

Iowa CONSERVATION Showcase

SW Iowa Farmer turns Mud Hole Into Oasis

Like many Iowa farmers, Dirk Dunn of Villisca had an area of cropland that was too wet to farm; an area that only in the driest of years could be farmed for profit. Each spring it filled with water and remained saturated throughout the planting season, leaving no choice but to mud in a crop.

After years of frustration, Dunn installed a wetland this spring through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the first CP-23 Wetland Restoration project in Montgomery County. “We considered the land use and the level of frustration with farming it, and we decided installing the wetland was best,” he said. “One farmer mentality is to farm every inch and acre possible. We would rather have a higher average yield with a little lower input.”

“I can’t tell you how many different things we tried to get a crop to grow there,” said Bill Dunn, Dirk’s father, who owns the land on the family’s Century Farm.

The purpose of the CP-23 Wetland Restoration is to restore previously converted wetlands, to improve water quality and promote wildlife habitat.

“Wetlands have many features which benefit a very diverse community of plants and animals,” said Dan Case of



Bill and Dirk Dunn

the Montgomery Soil and Water Conservation District. “Many species of songbirds as well as game birds, such as pheasants, quail, ducks, and geese thrive in a wetland. Mammals such as beaver and muskrat also call a wetland home.”

Case said he noticed the wet ground while touring the Dunn’s farm. “I noticed a large spot in the field where the beans had turned yellow with some standing water between rows,” he said. “Dirk said the family had always called it ‘The Swamp’, so I mentioned the different CRP wetland programs that might work there.”

The 17-acre restored wetland will have five acres of permanent pool. The other twelve acres will be saturated to the surface. A 15-acre buffer of native grasses and forbs will allow for wetness outside the restoration area.

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“Construction was finished in April, but heavy rains the first few weeks of May temporarily halted seeding of the area,” said Case. “However, the rains gave us an idea of what the area will look like when full, and also an idea of the amount of time necessary to drain the wetland.”

job protecting all of our natural resources.”

If you have a wet area in cropland similar to the Dunn’s, and you are interested in learning more about wetland restoration programs, visit your local USDA Service Center or go online to www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/Guide.html.



The Dunn’s CP-23 restored wetland through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Dirk and Bill Dunn were recently named Montgomery County Conservationists of the Year and District Conservationists of the Year, which encompasses ten counties in southwest Iowa. Dirk Dunn runs the 900-acre operation of corn and soybeans, and he is no stranger to CRP.

*Jason Johnson, Iowa NRCS and
Dan Case, Montgomery SWCD
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Including the restored wetland, he has over 200 acres of land in CRP, which also includes filter strips, bobwhite quail buffers, native prairie grasses, and food plots.

“It’s not just food plots and grass anymore to attract wildlife” said Dirk Dunn. “With the wetland, we’ll draw a lot more wildlife diversity,”



Dan Case of the Montgomery County SWCD (right) recommended Bill Dunn (left) and his son, Dirk, restore a portion of their farm ground to wetlands.

Gary Smith, Soil Conservationist for USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, said Dirk Dunn is a good conservationist because he makes good use of the land. “It’s not just about conserving soil for Dirk. He does a great

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