

Don and Diana Schaefer Honored as 2021 Outstanding Conservationist

The Brown Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) recognizes Don and Diana Schaefer as the 2021 Outstanding Conservationist in Brown County.

The Schaefer's reside a few miles south of New Ulm on a farm tucked between the Minnesota River and Little Cottonwood River watersheds. The original farm was 155 acres however, the farm has expanded through the years to its current size. They currently operate a corn soybean rotation with some hay ground along with a cow calf operation, utilizing rotational grazing on pasture and woodland. They have one child, Seth, married to daughter-in-law, Jamie, and 2 grandchildren. There is a unique history tied to this farm, as the original pathway down the bluff to the river bottom passed through it. Pioneers used to take their wagons down to the Little Cottonwood River crossing or up the hill to the original trail to Mankato (currently MN Highway 68). A portion of this area has never been tilled and the Schaefer's continue to leave the area in native prairie vegetation.



Don and Diana have incorporated multiple conservation practices and Best Management Practices (BMP's) through the years to promote and protect the valuable resources on their land. Due to the varied topography of their land, they have battled numerous different soil erosion problems consisting of streambank sloughing, ravine erosion, and gully erosion. To help combat streambank erosion, they implemented a buffer strip along the Little Cottonwood River utilizing grasses and trees. Grade Stabilization Structures and grassed waterways were implemented in multiple areas to battle ravine and gully erosion along with precise placement of CRP land. Other conservation BMPs added to their operation have been rotational grazing, minimal tillage, and no till drilling soybeans.



The Schaefer's have been active conservationists for a long time, trying their best to preserve the lands valuable resources. Other than military service in Vietnam, Don has spent his entire life on the farm which has given him a knowledge of the land and how water reacts on the landscape. Diana has been involved with conservation education throughout her life, starting at an early age helping with her father implementing conservation practices through the Fox Lake Conservation Club. She was involved with the League of Women Voters and sat on the CRP Land Selection committee when it started in 1986 along with the Brown County Water Planning Committee. With all of their efforts, the Schaefer's exhibit a high standard of land stewardship within Brown County and that is why Brown SWCD nominated them for this year's Outstanding Conservationist Award.

Along with other Outstanding Conservationists from across the entire state, the Schaefer's will be recognized at the Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts Annual Convention in Bloomington this December.