

Pepin County Success from the Field

A Prairie Christmas - Beauty in the Bloom!

A Family Farm in the Sand

Brent and Christine Bauer own a 93 acre farm near Durand, Wis. They are the proud 3rd generation on the family farm. Brent's grandparents, Albert and Mary, purchased the farm in 1925 and it has stayed in the family. For decades the farm, located in the sand flats of Pepin County, was used to raise crops like timothy, oats and corn. Recently, Brent and Christine have made a commitment to restoring the acres to its original native condition.

CRP Provides the Path Forward

Most folks see visions of Lake Pepin or towering bluffs when they picture Pepin County. This vision however is not the reality for the Bauer Farm. Located in the sand flats adjacent to the Chippewa River, Brent and Christine struggled with droughty conditions most years. In 2011, they decided to restore much of the farm to native prairie.

Brent worked closely with U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to restore the prairies on the farm. Brent restored nine acres at his own cost with technical assistance from NRCS. He hand collected local seed for his original seeding. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was utilized by Brent to establish the existing cover on the rest of the farm. CRP has allowed the farm to be restored while still keeping land designated as cropland. CRP cost shares the establishment of the cover while also providing an annual rental payment.

Working closely with local NRCS staff and groups, like the Prairie Enthusiasts, Brent and Christine selected a broad mix of native forbs and grasses to plant. Plants such as Wild Bergamot, Spiderwort, White Wild Indigo and Purple Prairie Clover grow well in the sandy, dry conditions. Every spring the true beauty of the prairie is on full display when the Wild Lupine comes into full bloom. Karner Blue Butterflies, in this area of Wis., depend on stands of Wild Lupine, like this one, for part of their life cycle.

The Bauers enjoy walking the property and performing the required maintenance on the prairie. According to Dennis Reimers, Pepin County District Conservationist, "Successful prairie restorations require adequate site prep and



Above: Brent Bauer shows off his stand of Wild Lupine growing in the Pepin County sand country. The wet spring of 2017 brought about an amazing bloom. Brent refers to this time period as the "Prairie Christmas"!

management practices such as burning or mowing. Utilizing a program like CRP gives a producer all the tools required to enjoy success." Managing the prairie is not without challenges as Brent notes, "Managing invasive species, like buckthorn and thistle, is a year-round battle. Just when I think I have the Buckthorn under control, I find a new patch."

Prairie for the Future

The current CRP contract for the Bauer Farm has seven years to go, but Brent and Christine have no plans to revert the prairie back to row crops after the contract term is over. Brent and Christine enjoy the wildlife too much, that call their prairie home. Everything from nesting Bobolinks to Bull Snakes can be found roaming the tall grasses. Someday the Bauers hope to find a Karner Blue Butterfly flying about the Wild Lupine.

