To be successful in farming today producers need to be business professional, marketer, scientist, and conservationist all rolled up in one. To survive in today’s competitive markets, producers must incorporate all of these aspects into their operations and adapt quickly to changing market conditions and challenges.

For some operations, pressing business concerns sometimes push conservation activities to the back burner. But the operators of Veen Huizen Farms, LLC in Whatcom County are among a growing number of farmers and ranchers who have made conservation an integral part of their operation.

Veen Huizen Farms consists of a two-family partnership with Jason and Debbie VanderVeen and children (Jordan, Shane, Lacey, Brooke) along with David and Becky Van Weerdhuizen and children (Lane, Lindy, Kelly, Tessa). “Translated from Dutch ‘veen’ means peat and ‘huizen’ is home. Combining them is ‘home in the peat,’” says Debbie VanderVeen.

This is more than a definition to Veen Huizen Farms, it is part of their mission statement in managing their 700 acres and 1300 holstein cattle in northwest Washington. “Good healthy soils produce great milk,” Debbie VanderVeen says.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helped Debbie and Veen Huizen Farms reach their conservation goals through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) by providing technical and financial assistance for their nutrient management system. EQIP is a voluntary program that provides assistance to farmers and ranchers who face threats to soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land.

Veen Huizen Farms collects, stores, transports, and applies the nutrients (manure) to their fields based on soil tests and crop needs. A manure injector is used for precise application. The injector forces manure to be inserted into the ground reducing the
potential for runoff, odors and atmospheric loss. “Veen Huizen Farms was the first in the county to implement this application method,” says NRCS Resource Conservationist John Gillies.

Debbie’s husband and business partner, Jason VanderVeen, says EQIP was a perfect fit for their “proactive approach to nutrient management.”

Filter and buffer strips were planted in the spring of 2001 to keep the nutrients in the fields and out of the waterways (drainage ditches and creeks). Grass filter strips were planted on over six acres of crop fields adjacent to the waterways to provide additional filtration.

Before the installation of the filters, according to Jason, spring time erosion would fill the drainage ditches with six inches of soil. “Now, with the filter strips and buffers in place the ditches are not filling with sedimentation and are running cleaner,” he says.

And while Jason is now a fan of conservation buffers, he’s also pragmatic in his assessment of their management. “The buffers need to be trimmed and maintained every other year to keep vegetation from taking over,” he says. “Operation maintenance on the buffer and filter strips takes special efforts, but the benefits out weigh any negatives.”

And thanks to the environmental stewardship of Veen Huizen Farms, the conservation expertise of people like John Gillies – and a little help from the EQIP program – visitors can also see how “conservation is made – with loving care.”

Kelly Sprute, NRCS Washington
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