

Lincoln County Success from the Field

Longer Growing Season “It’s a Win–Win” Situation

Background

“Once one retires, what better hobbies to have than gardening and farming” said Don Nichols. He continued, “I always find time for a little fishing too.” Don and his wife, Bonnie, purchased a small farm in Merrill, Wisconsin, with 40 acres of woods and about 30 acres of cropland/pasture. The Nichol’s farm houses a spectacular garden. They grow hops, raise chickens, bees and a small herd of beef cows.

Highlights

Don was “up north” visiting his cousin to see his high tunnel structure, when conversation led to Don discovering technical and financial assistance was available through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for building a high tunnel over his garden. Don was intrigued by the possibilities and thus, a phone call to his local NRCS office is where it all started. Don applied and was accepted for a NRCS contract under the High Tunnel Initiative and installed a 42 ft by 96 ft gothic style high tunnel in 2016 to cover his existing garden. Don is a beginning farmer and a veteran. “While the financial assistance ended up being a relatively small portion to the cost of the structure, I am excited to be planting produce earlier and harvesting later in the season,” said Don. Since installation of the high tunnel, Don has made connections and will be selling some of his produce at local farmers markets three times per week. Don’s gardens consist of a variety of sweet and hot peppers, potatoes, peas, tomatoes, broccoli, radish, strawberries, carrots, corn, summer and winter squash, cucumbers, pumpkins, kohlrabi, cauliflower and cantaloupe. “Installing a high tunnel is a win-win situation” said District Conservationist, Peggy Winter, “What a great opportunity for putting more local food on kitchen tables in our local communities.”

Future Plans

The high tunnel is where conversation started, but as NRCS met and talked with Don, he shared his other plans for the farm. Being retired, looking for farming options with minimal inputs, a desire to use equipment as little as possible, yet have options to maximize outputs on his farm, NRCS introduced prescribed grazing as a potential solution. Don has since applied for and accepted a 2017 NRCS contract for fencing, livestock waterline and prescribed grazing through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Work on the fence occurred in 2017 and the rest of the system will be installed in 2018. While currently confined to the farmstead exercise lot, Don is looking forward to getting his cows on “greener” pastures.



From gardening to grazing, both are excellent hobbies to have and see at the Nichol’s farm in Lincoln County, Wisconsin.

