Nestled in the slow rolling hills of Grant County, east of Twin Brooks, SD is the family farm owned and operated by David Kruger and his wife Nancy. David Kruger farms 1,700 acres of land with varying levels of soil capabilities. Given an average amount of rainfall, there are plots in Kruger’s holdings that can produce a nice yield in a manner that is as straightforward as the daily trip to the mailbox. However, other plots pose different challenges related to the soil’s plant available water holding capacity since they have different soil types. Given these factors, coaxing a yield in these areas is sometimes an intricate dance between the farmer and his land. As part of that dance, Kruger has converted to almost exclusively no-till farming practices with three basic crop rotations. His primary rotation includes one year each of spring wheat, corn and soybeans, however, through the CSP Program of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Kruger has added a four-year rotation including spring wheat, winter wheat, corn and soybeans.
He has found that for his lightest, sandy soil, a corn rotation is not feasible and for these areas his four-year rotation includes spring wheat, winter wheat, soybeans and alfalfa.

While out checking corn crops, with a quick glance in the rear-view mirror, Kruger takes the opportunity to reflect on the path that made his boyhood dreams of farming his own land a reality. In order to recognize the conduits of his success, Kruger credits past generations of farmers; primarily Kruger’s grandfather, Elmer Kruger, Sr. The elder Kruger helped guide his grandson into farming and cemented that bond, in 1985, by granting his 15-year-old grandson 40-acres to plant corn (in a share crop situation) that would put the younger Kruger’s dreams into motion on the seat of a tractor.

There was another Grant County farmer who paved the way for Kruger to enter the field of Ag production despite its steep start-up costs. Beginning as a high school student and for many years that followed, Kruger worked for a neighbor who recognized his drive and determination. It was this neighbor’s teamwork approach that allowed Kruger to return labor for the use of his farm equipment. In this manner, as land opportunities became available, Kruger was able to slowly build up his business by procuring his own land and eventually purchasing his own equipment.

“I am thankful for the opportunities these two offered me,” says Kruger, “So that I was eventually able to be out on my own and make my own decisions.”

Kruger’s decisions are influenced in part by the education he received in Ag Production at Lake Area Vo. Tech in Watertown. It was there that Kruger was first introduced to the science of no-till farming. At that time, the soil health benefits of no-till that attracted Kruger included mitigation of wind erosion, negating the emergence of rocks being heaved by the soil, conservation of moisture and labor cost savings. Kruger brought home the no-till concepts in 1993 where he slowly implemented these concepts into his farming operation. With incremental changes through the years, his no-till operation was fully integrated by 2002.

The economic benefits, although not substantial, are present in the corn rotation following small grain. “I have noticed a potential 10 to maybe 15 bushel increase in yields,” Kruger says. “There is also the unexpected benefit of weed reduction I have found since adding wheat to the crop rotation.”

Although Dave does not claim large increases in productivity with his system, he has noticed other financial benefits that positively impact the bottom
I have noticed a potential 10 to maybe 15 bushel increase in yields

- David Kruger

“Farm using these techniques because I believe it will help maintain the land for future generations,” commented Kruger. While experts warn not to evaluate the benefits of no-till techniques on soil health for at least ten years, Kruger believes 20 years out is a better gauge. Kruger adds, “I do what I do because I believe it will make a difference for tomorrow’s farm families.”

A quick glance to the west from the Kruger driveway shows a shelter belt, a conservation monument standing tall and proud, implemented during Kruger’s grandfather’s generation. This living legacy will continue to keep snow off the family’s driveway for many winters and will serve as a reminder that the soil management techniques Kruger employs today will continue to fortify his own family tree well into the future.