**NRCS 90th Year Series Two - Kent Vlieger, State Soil Health Specialist**

**Keith Weinberg**

So today we are going to continue with, part number two. And I have, with us, our special guest, Kent Vlieger. He's the state soil health specialist here in South Dakota. He's with the USDA Department of Agriculture, the NRCS office. Good morning. Kent. Nice to have you here with us this morning.

**Kent Vlieger**

Good morning. It's great to be with you.

**Keith Weinberg**

Yeah. Enjoy. Kind of a rainy day. So, first of all, get us up to date on some of the things you get to do as the state soil health specialist.

**Kent Vlieger**

Yeah. So our state soil health specialist, here in South Dakota, I have a I have a fantastic job. I get to work with our landowners and our farmers and ranchers, throughout the state. And I primarily work with them on, on the soil practices. So that's, can be quite the gamut of things. So I do a lot with, producers if they have, sometimes problematic areas with soils and fields. You know, a special focus is salinity in the James River Valley. Trying to remediate those areas. Or if they're just looking to kind of produce, long term management practices that can really, really help their operation.

**Keith Weinberg**

And I think that is one of the goals improving soil health. You start hearing about all the different programs and steps that are available through that and available for it.

**Kent Vlieger**

Yeah. So NRCS has, a whole gamut, of options to, to work with us on. And everything that we do within our agency is voluntary. So, so we're unique in that aspect. But we do have we provide, technical assistance, and that's kind of, the main thing our agency is known for is the technical assistance side. So that's, producers, landowners can can work with us if they just have technical questions or need help planning. And we also have, financial programs, that have become quite popular over the past couple of decades.

**Keith Weinberg**

So you get, some of those programs available that you can talk about.

**Kent Vlieger**

Yeah. So, we have a couple that are that are really popular with our producers and landowners in South Dakota. The first one would be, the Environmental Quality incentive program, which we call shorthand equip.

And that one is, really well known for and installing, kind of structural practices, related to grazing, for example, like cross fencing and pipelines and wells and tanks for, for livestock and the management of them on grasslands. And also does quite a bit with, nutrient management on crop land. Cover crops is a popular, practice that's, adopted or chosen through that program as well.

And then the second, program that's, really popular and really growing over the past decade or two is, called CSP or the Conservation Stewardship Program. And that's a program, kind of all encompassing on a produces operations. So it looks at, the conservation practices that they're already doing. And then also conservation practices, they may want to add on or new practices to their operation.

And then through the combination of, of those two things, things are already doing and managed practice they want to add on. Then they usually sign up for a five year contract, and then they can, get reimbursed for new practices.

**Keith Weinberg**

You think about, this again, NRCS being in business here for 90 years. Plus now you start looking at the technology that you guys are using just over your career, you know, making our way through that. I mean, some of this has really been tweaked, and, what improvements it's made.

**Kent Vlieger**

Yeah. So technology is moving at a fast pace. I think most of us, recognize and that that includes in agriculture and really agriculture oftentimes at the forefront of, technology innovation and practices. Yeah. So just even in the course of my career, which is, 23 plus years now, our agency has adopted a lot of different technologies that we can use to help producers evaluate, evaluate their land, evaluate what their practices are, look at practices that might improve it, both on the financial side and on the soil health side too.

**Keith Weinberg**

When you look at, some of the clients, customers that, producers that are participating with you and programs, of course, were always pushing to get the young producers involved. And of course, the secret is to keep them involved in agriculture. But when you look at those that you are visiting with, are you seeing a pick up at all count here with, some of those with the younger generation.

**Kent Vlieger**

Yeah, I, I really think we are. From my standpoint, you know, we certainly have, some programs and financial assistance that's, kind of tailored to the, the younger producers that are out there, or even if they're not so young but new to agriculture, it's still still tailored to them.

And a lot of these programs that can help, you know, offset some of those costs of adopting practices and kind of keep you, kind of keep your, your books in the black or or just to justify some of these practices. You know, a lot of our, a lot of our younger producers, you know, they're some of are, are doing newer practices to South Dakota.

Somewhere what we call a, you know, a smaller scale Ag or, specialty crop thing, specialty crops that they might be doing on smaller acreages. So we, we really expanded our base of producers we work with. We've got certainly our traditional, row crop and ranching, producers that are out there. But then there's kind of a whole new generation that are working on smaller acreages, but, producing some high value crops on, on smaller parts.

**Keith Weinberg**

A lot of great information. And I know we could probably go on for quite a while talking about these programs. Kent if somebody is looking for some more information. The best way to reach out to you guys is how.

**Kent Vlieger**

Yeah. So there's a there's many ways to reach out to to our agency. The first would be that there's, there's service centers in just about every county in the state, and those service centers are staffed with, local staff that you live within the community.

So they know kind of, the opportunities within the landscape in that county. And so they can work well with producers one on one get, kind of get, one on one time with that producer and they can visit, their operations, and look at the opportunities for them there. So that would be the first way I would say is look at your local service center.

There's also you can just hop on the internet, look at our NRCS website, which is nrcs.usda.gov. And then you can pick your state. So if you're in South Dakota you can look for South Dakota's site. There's also other ways. If you're on social media, NRCS has an X or Twitter presence, if you will. And those will be the best ways that I think you can contact us.

**Keith Weinberg**

Sounds great. Well, Kent I appreciate you taking some time here talking to us today as we team up with the NRCS office and talk about these programs. Thank you.

**Kent Vlieger**

Yes, thank you for the opportunity.

**Keith Weinberg**

Kent Pfleger again, state soil health specialist, with the USDA, NRCS office. I appreciate their time here today.