

MAWRC Monthly

- August 2016



Buffers Dominate Farmfest Discussion

For the second year in a row, buffers were the most “popular” discussion topic at the MAWRC booth at Farmfest. Most questions and concerns related to the DNR’s buffer maps, as many farmland owners are finding potential errors and seeing painfully slow progress in having them corrected by the agency. The public/private ditch debate has changed but clearly has not been addressed to the satisfaction of landowners.

Last year at this time, the concern was with DNR moving to include private ditches, without a clear definition of “private ditch”, in the buffer requirement maps. An agreement between legislators and the Governor resulted in private ditches being left to counties for possible inclusion in their list of “other waters”, with buffer requirements to be addressed at the local level. Clarifying language passed by the Legislature this year attempted to prevent additions of public waters to the buffer requirement maps. However, numerous landowners report that private ditches, grass waterways and field swales are showing up on the buffer maps.

Landowners should check out the buffer requirement maps at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/buffers/index.html> and report any discrepancies to their local SWCD office.

Nitrate screening was again offered at Farmfest, with several farmers bringing in tile and well water samples for analysis. This is part of an educational effort to help identify drinking water concerns in well water and begin building a broader understanding of what nitrate levels might be expected in tile water. In three years of screening, all drinking water wells tested have been well below the safe level for nitrate nitrogen.

Wood chip bioreactors are one of the tools often promoted to help remove nitrates from tile water. The MAWRC booth had on display a table top model of a bioreactor built by research scientists at the University of Minnesota. A highlight of the week came when a middle-school student explained the science behind bioreactors to MAWRC staff- and got it pretty much right! The photo shows a group of students checking out the model with the MAWRC’s Jeremy Geske.



Thank you to everyone who stopped by to visit with us!

Minnesota Soybean Produces WRAPS Handbook

Wondering how to weigh in on water planning efforts in your area? The Minnesota Soybean Research and Promotion Council announces the availability of a handbook explaining the MPCA’s WRAPS (Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy) process and offering insights to help farmers effectively participate.

Farmer perspectives are often overlooked when state agencies develop water plans, which can result in resources being wasted on promoting, even requiring, practices that do not actually contribute to cleaner water. You can download the handbook at <https://mnsoybean.org/msrpc/wraps-handbook/>.

Minnesota Beef Producers Recognized for Outstanding Stewardship

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association has recognized Stoney Creek Farm of Redwood Falls as the Midwest regional winner in their 2016 Environmental Stewardship Award Program. Grant and Dawn Breikreutz are the third generation to manage the farm and have worked hard to incorporate sound grazing practices to increase the carrying capacity of their pastures while also protecting soil and water resources.

Read more about the NCBA program and the Breikreutz farm at <http://www.environmentalstewardship.org/regioniii-stoneycreekfarm.aspx>. (Photo credit to NCBA)



Governor Dayton Kicks off Year of Water Action

Earlier this month, Governor Mark Dayton announced that over the next twelve months he and his administration will visit school classrooms, water treatment facilities, research institutions and farms to encourage Minnesotans to learn more about the challenges facing our waters and empower every individual to take actions in their own lives to be part of the solution.

The Governor has proposed a \$220 million spending plan, \$167 million of it allocated to repairing aging, failing community water infrastructure. The announcement also notes an upcoming need of \$11 billion over the next 20 years just to maintain our aging water treatment and delivery systems. The Governor's plan also includes \$30 million in state funding to implement a new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) leveraging up to \$120 million in federal funds, targeted toward buffer implementation.

In making the announcement, Governor Dayton called out aquatic invasive species, the serious state of disrepair of water treatment plants and potentially unsafe drinking water well. A full year of activities are planned, with a different theme to be addressed each month.



To learn more go to <http://mn.gov/governor/issues/wateraction>.

The MAWRC is a non-profit research and education corporation comprised of 24 agricultural organizations working together to address water issues. For more information, go to www.mawrc.org.

