

Mark Portner Honored as 2026 Outstanding Conservationist

The Brown Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is pleased to announce Mark Portner as the Outstanding Conservationist for 2026 in Brown County.



Mark farms 700 acres in Prairieville and Stark Townships near Sleepy Eye. For nearly a decade, he has been on a soil health journey, transitioning his operation to a more regenerative cropping system. The conservation practices he utilizes, including cover crops, no-till, diversified crop rotations, and livestock integration, are having positive impacts on his land. These practices have increased water infiltration and soil organic matter while reducing sediment loss, weed pressure, labor requirements, and input expenses.

He has worked with the NRCS through several conservation programs. A CSP contract helped him with nutrient and pest management, while an EQIP contract assisted with fencing cost to integrate livestock into his cropland, and he is currently participating in the newest soil health focused Regenerative Pilot Program.

Through the SWCD, Mark became certified in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program and is a Brown SWCD soil health peer to peer mentor. He has also conducted several video interviews for the Farming for Soil Health in Southern Minnesota website. Mark generously shares his story by participating in farmer panels, making time to connect with and learn from others, and by hosting Brown SWCD's inaugural soil health field day event.

Mark credits a willingness to keep learning as an important part of his conservation journey. His advice to farmers considering changes to improve resiliency, sustainability and soil health is to "continue questioning the narrative, continue learning, and don't get discouraged by mistakes, but look at them as learning opportunities."

While much of Mark's time is devoted to farming and conservation, family remains the most important. He enjoys spending time with his wife, Lisa, and their children, Rachel, Jared, Dustin, and Blake.

The Brown SWCD congratulates Mark Portner on this well-deserved recognition and thanks him for his dedication to conservation and stewardship of Brown County's land and water resources.



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