitalizing their land sparked a connection with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Wisconsin (NRCS-WI).

The Nettekovens first heard about the benefit of NRCS programs through articles and mailings. They have always been willing to try new conservation practices and learn along the way. Greg's forward-thinking attitude led him into a cooperative agreement with NRCS-WI to enroll his 800-acre farm in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and participate as a demonstration farm. The CSP is the largest program sign-up utilized in the state. In 2015, the program is anticipated to reach over one million acres of Wisconsin land enrolled in completed, or current contracts. The program gave Greg the tools, resources, and incentive to try new conservation practices and reach his land management goals. "CSP and the demonstration project have taken away some of the financial risk of trying new practices due to the support I have received from NRCS," said Greg. Five years after his initial program sign-up in 2010, he renewed his CSP contract five more years, until 2019. CSP has given him the ability to put conservation practices on the ground, including planting and interseeding cover crops of winter rye, triticale, radish, and clover. CSP also helped Greg transition to slow-release nitrogen sources, implement drift reduction strategies for pesticide applications, and even recycle farm lubricants and used oil filters. The Nettekovens have taken their program successes one step further to help share information and resources with the



Left: Greg Nettekoven (left) and Lynn Szulczewski (right), District Conservationist, NRCS Appleton Service Center, assess growing triticale cover crop on the Nettekoven's 800-acre farm.

public and other landowners. Greg and Karon act as advocates for NRCS programs, by making their land one of four accessible Great Lakes Demonstration Farms, in the Fox River Watershed, as part of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative for leading-edge conservation practices to reduce phosphorus entering Green Bay and Lake Michigan. Greg also developed a co-op seed formula, still successfully being used, for himself and other farmers. As a demonstration farm, Greg is assisting NRCS in considering the use of urea and gypsum applications with cover crops, and will be participating in herbicide trials, while also continuing conservation tillage/no-till practices.

Greg is a strong advocate for NRCS programs. There's many options and choices when signing up for programs, so he recommends focusing on two or three things you'd like to do to improve your land, and give them a good try, sticking with it for five years, to see a positive impact in soil health and land conservation. "Many farmers think about implementing conservation practices, but need help with resources and advice, and that's where NRCS comes in. CSP is a great planning tool to help farmers think through applying conservation enhancements on the ground. They have great people with expertise on staff to direct questions and needs in the right place, examples of what has worked well before, and having a local service center connection in almost every Wisconsin county is priceless," said Greg. NRCS-WI has given Greg a direct path to success in his goal of producing healthy,

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nutrient-rich food and preserving and bettering his land for future generations. It has also given him the flexibility to see what will and won't work for his land.

"Greg is a progressive farmer and is an excellent partner to collaborate with to promote conservation on the land. He sets an example for others, applying conservation for the good of his farm, and making his farm a model with productivity and sustainability being the goal," said Lynn Szulczewski, District Conservationist, NRCS Appleton Service Center. NRCS is committed to helping farmers, like Greg, care for their land, use it productively, and excel as stewards for the future. NRCS-WI works one-on-one with you to provide the technical expertise and financial assistance to make conservation work on the ground. Greg says of the experience, "It's amazing in the spring to walk my healthy land and see crops sprouting, thinking wow, I did that. It's very rewarding."