

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



Farm Conservation Contributes to Tourism Success

Did the seeds for the success of a popular Tama County winery begin long ago when it was a farm? Christine Taliga thinks the answer may be yes. She points to the use of conservation practices on the farm for helping make the Iowa River Valley attractive for tourists now visiting the area and the winery.

Taliga is a resource conservationist and coordinator of the Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development (IVRC&D) office in Amana. Her six-county group of business leaders and elected officials works to conserve natural resources and expand and attract business opportunities in the rural Iowa and Cedar Valley areas.

“Tourism,” she said, “can be the economic lifeblood of many rural communities. Tourists will visit an area if it is environmentally attractive. As tourist numbers increase, additional small businesses start up or expand.

Businesses can grow, hire local people, serve these new markets, protect the environment and attract more visitors.”

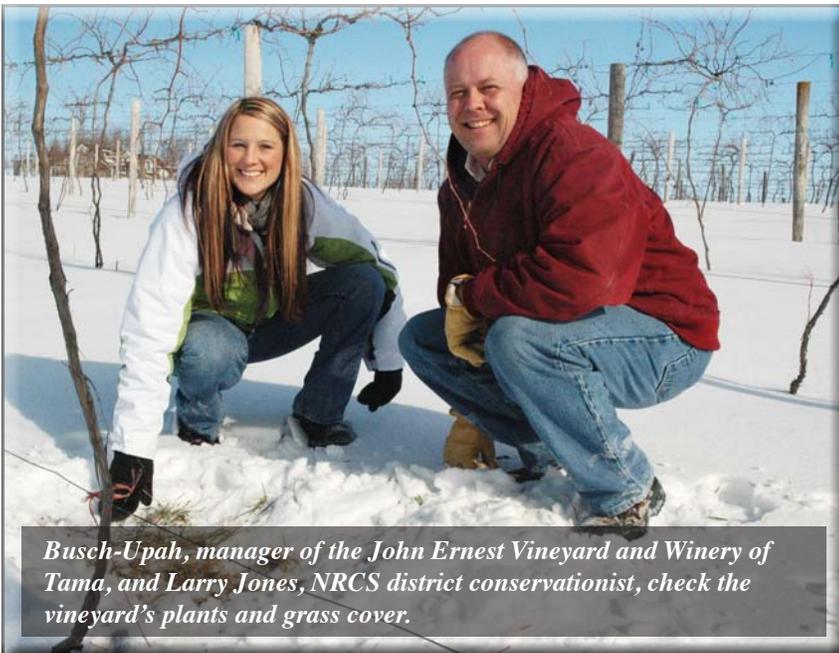
Taliga calls this concept “360 degrees of conservation.” She said, “A clean environment gets visited, the locals create business and jobs to serve the visitors and work to keep the area attractive to attract more tourists and business.”

Taliga says tourism and agriculture can flourish together and cites the John Ernest Vineyard and Winery of Tama as an example. She says the winery clearly started with a farming tradition of conservation, grew to serve tourists as a winery and continues its conservation work today.

The John Ernest Winery is owned by ten members of the John Kopsa family and managed by Jamie Busch-Upah. Busch-Upah says the John Ernest Vineyard and Winery began in 1980 as a farm owned by John Kopsa. Back then he grew traditional Iowa crops of corn, soybeans and alfalfa. Kopsa planted on the contour, installed soil conservation structures, enrolled land in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and planted filter strips and windbreaks.



Jamie Busch-Upah, manager of the John Ernest Vineyard and Winery



Busch-Upah, manager of the John Ernest Vineyard and Winery of Tama, and Larry Jones, NRCS district conservationist, check the vineyard's plants and grass cover.

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The switch from farm to vineyard started with a television show in the winter of 2001-2. Kopsa's son, Joe, saw a program about growing grapes in Iowa. Joe got his dad, brother Jeff and brothers-in-law Duane and Gary, interested in grapes and winemaking. The Kopsa men researched grape growing and experimented by planting 18 grape vines in 2002. The plants grew and so did their knowledge and interest. Other family members joined in the project and started experimenting. The family grew grapes, made wine, took trips and researched their hobby.

In 2003 the family planted three acres to grapes on the Kopsa farm. In 2004 they built a retail store on the farm. In 2005 the family hired Busch-Upah, Kopsa's granddaughter-in-law, to manage the business.

A new business was born.

Busch-Upah says visitors like their Pinot Noir, Dusty Road white wine and the River Bottom red wine. She also says the farm's old conservation practices are visitor favorites, too. She says people like the windbreak trees and are attracted to the pond.

Larry Jones, the Tama County district conservationist for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), said, "There is a long history of John Kopsa installing conservation practices on his farm. NRCS helped him build the pond to stop gully formation and soil erosion. We designed a windbreak in 1994 and a filter strip in 1998. He placed the highly erodible land (HEL) in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). That work helped his farm then and much of it continues to help the environment today."

Jones says he likes the new grape crop. "The grass cover and grape plants help keep soil in place. The family's vineyard is planted on HEL above the Iowa River. This is a good choice for improving the quality of water runoff leaving the farm before it enters the Iowa River only a quarter-mile away," he said.

Lindi Roelofse, executive director of the Tama County Economic Development Commission keeps track of tourists and the jobs they create. She says Tama is increasing its tourism ranking compared to other Iowa counties. "I can't attribute this tourism increase to any one thing, but the John Ernest Winery is definitely one of the dozen players in our economy. By bringing people here, the winery boosts their own sales and adds an economic benefit to surrounding businesses. This helps us all," said Roelofse.

Taliga says she is pleased. "We want to see farmers like Kopsa protecting the environment. Businesses can grow as a result of their stewardship. This gives economic opportunity to Iowans and encourages our young people to stay in the state. The John Ernest Vineyard and Winery is a great example of the environmental and economic benefit of conservation practices."

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Iowa Valley RC&D

The Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development councils is one of 17 in Iowa. The Iowa Valley RC&D is a private, not-for-profit 501 (c) (3), non-governmental organization serving the counties of Benton, Iowa, Johnson, Linn, Poweshiek and Tama and the Meskwaki Nation, whose mission is to conserve and develop our resources in the Iowa and Cedar Valley areas through education, demonstration and partnerships. The organization is headquartered in Amana, and is managed by a board of directors consisting of soil and water conservation district and board of supervisor nominees from each county that it serves.

Iowa Valley RC&D projects have included ecological restoration projects, the Iowa Valley Regional Food Initiative, the Land Stewardship Program and the development of the Iowa Valley and Lincoln Highway

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Heritage Byways.

The Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development (Iowa Valley RC&D) offers a guidebook series to the natural resources of the Iowa River Valley: The Sportsman's Guide to the Iowa River Valley and Paddler's Guide: Iowa River Water Trail.

These guides are the first in a series of guidebooks, which will include a Birder's Tour of the Iowa and Cedar River Valleys, due out later this spring.

The Paddler's Guide: Iowa River Valley Water Trail is a laminated reference for traversing the eastern segment of the Iowa River, including a comprehensive map, detailing access points, ramp locations, portage points, and water hazards.

The Sportsman's Guide to the Iowa River Valley is a 32 page full color booklet with maps, descriptions, photographs, and business listings designed to enhance the experience of hunters and angler.

The third guide in the series, A Birder's Tour of the Iowa and Cedar Valleys, will include over forty prime birding locations throughout the Iowa and Cedar Valley areas, with maps of each site, driving directions, a site description, birding tips and lists of commonly viewed species at each locale. The birder's guide will include a full color fold out map with all of the birding locations and trails marked, as well as area businesses.

These guides have been made possible through a grant from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and the sponsorship and assistance of many regional organizations and individuals.

The guides are available from the Iowa Valley RC&D offices at 920 48th Avenue Amana, Iowa 52203, by calling 319.622.3264 or on-line with a credit card at www.ivrcd.org

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USDA-NRCS, Des Moines
February 2009*

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