



Kansas Bankers Award Winner for Soil Conservation, Jim Appel. Pictured, (left to right), Jamie Holopirek NRCS, Jim Appel, Cody Tuzicka, NRCS.

Jim Appel Soil Conservation Award

Ever since he can remember, Jim Appel has been helping his grandfather and father farm. One could say his passion for farming began at birth. Jim recalls working the fields on his own when he was five years old. He would start in the morning and drive in squares around the field. His grandpa would bring him a sandwich at noon and refill his water jug, then he'd be right back at it until quitting time. The first cab tractor came into the family operation around 1983, however, the privilege of driving that particular tractor was reserved for his father. Jim was designated to take over the family farming operation around the year 2000. A lot has changed in agriculture since that time, and Jim has changed his practices along with it.

Jim realized that crop

rotation was very important so he has developed a third-third-third rotation on all the dry land that he farms and operates. A few years later he started no-tilling these acres and is now 100 percent no till with rotations of wheat, corn and fallow. Jim switched to corn from milo in order to get the crops off the ground more timely as he was having trouble getting the milo to dry down.

Like all no-till farmers, Jim is really concerned about getting a good kill of weeds when he sprays. He does not like to let weeds grow in his fields as they drain vital moisture from next year's crop. His fields are checked weekly to ensure nothing is getting out of line when it comes to weed control. This is easily maintained as most of the fields are located in close proximity to Jim's

residence.

Jim owns and operates 287.99 acres of cropland. He farms 275 acres for relatives and operates 130.0 acres for neighbors, all located in Pawnee County.

Jim also operates a small business as a mechanic. He works on motors and anything that he or his neighbors think he can fix. Neighbors and local farmers rely on him to get their implements and vehicles operating so they can get back in the field.

What makes Jim stand out for this award is the fact that he has completed all of his no-till operations without any aid from NRCS. He has taken it upon himself to conserve the land, all on his own dollar. Jim was nominated by his neighbors that were impressed with the results that he has achieved in his farming operations.



Kansas Bankers Award Winner for Water Quality, Margaret and Steve Miller. Pictured, (left to right), Joe Gabel NRCS, Margaret Miller, Russell King Key Banker, Brock Miller, Jed Fleske PCCD, Brittini Miller.

Steve and Margaret Miller Water Quality Award

George Miller, father of Steve Miller, moved from the Macksville area to a rented farm north of Burdett in 1929 with his parents, brothers and sisters. Four years later a nearby half section with a nearly new house was for sale and George purchased it. Interestingly it was being sold because the lady who had the house built asked her carpenter brother, who lived in Illinois, to build her a new ranch style house. She gave him the plans and went to live with her sister to avoid all the day-to-day decisions, trusting her brother's experience to build it right. He liked building two story bungalows and built what he wanted. When she returned, she wasn't happy, and soon put the house and land up for sale.

Steve was raised in this house, and except for his 4 years at college, has lived in the same house his entire life, beginning his farming career in 1973 after graduation from KSU.

Steve and his wife Margaret designed a 1,000 head capacity feedlot in 1983 and Miller used it as a custom starting lot for many years. Like many feedlots, it was built on sloping ground to aid drainage. Not a concern at the time it was built, the drainage made its way into a main tributary of the Pawnee Creek. As awareness of environmental factors increased, Miller became concerned with the water pollution to which his lot was contributing. When he learned of NRCS's EQIP Program, he contacted the local NRCS and applied for cost-share. The long planning process began with several wells drilled to determine the depth of the surface water. A high surface level of only 12 feet, meant the Kansas KDHE, the EPA and other regulatory agencies guidelines would need to be met to avoid contaminating ground water. One of those regulations was to top build a clay lined holding pond for run-off. Built during a very dry period, it was necessary to haul 100,000 gallons of water from a nearby irrigation well to add to and mix with the clay. KDHE required the clay to be at 22% moisture and packed to their standards to prevent seepage through the liner into the groundwater.

Also, the drainage pond needed to be located where it could catch the feedlot run-off. That meant it needed to be built in the flood plain. To counter that, dikes 5 feet higher than a predicted 100 year flood were necessary surrounding the pit and the drainage area. That required removing the middle row of a 5 row, 50 year old cedar tree windbreak so the dike could be built in-between the rows.

When feedlot drainage fills the pond to a certain predetermined level KDHE requires it be pumped out. For that solution an underground line was placed across the road to an adjoining quarter of irrigated land the Millers own, and a floating pump in the pond can pump the feedlot effluent onto the adjoining center pivot land.

Upon completion of the structure, fences were built, the dikes and berms planted to grass, and the pond was

filled with irrigation water for testing. A Satellite GPS measurement of a floating sensor test conducted by KLA, confirmed the pond was seeping less than .012" of an inch per day, 10 times better than KDHE's requirement.

Five long years separated the initial planning to the completion. The resulting cost, because of all of the extra requirements, was much higher than expected, but in the end the result is a great system that protects the water quality from this cattle operation for this and future generations. Steve and Margaret's son Brock also assisted throughout this process.

Please join me in thanking Steve and Margaret Miller, and Brock and Brittini Miller, for their proactive Conservation efforts, and congratulate them on earning the 2015 Banker's Conservation Award for Water Quality.



Kansas Bankers Award Winners for Windbreak, Janessa and Ryan Meckfessel. Pictured, (left to right), Jamie Holopirek NRCS, Janessa and Ryan Meckfessel, Jed Fleske PCCD, Russell King Key Banker.

Ryan and Janessa Meckfessel Windbreak/Shelterbelt Award

Ryan grew up in a farming family, and started farming himself in 1992. For awhile he farmed with the Fleske's, and ultimately purchased the farm where he lives now. Interestingly, although he did not acquire the farm from his family, his aunt grew up there.

The original Windbreak was installed in the 1950's. In 2009 Ryan planted 350 trees to make a better shelter for his cattle, and to start to replace part of the earlier planting, which after 60 years was beginning to fail. Unfortunately, those trees in the first

planting did not survive—a combination of several factors including drought and prairie dogs did the little trees in. Ryan had to start over, but he was not disheartened. Ryan was determined to get the new windbreak installed. In 2011 he got trees from the Arkansas River area and had all those tiny trees transplanted into the prepared area where the first planting had failed. He installed weed barrier which held the moisture in, and some well timed rains got them off to a good start. This windbreak was a personal project done

without Cost-Share, and so was not required to have a drip system. The 330 new trees that were planted are thriving, and a wonderful example of a well planned shelterbelt. Ryan takes good care of them, and they will protect the homestead and the cattle for years to come.

Ryan and Janessa are expecting their first child in April.

Let all put our hands together and congratulate Ryan and Janessa as the Windbreak Banker's Conservation Award Winners for 2015, and on their soon to arrive bundle of joy!

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