

Conservationist enjoyed meeting people

By Fred Wedel

District Conservationist

During the past 12 months I have enjoyed the opportunity to meet more Sherman County people.

Many of you are farmers and ranchers but the list includes business people, educators, students and people in agri-business who are involved with Sherman County agriculture. I remain excited about the conservation efforts in Sherman County and the opportunity I have to participate in this effort.

Natural Resources Conservation Service programs have not changed

much this past year. Conservation Technical Assistance and resource planning continue to be the primary focus of the conservation service.

Conservation planning information is available for cropping plans, grazing plans, irrigation planning and scheduling and wildlife habitat, including windbreaks and shelterbelts. The five natural resources include soil, water, air, plants and animals. It is people (farmers, ranchers and city



Fred Wedel

folk) who manage and plan for the wise use of these resources. The most important natural resource in Sherman County is the people.

New computers and software were provided to the Sherman County Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Office this year. Included are Customer Service Toolkit and Arcview. The toolkit when coupled with Arcview mapping tools enable development

of locally printed plan maps, soil maps, contour maps etc. The written practice narratives are also printed with planned and applied amounts and dates.

Next to Conservation Technical Assistance, the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program affords farmers and ranchers wonderful opportunities to install conservation projects on their land with cost-share assistance and incentives.

Conservation practices being most promoted are field windbreaks, shelterbelts, grassed waterways, contour grass buffers, cross

wind grass trap strips and grassed terraces. Other programs that may be included in the new farm bill include Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Wetland Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Program. The Playa Lakes Project and Pheasants Forever also offer conservation opportunities.

I look forward to a time when I can work with you this coming year. Please stop at the Conservation District office when you are in Goodland or on your way to the farm and say hello.

Alliance's goal is to ensure northwest environment

REPORT, from Page 10

program for food plots. Sharon Bowker continues as the representative to the Western Prairie RC&D, with Sandy Rodgers serving as alternate.

Sandy helped form the Northwest Kansas Conservation and Environmental Alliance in April of 2001. This group consists of Dis-

trict Managers representing nine County Conservation Districts. Their objective is to search for funding through grants and foundations to enhance and ensure a quality environment for future generations in northwest Kansas. Sandy currently serves as President.

Sandy and Fred were asked by the County Commissioners to serve on a solid waste committee, whose job

was to study and recommend a plan for county-wide recycling and disposal of hazardous materials.

The district offered prize money to 4-H and individual fair booths that carried a conservation theme.

National Wildlife Week and Soil Stewardship weeks were observed by distributing educational material to the schools, public library, various offices and churches in

Goodland. Bill Selby and Fred attended the KACD Convention held at Wichita in November.

The district reviewed their long-range program and also reviewed the memorandums of understanding with all cooperating agencies.

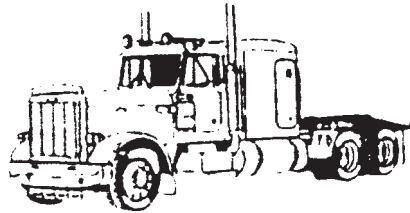
The Sherman County Conservation District's objective is to promote locally led conservation and to help landowners and operators

apply conservation practices to the land with the technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Conservation Office is available for assistance to anyone needing help solving his or her conservation needs. The District Board meets the first Thursday after the first Tuesday of every month with the exception of July.

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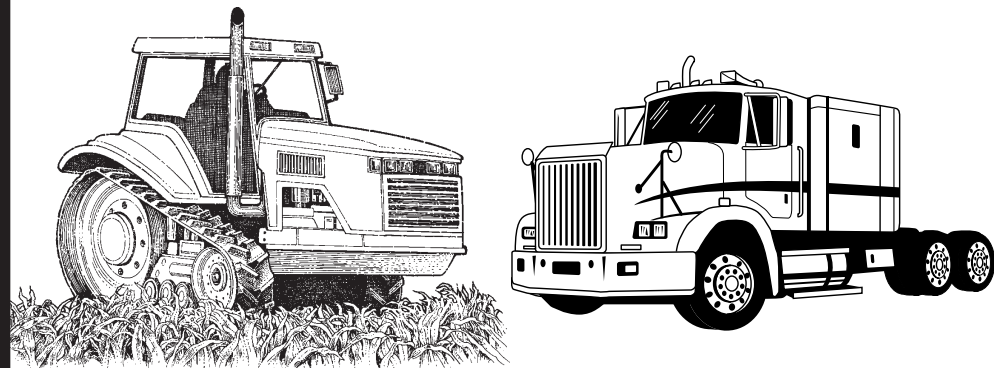
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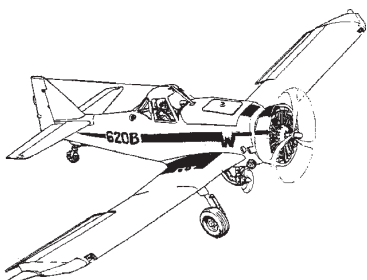
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Freedom gardens grow spirit, not food

By Douglas Oster

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Days after seeing the second plane hit the World Trade Center, I wondered how I could possibly write something as trivial as a garden column. But as time passed, those feelings began to fade — life goes on. Although our lives have changed, the leaves still drop in fall and the daffodils will bloom again in spring.

Since Sept. 11, I've been hearing about Freedom Gardens. They're planted in the spirit of World War II Victory Gardens, which aimed to conserve food and strengthen the war effort.

Freedom Gardens are more about fostering spirit than food. But if there's any way

for plants to express your patriotic spirit — and offer of tribute to the victims of this tragedy — this is it. A red-white-and-blue motif is pretty easy to produce. White Flower Farm offers a special May Day collection of hyacinths, but you could put it together yourself with three varieties of the appropriate colors. The same could be done with tulips, although the blue would be more towards purple. Bulbs, of course, need to be planted before the ground freezes. Those blooms will be beautiful but short-lived.

Another way to go would be with annuals. Since they bloom all summer, the combinations are limited only by the gardener's imagination.

For spring planting, red and white impati-

tens along with blue salvia would work. The hard part is finding a flower that blooms deep blue. You could try veronica, lobelia Midnight Blue, petunias, eustoma Forever Blue and bachelor buttons.

At the end of the season, red, white and blue morning glories would put on quite a show. Of course you don't have to plant a flag to call your plot a Freedom Garden. Maybe you could plant some extra vegetables and donate them to a food bank.

The America the Beautiful Fund is providing \$1 million worth of flower, vegetable and herb seeds to plant Freedom Gardens all across America. Besides the connection to Victory Gardens, fund president Nanine Biliski reminds us that Memorial Day was

started to plant flowers for Civil War casualties. People who want to sponsor or start a Freedom Garden in their community can receive a grant of anywhere from 100 to 1,000 seed packets.

For information, go to www.freeseeds.org or send a self-addressed stamped envelope to America the Beautiful Fund, Department 911, 1730 K St., N.W., Suite 1002, Washington, D.C. 20006.

Other options for a Freedom Garden include Star Roses' World War II Memorial Rose. The hybrid tea blooms soft white with gray and a tinge of lavender. For each rose sold, Star Roses will make a contribution toward the World War II monument under construction in Washington.

Increasing income with grass strips meeting topic

Area farmers are invited to attend a meeting to learn about new opportunities to increase income by installing Conservation Grass Strips on their farms.

The meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 5 at 11 a.m. at the Sherman County 4-H Building and will take about an hour.

Conservation Grass Strips, available through the United State Department of Agriculture, can be seeded in straight east-west patterns or on the contour.

They can be installed on terraced or unterraced land.

All such strips provide benefits to the farming operation over and above the annual payments provided through the department. These benefits include improved growth of adjacent crops, erosion control, reduced fuel and input costs, and great upland bird habitat.

Program flexibility makes it possible to design Conservation Grass Strips to fit into

any farming operation, no-till or conventional.

Conservation Grass Strips, also known as "buffers" are part of the "Continuous Signup" of the Conservation Reserve Program. Applying for these practices is easy and most fields in this area are eligible.

Unlike the regular Conservation Reserve Program, farmers can apply for grass strips anytime, with no competitive bidding, at their local Department of Agriculture Ser-

vice Center.

Annual payments are based on prevailing Conservation Reserve Program rental rates and on soil type.

Sponsors of the meeting include the Sherman County Conservation District, the High Plains Roosters Chapter of Pheasants Forever, Kansas State University Extension, and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. Lunch will be provided after the program.



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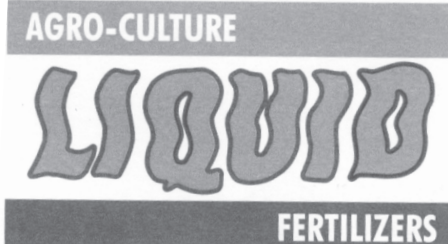
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Review shows less Kansas cropland

Kansas' cropland is in better condition than it was nearly 20 years ago, but there is a lot less of it, according to information released by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The information comes from a five-year checkup conducted by NRCS's National Resources Inventory (NRI) which assesses the use, treatment, conditions, and trends of natural resources on nonfederal rural lands. These are the lands on which we grow crops, raise livestock, enjoy wildlife, and hunt and fish. In Kansas, they make up over 90 percent of the land in the state, or 51,624,500 acres.

However, according to USDA sources, conservation challenges are mounting and intensifying more quickly than we are meeting them. The troubling trends encompass several issues, soil erosion and urban sprawl.

For the entire U.S., the average annual rate of land converted to developed land was 1.4 million acres a year from 1982 to 1992. This jumped to 2.2 million acres in the period 1992 to 1997.

Kansas is no exception. The data shows farm acres converted to development have increased dramatically. The number of acres of agricultural land converted to urban/rural development increased significantly from 1982 to 1997. Urban and rural devel-

opment acres (including rural transportation) were up from approximately 1,719,000 acres in 1982 to more than 1,900,000 acres in 1997, an increase of almost 4 percent.

The NRI data also shows that cropland in Kansas has declined by more than 2.6 million acres from 1982 levels. With the decrease in total cropland, adequate protection of this resource becomes vital in maintaining sustainable agriculture.

More than 100,000 acres of cropland were permanently lost to urban development between 1982 and 1997. Altogether, rural land area is down by more than 2.6 million acres in the state.

The NRI also notes the decline of sheet and rill erosion in the state. This is a testament to the land users of Kansas who have continued to adopt various forms of conservation tillage to maintain higher residue levels to protect their cropland during the critical erosion periods. Controlling sheet and rill erosion not only sustains the long-term productivity of the land, but also reduces the amount of soil, pesticides, fertilizer, and other pollutants that move into our Nation's waters.

"Kansas farmers have made tremendous progress in applying conservation practices to reduce erosion and protect water quality," says Tomas Dominguez, NRCS State Con-

servationist, Salina.

More than three-fourth's of the state's cropland is adequately protected from excessive erosion according to the 1997 NRI. Compared to 1982, erosion on cropland dropped from an average of 2.6 tons per acre each year to 1.4 tons per acre per year.

However, a lot of work still needs to be done in reducing erosion in Kansas. Over three million acres of Kansas' cropland continues to erode by water and wind erosion at unacceptable rates: approximately 1.9 million acres from water and 1.7 million acres from wind.

NRCS soil conservationists will be challenged in the future to help producers to apply new residue management technology

and assist new land users with their residue management plans.

Even with the positive strides made by Kansas' farmers to reduce erosion, Dominguez emphasizes that with the decrease in total cropland acres, adequate protection of this resource is vital to maintaining sustainable agriculture in the state.

For more information about the natural resource inventory in your county, please contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service or conservation district office located at your local county USDA Service Center.

For more information about the NRI and NRCS, visit the Kansas NRCS web site at www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov.

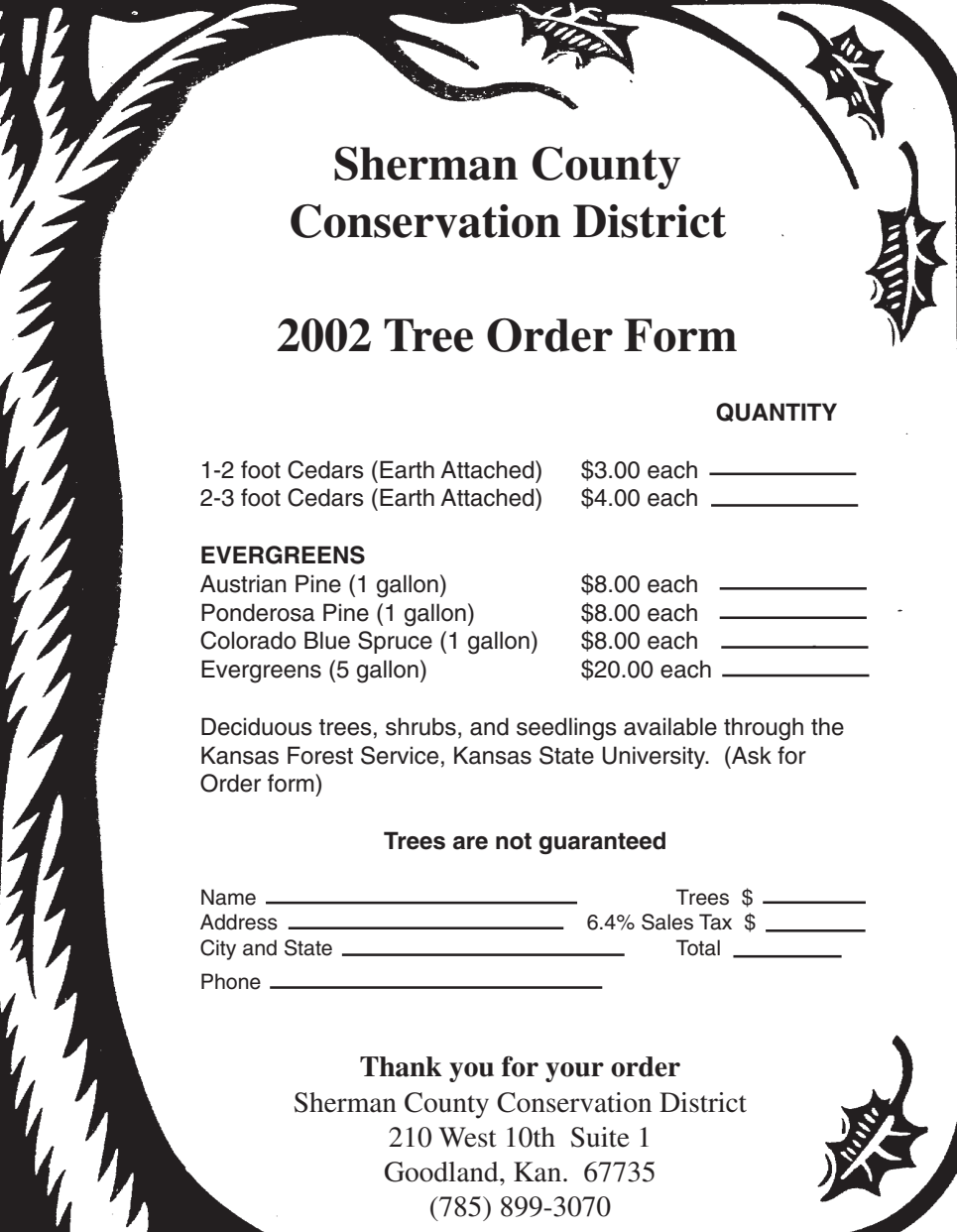
New customer service tools a big help in farm planning

When farmers step into their local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office to develop a conservation plan, conservationists will be using the new Customer Service Toolkit (CST) to help visualize their plan.

According to Jeff Hart, CST Coordinator

in Salina, the purpose of the toolkit is to integrate computer applications and digital data to help natural resource planners provide information to the public that results in conservation on the land.

See TOOLKIT, Page 14



Sherman County Conservation District

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Program's purpose is to preserve resources

The State Conservation Commission (SCC) administers the Mined Land Reclamation Program as a result of the passage of the Surface-Mining Land Conservation and Reclamation Act in 1994 by the Kansas Legislature.

The purpose of the law is to preserve natural resources, protect and perpetuate the taxable value of property and protect and promote the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the state.

The industries affected by the Act include surface operations that mine minerals of commercial value such as gypsum, clay, caliche, limestone, sand, shale, salt, gravel,

volcanic ash, building stone and minerals other than coal. Any land disturbed for surface mining purposes after July 1, 1994 falls under the provisions and requirements of the Act. Mining activity that occurs within river channels must be approved by the Kansas Department of Agriculture, Division of Water Resources.

Each operator of a surface mine is required to obtain a license to operate from the SCC and register the site. The registration requires a map of the site, a reclamation plan and a reclamation bond. The license is renewed each year, and an annual report indicating the acres disturbed for mining and

total tons of material produced is filed with the SCC.

There are 138 commercial operators and 58 county/city operators licensed in Kansas. Counties have registered 547 sites and commercial operators have registered 448 sites. In the year 2000, nearly 38 million tons of material was produced, and 437 acres were reclaimed to program standards.

Each year a Reclamation Award is given to the producer who has demonstrated excellence in mined land reclamation. The award is intended to improve public awareness of positive mining practices and the mining industry's commitment to protect-

ing the environment.

The state award recipients are then nominated for the National Reclamation Award given each year by the National Association of State Land Reclamationists at their annual conference.

Since the Mined Land Reclamation Program started in 1994, over 1,500 acres of mined land have been reclaimed. Reclamation projects have focused upon wildlife habitat, recreation, lakes and ponds, housing developments and land returned to productive pasture and farmland. For more information, you may contact your local Conservation District office.

Toolkit is useful when working with other offices

TOOLKIT, from Page 13

"Conservation planning is the basis for all assistance we provide," Hart said.

The toolkit is available in every county office for NRCS field employees who work with the public, primarily with farmers and ranchers.

It is also useful when working with other partner agencies, such as conservation districts or others who provide conservation planning and resource assessment informa-

tion.

For years, maps have been a traditional method of communicating with customers.

"With the CST, conservationists can assemble a plan with a landowner, and when finished, they have a professional-looking document," said Hart.

ARCView is a computer tool that accompanies the "toolkit." Digital maps are loaded onto a computer and the conservation technicians can outline a proposed field and indicate areas where land treatment may be

beneficial.

"This process allows several different layers to be viewed at a time, such as soils, land use, and contour lines reducing the need for hand drawn, composite maps," explained Hart.

"The toolkit is an excellent way to help NRCS become more efficient with our customers when they walk through the door for conservation assistance. The ability to evaluate natural resource concerns and assist the landowner in making decisions to

achieve their conservation objectives will be enhanced by use of this new technology," he added.

For more information about the customer service toolkit, please contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or county conservation district office located at your local county USDA Service Center.

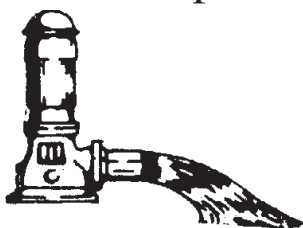
For more information about NRCS, visit the Kansas NRCS website at www.ks-nrcs.usda.gov.

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Trees do more than save farm land

Conservation Tree Program trees do more than protect farm and ranch land. Another way of thinking of the benefits of a screen of trees is to think in terms of reduced energy costs, reductions in pollutants and less noise.

"There have been many times when I've heard someone say, 'Boy I wish I would have planted those 20 years ago,'" said David Bruton, forester for the Kansas Forest Service.

Bruton said he would like to see many more windbreaks in and out of communities.

"Noise abatement and screening are big issues in towns," he said. "In rural communities, dust control is a big issue."

All of these are problems that can be helped by trees.

One problem with putting trees on small city lots, of course, is space, and another is utilities: power lines above and various kinds of pipelines below.

Bruton suggests that several owners of adjacent small lots can share bundles of trees to establish living screens to reduce street noise and pollutants, to filter dust and provide the kind of energy savings that result from a house protected from winter wind and summer sun.

Technical help is available from the Forest Service and from Extension and Conser-

vation District offices, and guidelines on underground utilities are available from the utility companies.

Another project with which Bruton has worked is an outdoor classroom project at Lecompton Elementary School, K-4. Principal Dr. Denis Yoder described his school's nature study site — a two-and-a-half-acre plot just east of the school building. At its heart is a water garden. It also includes a grouping of 35 species of native trees, a hummingbird and butterfly garden.

In a few years it will be protected from the north wind in winter by a 300-foot belt of red cedars and shrubs planted along the entire north side of the site. The trees came from the Kansas Forest Service, as did Bruton's help in getting them started.

The trees, two rows of alternating cedars bordered on the south side by a row of shrubs (also from the Kansas Forest Service) and some flowers were all planted with the help of students from the school. The cedars and the shrubs will provide food and shelter for wildlife.

"One of the main reasons we planted it was for habitat," said Yoder.

"Shrubs on the back side of a row of cedars allows the birds to get back in there and take shelter but also have a food source," said Bruton.

Other school projects that Bruton has worked on include a windbreak on the north side of Jefferson County North High School track and an outdoor classroom at an Oskaloosa school.

"There are outdoor classrooms all over the state," said Bruton, many of them benefited by plantings of trees from the Kansas Forest Service, "but a lot of people don't know about them."

Another use of Conservation Tree Program plantings that is gaining in popularity is as living snow fences. Mike Nickels, McLouth, installed a living snow fence on his property with the help of the Kansas Forest Service, the Glacial Hills RC&D, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, the Jefferson County Commission and the Jefferson County Extension Service.

Cheyenne County implemented a living snow fence program and the Kansas Turnpike Authority established the first living snow fence in Kansas next to the Interstate 35 in 1991, planting 1,276 trees and shrubs and installing 6,250 lineal feet of weed barrier fabric. The KTA also sponsored another planting along I-35 in 1993, planting 1,000 trees and shrubs.

"Any landowner, county commission or Kansas Department of Transportation personnel who have sites that give snow prob-

lems in winter can use living snow fences," said Jim Strine, a district forester based in Hays. In the western part of the state, Strine is much more involved with the Conservation Tree Program plantings as living snow fences.

"Living snow fences will store more snow than the slatted fences, and in the long run will be a lot more economical to maintain," he said. "They are designed to protect livestock and crops and cropland."

Strine also pointed out that in certain situations landowners can get assistance with planting living snow fences. "They can get annual rent payments as part of the Conservation Reserve Program continuous sign-up in addition to a cost-share for establishing the trees."

The creation of three special bundles indicates other uses to which the trees can be put. City dwellers, for instance, can create a miniature wildlife haven in a corner of the yard with one of the service's Songbird Bundles — three red cedars, three common ninebark, five red twig dogwoods, five fragrant sumacs and four golden currants, all for only \$14.50. Even with the minimum shipping charge of \$5 added, that's an urban wildlife preserve for only \$19.50.

See TREES, Page 18

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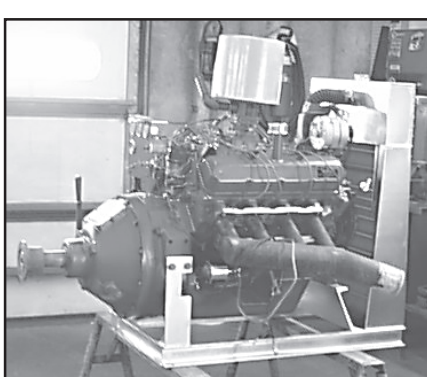
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