

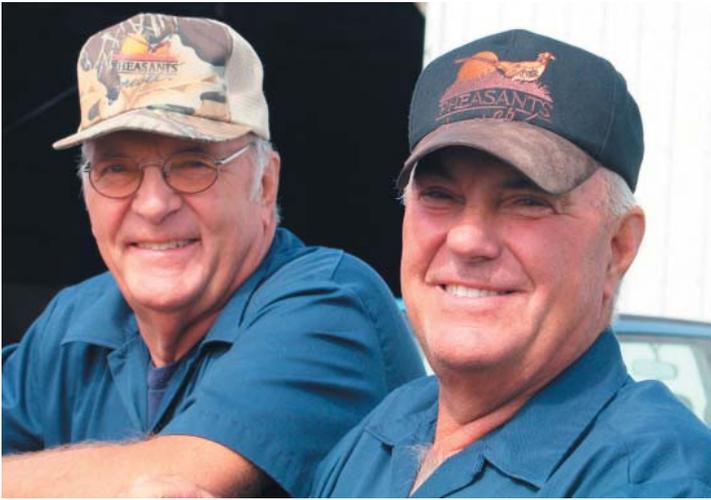
Featured Customer Vignette

Location: Peoria County, Illinois

Featured Customer: Ted and Ron Gilles

Farm Operation: 700 acres of corn, soybeans, prairie, and room for the entire NRCS toolbox!

Date: October 2007



Meet the Gilles Brothers

Ted and Ron Gilles own and operate land along the Spoon River in Peoria County, Illinois. But they aren't known as just 'farmers' because who they are, what they do, how they do it, and what their land represents involves much more than just agriculture.

They are true stewards of the land. Yes, their land grows corn, soybeans, hay and wheat, but it offers them, the environment, and the community so much more. Much of the Gilles land is highly erodible ground. But all acres are protected with a stellar conservation system. The farm includes almost every conservation practice available in the NRCS toolbox—and more...

*“Take care
of the land
and the
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- No-till improves the soil quality of their ground.
- Three miles of terraces, several grassed waterways store and direct water.
- Cool season grasses, legumes and 200 acres of native grasses, forbs and prairie flowers abound.
- Two farm ponds and three wetland restoration projects cover another 20 acres.
- Water control structures make the wetlands effective, provide wetland habitat and storm water retention.
- Wood duck boxes, 30 blue bird and tree swallow houses and goose nests are established and well used.
- Fourteen acres are dedicated for trees and shrub plantings, attracting even more wildlife to the area.
- Pasture improvement and rotational grazing are used to both protect the land and improve soil health.
- Timber management techniques and field windbreaks protect the farm and offer cover for wildlife.
- Riparian buffers and grass filter strips improve water quality and offer habitats and food for wildlife.
- Water and sediment control basins and diversions work their time-tested magic on the land.

Why such an emphasis on conservation for these Illinois farmers? Their parents instilled a conservation ethic in them many years ago. “Take care of the land and the land will take care of you,” –words of wisdom from their Mother that guides their actions even today. The Gilles’s strive to share their bounty with others. They are model landowners, using but not abusing the

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land. They use the advice and programs of the NRCS, the state, and other environmental groups such as Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, to accomplish conservation goals and to set an example for others. They demonstrate great success with conservation practices and their land is in essence a showroom of conservation practices at work—almost like a hands-on, working conservation catalog of solutions for the farm.

This showroom is not just enjoyed by the Gilles family and resource professionals who helped guide them on their conservation journey. Ted and Ron are proud of their operation and offer it up for public educational purposes on a regular basis. In 2007 more than 600 people toured

their ‘wildlife sanctuary.’ For more than a decade, their operation has been used for demonstration tours, prescribed burning workshops, prairie tours, 4-H and grade school class excursions, SWCD tours, legislative gatherings, and tree planting groups. These are all regular events within the county and community. “Things are always happening on the Gilles Farm,” says Peoria County District Conservationist Scott Wallace. “It’s a place to admire; an outdoor classroom to learn; a place to visit and see how it’s done when it’s done right,” adds Wallace. The fact that it’s a profitable and productive farm is almost secondary to everything else this land and these men have to offer.

Ted and Ron have not accomplished all this on their own. NRCS has played a role with conservation planning and by delivering conservation technical assistance over the last 20 years.

They’ve also had help from people whom they have already helped in some way. Somehow, while running this operation, Ron and Ted find time to volunteer and help others with using no-till drills or planting trees or teaching classes and workshop sessions. Because they know much and have such success,

they’re asked to do more. And they continue to say yes. Both have been active Directors for the Peoria County Soil and Water Conservation District and they work on the Land Use Council, the Spoon River Ecosystem Partnership, and many local church and community activities. Their efforts and contributions are often rewarded and recognized over the years by partners, agencies, and other agricultural and conservation organizations who appreciate what the Gilles family represents and what they contribute.

The role these men play in conservation in Central Illinois is tremendous. They operate a sustainable operation and share their knowledge with others. They make prudent use of available state and federal cost share programs and supplement with their own money when needed to accomplish a goal or task. The Gilles team has a love of the land and they are passionate about making the most of the land for themselves and others. Their pride and enthusiasm for conservation is evident in all that they do.



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