

Manitowoc County Success from the Field

Protecting Water Quality Through Leachate Collection

Background

Kocourek Bros. is a family owned and operated dairy farm located outside of Reedsville, Wisconsin. The Kocourek brothers, Dennis and Donald, built their first barn in 1995 for 300 cows. Today Dennis and Donald, along with their three sons, continue to run the growing farm and operate over 2,000 acres. Their latest expansion, in 2016, tripled their milking herd and raised their total animal number to just over 1,000.

Program Successes

Kocourek Bros. came to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in July of 2016, after their latest expansion, with concerns about proper containment of leachate running off of the corn silage feed pad. The feed pad is slightly uphill and less than 50 yards away from an intermittent stream. This stream flows through the Collins Marsh State Wildlife Area, into the Manitowoc River, and eventually into Lake Michigan, only 20 miles east of the farm. After the 2016 expansion, Kocourek Bros. became a Department of Natural Resources permitted farm. With this change, they had to start considering the impact their farm might have on local water quality. "We never really realized how bad the placement of our feed pad was until we made our latest expansion and had to start looking at these things more closely," said Dennis.

When Dennis and Donald came to NRCS, they wanted to build a leachate collection pond to catch the runoff from the feed pad in order to protect water quality through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). Kocourek Bros. had worked with NRCS in the past, so they were aware of the program and the benefits it had to offer.

In January of 2017, their application was selected for funding through EQIP-GLRI and construction began that summer. Concrete was added around the existing feed pad and was sloped towards the newly constructed waste storage facility, which was lined with reinforced concrete and has a capacity of more than 135,000 cubic feet of storage. Subsurface drain was also put in around the feed pad in order to prevent any percolating water from reaching the groundwater.

Now that the contract is complete, Dennis and Donald could not be happier with how it turned out. "We never would've imagined how bad the runoff from that feed pad looked until we started collecting it and pumping it out," said Dennis. "NRCS was so easy



to work with and we were very happy with the cost sharing and just NRCS in general."

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*(Above) The newly constructed leachate collection facility.
(Below) The farm's feed pad, a short distance uphill of an intermittent stream that runs through the farm.*



Matt Rataczak, NRCS District Conservationist in Manitowoc County, also had a positive response to the leachate collection facility. "I feel this is a unique success story of a conservation practice that typically gets a bad wrap, in that they are just collecting more water to handle, when in reality, there is some unpleasant runoff that comes off the feed storage areas, so proper storage and handling is critical for the environment," explained Rataczak.

Future Plans

Although Dennis and Donald's EQIP contract is now complete, they continue to use both NRCS and their leachate collection facility to further their conservation efforts on the farm. They are also on the third year of a Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) renewal contract and they hope to apply for the program again after this contract is complete.

The Kocourek's are a family of outdoorsmen who care about the environment. They will strive to continue improving their impact on the environment, on their own, and with the help of NRCS whenever possible.

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