

Farmers' Co-Operative Ditch Company's Regional Conservation Partnership Program project's keystone practice begins construction

Farmers' Co-Operative Ditch Company (FCDC) of Parma received \$500,000 matching project funds from the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)'s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) for a project impacting approximately 4,000 acres in the Parma area. RCPP promotes coordination and collaboration between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners.

With the assistance of the Canyon Soil Conservation District and its employees, the FCDC developed the RCPP proposal that ultimately draws on the talent and support of seven different organizations. The project seeks to address a major resource concern for the Treasure Valley – water quality. Producers using water from the FCDC's canal have to deal with large amounts of sediment in their systems as a result of the valley's extensive use of flood irrigation, which can sweep nutrient-rich soil into the canal with the tail water. As the irrigation season progresses, producers end up pumping sediment-laden water, which causes damage to pumps, clogs micro-irrigation systems and deposits sediment in concrete ditches used for surface irrigation.

Tom Johnston, FCDC board member said, "The board is very committed to improving the water quality in the Lower Boise River watershed. This project will help our shareholders improve water quality, quantity and reduce production costs."

The five-year timeline for the project seeks to address this using several conservation practices recommended by NRCS. One of the keystone practices for the project is an approximately 8-acre sediment basin that officially began construction with a ground-breaking ceremony on April. The basin will remove approximately 2,000 tons of sediment each year in an effort assist downstream water users who are interested in converting to more water efficient systems such as micro (drip) irrigation or sprinklers. A water quality monitoring plan will accompany the basin to help measure its efficiency and pinpoint areas downstream where the FCDC and its shareholders will want to consider the installation of additional sediment basins.

Jerry Raynor, acting NRCS State Conservationist for Idaho, said, "We are happy to be able to support the long term water quality, quantity and soil health goals of the Farmers' Co-Operative Ditch Company and the Canyon Soil Conservation District. This multi-pronged approach which promotes conservation practices that improve soil health, reduce erosion and increase efficiency in the use of Idaho's water will result in a number of positive impacts for the company, the FCDC shareholders, the residents of Canyon County and our downstream neighbors."

The sediment basin will take advantage of a long, oxbow-like feature of the canal to divert irrigation water from the canal into a serpentine path that runs approximately 2,000 feet in order to slow the water's speed down and allow the sediment to settle out. The water will then be directed back into the canal on the other end of the basin.

Each year the approximately 2,000 tons of sediment removed from the basin will be placed on some nearby acreage that is currently unsuitable for farming. After several years, the layers of nutrient-rich soil should render that land arable and productive.

Construction of the basin, which officially began on April 6, will take place through the remainder of 2018, so that it will be in place, tested and ready to go for the 2019 irrigation season. With the sediment basin under way, NRCS has turned its focus to working with FCDC shareholders and the Canyon SCD to implement other targeted conservation practices in the project area. NRCS will provide both technical assistance and financial assistance to qualified applicants during this process through the Farm Bill programs the agency administers. Examples of some of the conservation practices that would apply to this project include Irrigation Water Management Plans, pivot and wheel line sprinkler systems, filter strips, soil health and flow meters.

Partner participation in the project is critical to its success. In addition to staff support, the FCDC has secured the lease for the land the sediment basin will sit on, as well as having shareholder participation in implementing other conservation practices on privately-held lands. The Canyon Soil Conservation District is providing staff time and logistical support, not only for the project itself, but also the groundbreaking ceremony. The Canyon County Commissioners, City of Parma, Southwest Idaho Resources Conservation and Development Council, Black Canyon Irrigation District, and the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission all provided letters of support.

“It’s wonderful to see the wide range of government and private organization support for this project,” said Morgan Bennetts, Assistant State Conservationist for NRCS Idaho. “What is learned here can be replicated elsewhere by these partners and new ones. NRCS helps get the ball rolling, but our partners are the ones who create interest and buy-in by being leaders in their respective fields.”