

Runck family signs first acres in Brown County into Reserve program

Area conservationists and legislators gathered at the Runck Dairy Farm in North Star Township Wednesday morning to witness the signing of the first acres of Brown County into the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program.

The "First Acre Ceremony" illustrated how landowners, government, conservationists and sportsmen can work together in developing innovative and effective legislation.

The Brown Soil and Water Conservation District hosted the 13 county south central Minnesota "First Acre Ceremony" that was the second of seven conducted in the state last week.

Seated on straw bales under bright blue skies on a crisp, chilly October morning, visitors were able to view some of the sound conservation practices developed by the Lowell Runck family through the years. Grassed backslope terraced farmland was in the background, and Coal Mine Creek flowed adjacent to the acres dedicated to the RIM Reserve Program.

The 20-acre parcel enrolled in the RIM Reserve Program will be an extension of the existing Runck conservation practices. The 50-acre meadow along the creek is a haven for deer. Hungarian partridge, pheasants, and many varieties of song birds thrive in the thick cover of the sod waterways, terraces, hedges along field boundaries, farmstead windbreaks and the 58 acres of alfalfa on the farm. For these accomplishments the Runcks were selected by the Brown Soil and Water Conservation District as the 1985 Brown County Outstanding Conservation Farmers.

Under the RIM Reserve Program, Lowell and Diane Runck and their sons, Bruce and Philip, will take 20 acres out of production for 10 years. The enrolled land, now planted in corn and soybeans, is sandy and subject to wind erosion. It will be planted in native grasses and a two-acre wildlife food plot.

Reinvest in Minnesota legislation is the first-of-its kind state program. The reserve portion of the program

takes marginal cropland out of production to benefit soil and wildlife conservation efforts.

"For too many years we have been taking our natural resources for granted," said Brown SWCD Supervisor Leo E. Schroepfer, who spoke from a hay rack stage on the site the Runcks enrolled in RIM. "We have been taking too much out of the land and not putting anything back, and I call that milking," said Schroepfer. "And, the Runcks know what milking is."

Schroepfer called the RIM bill a "fit gift to all of Minnesota." He asked farmers who have marginal land to consider participating in the RIM Reserve Program, and he asked the people to support and promote the RIM bill which was funded with 16 million dollars.

Rep. Terry Dempsey and Senator Dennis Frederickson said they would support continued funding of the bill. "What we see here today is the evidence what good sound thinking can bring to the legislative process," said Dempsey. "It's a good thing for Minnesota because it shows the partnership that can incur between the government, government agencies, landowners and conservation groups."

"I will support continued funding of the RIM bill in the future," said Frederickson. "It is a good program. . . something we have to continue. We must keep the program in place and keep replenishing our natural resources."

Joe Alexander, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, explained that the program came about through the efforts of people interested in the Pheasant Stamp Program and Pheasants Forever and others who put a lot of pressure on Gov. Perpich to reinvest in Minnesota. The governor then formed a citizens group — people who were interested in the preservation of erodible land and other things as well as hunting and fishing. "One of the intangible things that means so much to me is that we will have the opportunity again to build a relationship with the

farming community that we realize is so important," said Alexander. "As commissioner I have not lost sight of the fact that it is the land that is the number one resource that we have in this particular area of the state." The bill has far-reaching effects, he continued. "With proper financing your children and grandchildren will see the results for a better Minnesota."

Jim Nichols, Commissioner of the

Minnesota Department of Agriculture, told the crowd that the bill is "an idea whose time has come." Nichols said he would like to see the project be an ongoing project funded at about \$20 million a year. This year approximately 450 farmers put 30,000 acres in the program in Minnesota.

"There is a surplus production in the entire world," said Nichols. "We need to solve that because we still

have a distribution problem as we still have people starving in the world. We need to solve that. But producing more grain and piling it on the ground is not going to solve our distribution problem."

The federal farm program has been costly, Nichols said, because the farmer has to recover his input costs. "We do that through deficiency payments," he continued. "It is far cheaper to take land out

of production and not force the farmer to recover his input costs as well as his cash rent or his farm payment."

Nichols also presented the Runck family with the Good Year Conservation Award.

Lowell and Diane Runck and their sons and daughters-in-law, Bruce and Sandy and Philip and Kelly signed the RIM agreement at the end of the ceremony.

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LOWELL RUNCK, seated at the right, signs the first acres in Brown County into the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program. His wife, Diane, and their sons, Philip and Bruce, are seated at the left. The others are, from left to right, Verna Schmidt, notary public of

Runck and daughter, Tiffany, Sandy Runck, Brian Runck, Senator Dennis Frederickson, Rep. Terry Dempsey, Brown SWCD Supervisor Leo E. Schroepfer, and Joe Alexander, DNR Commissioner, St. Paul.