

Conservation Notes

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Michigan

March/April 2021



First-Generation Farmer Values Conservation

Farming has become more than a hobby for David Halsey. His family started with only three acres outside of Adrian, after 20 years they are now farming 850 acres along with a 45-head cow-calf operation. Conservation is an important part of how they farm.

Halsey and his wife Paula both grew up on hobby farms so after they were married they purchased a 3-acre farm. The couple found they had a passion for farming so they purchased more land along with renting any farmland they could find.

“Starting a farm from scratch is definitely a bold move,” said Halsey.

Paula is the family’s full-time farmer, says Halsey. Paula primarily runs the cow-calf operation. The farm produces about 30 calves a year which they market to the show calf industry. As their cattle operation grew, they incorporated a prescribed grazing operation on the advice of their local NRCS district conservationist. The prescribed grazing plan allows them to graze more efficiently with less of an environmental impact. Continually moving the cattle from once fenced-in paddock to another keeps the grass in their pasture healthier. The result is less soil erosion due to over grazing and the grass will grow back more quickly.

Halsey and his son Jacob primarily run the cropping portion of the operation. This includes about 400 acres of row crops, including a rotation of corn, soybeans and winter wheat. They also grow about 350 acres of hay, which they sell primarily to horse owners and small specialty livestock operations. Hay has been the farm’s most consistently profitable



Lenawee County farmer David Halsey with one of the calves his family raises for sale as show calves. They use donkeys to help train the calves how to walk on a lead.

crop, said Halsey. With so much hayland, once cutting starts it goes on almost continuously through the growing season. He also delivers the round bales directly to his customers.

They utilize no-till on all of their cropland and for the past several years have planted a cover crop on all of their row crop fields. Halsey received conservation financial assistance for implementing no-till and cover crops from NRCS with funding provided through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Both practices help to reduce erosion and prevent nutrients from running off and entering surface water, they are even more effective when combined.

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State Conservationist's Message

The Great Lakes remain a high priority for the USDA as evidenced by the selection of four Regional Conservation Partnership Program projects in Michigan. All of the projects, including one multi-state project, were selected under the Critical Conservation Area - Great Lakes funding pool.

USDA funding for these projects totals over \$24.3 million which will be supplemented by local partners.

The multi-state project is the Tri-State Western Lake Erie Basin - Collaboration, a continuation of the USDA's effort to reduce nutrient runoff to Lake Erie. The Western Lake Erie Basin project has grown to over 30 partners and will be led by the Indiana Department of Agriculture. Michigan partners include the Erb Family Foundation, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Hillsdale, Lenawee, and Monroe conservation districts and Michigan Farm Bureau. The project will provide financial assistance to Western Lake Erie Basin producers in Michigan, Indiana and Ohio to reduce nutrient runoff.

On Michigan's west coast, the Farmland Water Quality Conservation Initiative, led by the Ottawa Conservation District, will focus on protecting surface and groundwater quality and improving aquatic and wildlife habitat in the Macatawa, Lower Grand, and Pigeon River watersheds.

The Upper Tittabawassee River Regional Conservation project focuses on the largest watershed within the greater Saginaw Bay watershed. The project is led by Gladwin County and will focus on agricultural drains in Gladwin and Midland counties. Two key practices will be

cover crops and buffers along drains to reduce sedimentation of drains and nutrient runoff.

Finally, the Lake Erie Conservation Partnership, led by the City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program, will purchase conservation easements on agricultural land in Washtenaw County and portions of surrounding counties. Land enrolled in conservation easements will be protected from development. Project partners hope that land enrolled in easements will be more affordable to beginning farmers and socially-disadvantaged producers.



State Conservationist
Garry Lee



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the creation of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program during an event near Bay City in May 2014.

In addition to the lead partners, each project has a number of other partners contributing financial and technical assistance. The support of local partners is what has made the program so successful that it has now extended into a third administration.

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Over the next few weeks a new source of local USDA-related information will be available. A monthly, USDA Service Center-oriented, newsletter will be available via GovDelivery.

Local Farm Service Agency and NRCS staff will compose the newsletter that will be delivered by email. Anyone can subscribe to the newsletter through GovDelivery. A [GovDelivery link](#) can be found on the NRCS, FSA or Farmers.gov home page, look for the red envelope logo.



Farmers.Gov Adding More Features for Users

Last June, NRCS' Conservation Client Gateway moved to farmers.gov enabling USDA customers to access multiple conservation features through a platform that provides a customer-centric digital experience. Farmers.gov provides a secure, single desktop- and mobile device-accessible authenticated portal for FSA, NRCS and RMA customer-facing features.

As we've continued to add more content and capabilities, farmers.gov has quickly become the



premier online hub for customers to find resources, submit applications and assistance requests, and make connections.

Another new feature is coming to farmers.gov to help producers manage their USDA business. They'll now receive an email when an NRCS document needs a signature, which they can quickly and easily sign online in the portal. The farmers.gov portal also enables producers to:

- View, upload, download, and e-sign documents.

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First-Generation Farmer Values Conservation

Halsey's farmland is in the River Raisin Watershed which drains directly into Lake Erie. In addition to practicing no-till and planting cover crops, he has planted filter strips along a drain on his property and has a drainage water management plan. He manages the drainage water with a water control structure. The structure can be adjusted to allow water to drain off the field before planting, and then holds water on the property after he applies manure, preventing nutrients from entering the drain and eventually Lake Erie.

Halsey appreciates that all of the conservation practices he uses help protect Lake Erie, but they also help make the farming operation



Forage production is a major part of the Halsey family's farming operation, they sell hay to area horse owners (above right). On their farmstead near Adrian they utilized EQIP assistance to construct a fueling facility (below left) and an agrichemical handling facility (below right).



NRCS-Michigan Welcomes New Employees

Chris Corgan, District Conservationist - Marshall

It's great to be back in Michigan. Previously, I worked at the Michigan State Office as an Administrator and for the last 6 years I worked in Ohio as a Resource Conservationist. I've received much appreciated welcomes and assistance. Megan Fawcett, a rock. Former Marshall DC, Tiffari Jenkins, the AO office staff Kristian, Stacy, and Erin and my neighboring county DCs, Joe, Tamara, Gabe, Marcus, Tim and can't forget Ashley, our Farm Bill Specialist. Thank you all! I look forward to becoming an asset for the team.



Juanita Farley, Civil Engineering Technician - Caro

My name is Juanita Farley, but I go by Janie. I am a South Central Texas native. I have a degree in Plane Surveying. My last position was Civil/Structural Designer. During my free time, I enjoy spending time with my family and pets. I recently taught my nine year old son how to skateboard.



Jon Pierre, District Conservationist - Bad Axe

Jon Paul Pierre served as a Research Scientist Associate with the Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas at Austin for the past nine years. He was a co-founder of an enduring research program, the Water, Landscape, and Species Studies program. In this work, he collaborated with and engaged a diversity of stakeholders to develop readily usable and available tools to inform the decision-making process. He has a Master's Degree in Energy and Earth Resources from the University of Texas at Austin and a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Protection from West Virginia University. Prior to his return to academia, Jon Paul spent nearly 20 years commercially producing ornamental horticulture crops and managing various companies across different regions of the east coast.



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Farmers.Gov Adding More Features for Users

- Request financial assistance, including submitting a program application.
- View and submit conservation requests.
- View technical references and submit questions.
- Access information on current and past conservation practices and plans.
- Report practice completion and request practice certification.
- View detailed information on all previous and ongoing contracts.
- Have the authority as an FSA and/or NRCS customer to work in the portal and act on behalf of your active power-of-attorney entitlements and your current authorities for business entities.

These conservation features join several others

already available through the farmers.gov portal, including the ability to view farm loan information. We'll continue to update you about new features as they become available.

New Farmers.gov Users

If you do not have login information for farmers.gov, you can create your login profile, or eAuthentication by following the instructions at farmers.gov/sign-in.

Help and Support

The Conservation Features User Guide gives you step-by-step instructions on how to navigate farmers.gov and the how-to video instructions explain some of the popular features. NRCS field office staff are always available to assist you with your conservation questions and other needs.

EWP Work Continues in Midland and Gladwin Counties

(below) Following the dam breach on Wixom Lake the lakeshore was unstable, with portions washing out.



(below) Streambank stabilization and slope stabilization work at the same site repaired the damage and protected the area from further erosion.



(below) A temporary bridge was installed where the M30 bridge was washed away in May.



(below) Over the winter, work continued on the Tobacco River spillway adjacent to the Edenville Dam. A concrete weir was constructed to lower Wixom Lake and restore the Tobacco River to its original course.



Benefits of Planting Trees are More Local than Global

by Bill Cook, Retired MSU Extension Forester/Biologist

There are many good reasons to plant trees and none of them have to do with saving the planet or generating fresh oxygen. These are urban myths. Take oxygen for an example. I've visited hundreds of elementary school classrooms and, quite curiously, "oxygen" is nearly always a cited reason for planting trees. Hogwash.

Most of the planet's "fresh" oxygen is produced by the oceans, which makes sense seeing how three-quarters of the planet is covered with ocean. Terrestrial vegetation accounts for about a third of the "fresh" oxygen. Forest covers only about a third of the land surface. The majority of tropical areas, that zone between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, are desert or near-desert. Not forest.

Forests simply aren't as important to the planet's oxygen balance as we're sometimes led to believe. Forests have far more important functions, such as carbon sequestration, weather modification, species diversity, habitat, clean water, and forest products. And for the first several decades, trees don't crank-out the amount of oxygen that's too commonly advertised. Growth takes a while.

I've been planting trees on my property for over two decades. Some of them are now over fifty feet tall. Most are not. I'll plant just about anything that comes my way, even a couple of species that just don't do well in cold northern climates. I just like planting trees, up to a point.

It's hard work planting trees, whether they're seedlings, bare-root saplings, or balled and burlapped trees. Actually, I've never planted the latter, as they're far too expensive for my frugality. And, I haven't much interest in residential planting.

Trees can be planted just about any time during the warm season. Bare-root stock is best planted in the spring and containerized in the fall. Containerized seedlings come in foam blocks with cells filled with soil plugs and a seedling. Watering during the first growing season does much to improve survivorship, although that's hard work when buckets need to be

hauled.

Properly preparing the planting site and proper planting technique are more important than the selection of species or planting stock. Site preparation means removing competing vegetation from the planting site. That's best done with a broad-spectrum herbicide, such as glyphosate. If chemicals aren't your thing, then prepare to sweat a lot and develop blisters. Some sites are easier to prep than others.



Why bother with site preparation work when nature doesn't do it? Well, sometimes nature does do it, in its own way, such as with wildfire and jack pine. Also, nature casts billions of seeds each year, and the vast majority fail. People put a lot of effort into planting a single tree. Nature deals in populations, not individuals. For nature, a one percent survival rate can be good

enough. Not so for human effort.

Timber harvesting can be an excellent way to stimulate regeneration over larger areas. Loggers are responsible for more new trees than any other human effort. Forest management in the Lake States is specifically designed to encourage natural regeneration. It's much more effective than tree planting.

Human beings cannot plant enough trees to affect planetary change.

In Michigan, alone, there are about 14 billion trees over one inch in diameter, plus many, many billions of seedlings. Planting a couple of hundred trees will be statistically irrelevant, let alone a few in the back yard, or even in millions of back yards.

There are two categories of tree planters, those who plant a few trees (most of us) and those that plant acres upon acres of trees.

Casual tree planters put their trees around residences and may scatter some across a few acres, if they have that much land, or help plant trees in a park or school grounds. There are excellent reasons for doing this.

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Locate a COVID-19 Vaccine Provider Near You

Across the country, the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating, but the light is at the end of the tunnel. The United States now has safe, highly effective vaccines that protect you and your family from getting sick. They offer an opportunity to return to normalcy in our everyday lives. Getting the COVID-19 vaccine gives you an added layer of protection and could protect your coworkers, family, and friends.

Some may have concerns, and that is perfectly reasonable. USDA believes we can trust what doctors and scientists are saying. COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective, and will save lives. Millions of people have already safely received these life-saving vaccines.

USDA is encouraging our employees to get the vaccine as soon as they have access to one, and as our offices begin to reopen, we also encourage customers our staff may encounter in the workplace to get one. More and more states are increasing the number of COVID-19 vaccines available to their residents.

If you want to know more about COVID-19 vaccines or search for vaccine providers near you, please visit: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html

Help be a part of the solution. You are a key player in our nation's effort to end this pandemic for good. Together, we can do this.

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Benefits of Planting Trees are More Local than Global

It's a real way to connect with nature, especially with kids. It can be a segue to a greater awareness of the important role of forests. It's fun to watch those trees grow. They can add color, beauty, and structure to a property. Residential and urban birds may eventually build nests, or use the branches as perches near a bird feeder.

After a couple of decades, the larger trees may actually begin to pay-off in terms of shading a house on hot, sunny days or grow large enough to block the wind on those cold winter days. Those older neighborhoods with mature trees often have higher property values. I am grateful to the original owner of my house that wisely planted the conifer windbreak on the north side in the 1920s.

These are all great reasons to plant trees. Saving the planet is not a realistic one.

Those landowners who plant non-forest areas, or wish to change the forest type of an existing woodland, plant far more trees than city folks. Their reasons have more to do with forest management than with urban issues, but their global impact is still nil. Again, the benefits are local and can be quite rewarding.

Because of the larger scale of reforestation or afforestation operations, more planning is warranted. Selecting a mix of tree species to match the soil and other environmental conditions (such as deer browsing pressure) is more important because

the investment is so much greater.

Oftentimes, a contractor can be hired for planting acreages. These planters are good at what they do. At several hundred trees per acre, the workload quickly builds beyond the tolerance of the casual tree planter. Cost-share programs and federal tax credits can defray the costs. Hiring a forester can provide guidance that will reduce the odds of a major disappointment.

The most important aspect of forests is to prevent conversion to agriculture and development. Properly managed, these forests will do all the things so important to humans.

The collective tree planting efforts of a nation can incrementally improve the physical nature of cities and towns. Replanting forests, especially after events such as wildfire, can help keep land in forests, as opposed to non-forest vegetation (or, worse, human development). Planting trees on a landscape scale can nudge habitat quality for desired species of wildlife and can help improve water and soil protection.

So, there are many excellent reasons for planting trees. Saving the planet just isn't one of them.

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Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events

May

- 10 Monday Fruit IPM Webinar, every Monday from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., for more information go to www.canr.msu.edu/fruit/events
- 12 Vegetable Beet Webcast, every Wednesday from 12:30 p.m. to 1 p.m., watch at www.glveg.net/listen
- 22 Fish Day, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Kalamazoo Conservation District - Portage, order fish for stocking at least 7 days in advance, for more information go to www.kalamazooconservation.org

June

- 8 Backyard Conservation Workshop, 7 p.m., online via Zoom, for more information go to midlandcd.org
- 10 Field Crops Virtual Breakfast: Organic Field Crop Production with Vicki Morrone, 7 a.m. to 7:30 a.m., for more information go to www.canr.msu.edu/events

June ctd.

- 14 Leopold Education Workshop, 9 a.m. to noon, Missaukee Conservation District Outdoor Classroom, 6180 Sanbord Rd. - Lake City, for more information and to register go to www.missaukeecd.org
- 24 Pollinator Partnership Demonstration Sites Tour, 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Waldron Fen Nature Preserve - Alanson (Emmet County), for more information and to register email Maureen Stine at ms@pollinator.org

July

- 24 Eco Expo, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Woldumar Nature Center - Lansing,



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