

Pepin County Success from the Field

Partnering to Restore Fall Creek

Background

Mike Brion and his two sons Curt (wife, Lisa,) and Cory (wife, Hannah,) run Brion Dairy LLC, a 500 head dairy farm with 1,800 acres of alfalfa, corn, soybeans, and rye. Brion Dairy, a century farm, received the Pepin County Conservation Farmer of the Year Award in 2014 recognizing conservation excellence in the county. Also in 2014, Brion Dairy hosted the Pepin County Dairy Breakfast and a soil health day.

In the 1990s, Mike Brion was one of the early enrollees in the Fall Creek Water Quality Project. Brion Dairy LLC has worked with the USDA–Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on numerous surface and ground water quality projects such as a barnyard runoff control system, waste storage facility, and wetland restoration, to name a few. The dairy currently has over 1,500 cropland acres enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Mike Brion became interested in restoring Fall Creek, a trout stream that runs through his property, 16 years ago when the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) purchased a public access fishing easement. In 2013, Mike asked the local NRCS office about restoring Fall Creek. Mike applied for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) with NRCS and the project application was funded under 2014 EQIP-Driftless Area Land Conservation Initiative– Cold Water Stream Restoration. The stream restoration was to be a partnership project with Mike, DNR and NRCS. According to Joseph Gerbyshak, Wisconsin DNR Fisheries Biologist, “Our (DNR) goal is to be able to upgrade Fall Creek to a Class I trout stream. This can be accomplished through working with partners (such as NRCS) and obtaining easements that enable habitat restoration projects to be conducted on the stream.”

Before the restoration commenced Mike passed away in Fall 2014. Mike’s sons, Curt and Cory, took over on the project to complete their father’s wish of seeing the creek restored.



Brion Dairy LLC streambank restoration on Fall Creek.

Program Successes

In June 2016, DNR Western District Field Operations Crew completed work on 1,200 feet of Fall Creek by installing riprap on eroded vertical banks, bank boulders, cross logs, and other habitat structures. Mike’s wish to restore Fall Creek by stabilizing eroding banks and improving habitat for trout have been realized. “I think Dad would be awful proud of how it turned out,” said Curt. In 2015, DNR purchased over 4,000 additional feet of public access easement from Brion Dairy and will restore an additional 2,000 feet of Fall Creek in 2017.

“Brion Dairy LLC strives for land stewardship and conservation ethics. They are great partners in protecting water quality in Fall Creek watershed and I look forward to working with them on future projects,” said Dennis Reimers, Pepin County District Conservationist.

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