

January 27 Meeting of the Union County Soil and Water Conservation District

Present:

Pete Cameron -- Deputy Chair, Secretary

Duke Emerson -- Treasurer

Laurel Schaafsma -- Board Member

Scott Tucker -- Dept. of Agriculture Representative

Wiley Feagle -- NRCS Representative

The meeting opened with the announcement that Delbert Smith (absent) had performed all year-end financial reporting.

The meeting was largely taken up with discussion of some of the water- and fertilizer-saving methods promoted by Scott Tucker in his FDACS work.

One such was the "scavenger well", a 4-inch well into the top layer of the surficial aquifer where nitrates are present in larger percentages if the well is located near a nitrate source, such as dairy operations. Nitrate-rich water is pumped up to the surface where it is channeled through a de-nitrification layer (sand/wood chips), which absorbs most of the nitrates, leaving relatively clean water to pass back into the soil or be used for irrigation.

Also mentioned was a "solid separator". Ground water used to rinse sand and manure from the barns passes to a solid separator, which removes solids from the water in the form of sludge. The sludge can be used as fertilizer, spread over the field before planting, and the sludge-free water can be used for fertigation. If the sludge were not removed, the rinsing water could not be used for fertigation as the solids would clog the lines.

One of Scott's cost-share items is a banding fertilizer applicator that lays down parallel lines of fertilizer on both sides of row crops so that the fertilizer is applied directly to the roots of the plants. The focus of farming research today is on minimizing the expensive use of fertilizer, with such advances as the banding applicator which apply fertilizer right where it is needed, with as little waste and leaching as possible.

"Grid sampling" examines fields for areas of relative infertility and computer aided fertilizing puts heavier applications (rate adjustment) on the infertile areas. Over several years this technique will achieve uniformity of fertility over the field.

Wiley Feagle, representing Monica Jones for NRCS issues, gave board members a handout describing Conservation Stewardship Program activities that are funded by NRCS. The handout mentioned several areas now funded in the 2014 Farm Bill: cover crops, rotational grazing, and wildlife-friendly fencing.

The meeting closed at 8 PM.