

# District annual meeting always a joy to attend

By Fred Wedel  
*District Conservationist*

The annual meeting of the Sherman County Conservation District will be on Monday, Feb. 15, 2010. The meeting is always a joy to attend, with your student, family, and friends. Take this time to enjoy a delicious meal and visit with your neighbor. District Manager Sandy Rodgers, the Sherman County Conservation District Board of Supervisors and I look forward to seeing you on the 15th. Students and producers are given recognition for a job well done. The annual meeting completes the year just ended and begins the coming year of resource management on the working farms and ranches of Sherman County. Use the time spent at this annual Conservation District meeting to celebrate “Earth Day” in February.

As we look forward to the 2010 growing season, I have three topics on my mind. All three are important for Conservation Agriculture in Sherman County.

First, Conservation Compliance. The Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation Compliance (WC) provisions were established by Congress in the 1985 Farm Bill, with amendments in 1990, 1996, and 2002.

The objectives of these provisions are to: Reduce soil loss due to wind and water erosion, Protect the Nation’s long-term capability to produce food and fiber, Reduce sedimentation and improve water quality, and Assist in preserving the functions and values of the Nation’s wetlands. To maintain certain USDA benefits and program eligibility, fields designated as highly erodible (HEL) must be protected from excessive soil erosion when used to produce agricultural commodities, by applying an approved conservation system.

Benefits subject to compliance provisions include but are not limited to, the following: COMMODITY PROGRAMS — direct and

counter cyclical program, deficiency payments, consolidated farm and rural development act farm operating loans, emergency feed program, wool and mohair program, farm storage loans (HEL only), crop disaster program CONSERVATION PROGRAMS — conservation reserve program, conservation stewardship program, environmental quality incentives program, wetland reserve program, and wildlife habitat incentives program. Please contact me at the NRCS office to review your conservation compliance plan or learn more about approved conservation systems.



Wedel

Second, Converting expiring CRP land to Cropland. Several things should be considered when converting highly erodible CRP land to cropland. They are: maintain concentrated flow areas or other critical eroding areas in grass cover, consider continuous CRP practices such as grassed waterways, field borders, filter strips or other buffer practices, planned crop rotation, tillage and planting system, soil fertility and impacts on environmental quality.

No-till is the preferred method when converting grassland to cropland so benefits accrued over the last 10 to 20 years in CRP will be maintained. No-till systems in conjunction with a diverse crop rotation, and minimal fallow periods are most effective to improve or maintain soil organic matter, aggregate stability, soil infiltration and available water holding capacity. Depending on the cropping system, soil erosion rates can increase significantly when HEL land is cropped.

The Conservation Compliance provisions of the Food Security Act require USDA Agriculture Program participants who produce annual agricultural commodities on HEL fields to apply an “approved conservation system” on those fields. In addition to controlling soil erosion by wind and water, gully erosion including ephemeral gullies must be controlled

to prevent offsite damages. Contact me at the Goodland NRCS office for assistance with planning the transition from CRP back into cropland.


Third, Zero tillage cropping systems.

No-Till farming promotes soil quality and soil health in ways that intensive tillage systems never can. Soil quality always precedes water quality and air quality. The terms “soil quality” and “soil health” are used interchangeably. Soil Quality is defined as the ability of soil to: absorb and store water, support plant and animal life and act as an environmental buffer. Soil Quality is improved using the following Best Management Practices: soil tests, nutrient and pest management, crop rotations, residue management — leave large amounts of crop residue on the soil surface each year (a minimum of 2 to 4 tons per acre per year), summer and winter cover crops including grasses, legumes and broadleaf crops, eliminate tillage — even light disking, and practicing continuous long-term conservation tillage including Direct Seeding or No-Till.

Healthy soil holds more water and has much better soil structure, including improved chemical and biological properties. Healthy soil is more productive and results


in improved water and air quality giving us a healthy environment. In the semi-arid climate of Sherman County, moisture is usually the limiting factor in crop and range production. Conservation practices that capture and maintain soil moisture are critical to successful production. Tillage always dries topsoil, destroys soil structure and reduces moisture infiltration rates. Crop residue always increases organic matter, reduces wind speed at the soil surface, reduces moisture evaporation, minimizes runoff, reduces soil erosion and more importantly is food for the soil microorganisms. The soil is really a living breathing ecosystem that stores, transforms, and cycles nutrients through the soil. Remember, the air we breathe is 78 percent nitrogen. Legume cover crops cycle this nitrogen into the living soil and make this nitrogen available for crop and forage production...and the nitrogen is free!

I continue to enjoy the opportunity to work with the people of Sherman County. Please call for an appointment or just stop by the “Conservation Office” at 210 West 10th in Goodland. District Manager Sandy Rodgers and I look forward to having a chat with you about your farming or ranching goals.



## CONGRATULATIONS SHERMAN COUNTY CONSERVATION WINNERS!

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| <b>1st PLACE LIMERICK STATE WINNER</b><br>Courtney McBride     | <b>WINDBREAK AWARD</b><br>Mr. and Mrs. Robin Deeds   |
| <b>POSTER HONORABLE MENTION STATE</b><br>Jonah McClung         |  |
| <b>FRIENDS OF AGRICULTURE</b><br>Greg Nemechek and Steve Evert | <b>BANKERS AWARD</b><br>Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Nemechek |



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Instructor Greg Nemechek shows Sharla Snethen and Bernice Scott how to tighten the sling on J.D. Burk to make it snug as he worked with the emergency medical training students about the sling and wrap for an injured arm.

Photos by Tom Betz/The Goodland Star-News

# Two honored as friends for safety efforts

By Tom Betz  
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The two men being honored by the Sherman County Conservation District as Friends of Agriculture have been working together for more than 10 years to improve farm safety and train emergency medical people throughout northwest Kansas.

Steve Evert and Greg Nemechek are Sherman County natives who farm plus are members of the Northwest Kansas Emergency Medical Service, and for the past 10 years have been doing farm safety training programs, training emergency medical technicians and working with the city and county fire departments.

The men, said Karen Hooker, who was their EMT instructor, pushed them to get trained, and they went to Iowa to a national safety training center and got their farm-medic training certification.

They started doing the farm safety classes that year. Evert became an EMT in 1997 and it was 1999 for Nemechek. They both got their instructor training at Barton County Community College six years ago.

This year is their fifth EMT class. Without the instructors,

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