

MAWRC Monthly

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Minnesota Milk Producers Seek Common Ground

The Board of Directors of the Minnesota Milk Producers Association recently issued a letter responding to on-going campaigns of misinformation directed toward dairy farmers by the Land Stewardship Project. The MMPA letter makes several points including correcting LSP assertions that environmental protections are absent or inadequate, pointing out the numerous approvals, permits and on-going regulatory oversight to which dairy facilities are subject.

The MMPA is the leading advocate for dairy farms all across Minnesota of all sizes and types and a supporter of MAWRC efforts to help non farmers gain a better understanding of practices utilized by dairy farmers to protect water resources.



Read the entire letter here- <http://www.mnmilk.org/news/226037/MMPA-Board-Seeks-Common-Ground.htm>

University of Wisconsin Study Alleges Wetland/Habitat Loss

A recently released study by a University of Wisconsin graduate student found that Minnesota farmers converted about 250,000 acres, mostly grasslands, to row crops between 2008 and 2012. The study also states that about 10%, or 25,000 acres, of the conversion resulted in row crops planted in wetlands.

This study should not be making headlines, but anti-farming interest groups are working to characterize this short term trend in land use as negative and on-going. Readers should be asking for more information.

The wetlands converted from non-crop to cropland during the study time period are not typical duck sloughs with open water and cattails. They are a type of wetland that rarely holds water and are typically small patches within larger crop fields. These wetlands are eligible cropland and they can be farmed, though they cannot be drained unless replaced elsewhere.

Conversion of grassland to crops on land temporarily rented to the USDA for conservation and supply management purposes is a natural response to higher market prices for grains due primarily to increased global demand and weather related supply reductions across the globe, which coincided with cuts in CRP funding, resulting in some of these acres being farmed as farmers and farmland owners sought to optimize return to their investment in farmland.

The author of the study, in media releases associated with release of the report, did wonder whether increased land conversion would continue in light of declines in crop prices. A simple review of crop acreage from the National Agricultural Statistics Service shows that the trend was indeed short-lived as acres planted to all crops in Minnesota fell from 20.0 million in 2012 to 19.7 million in 2014. In addition, enrollment in Continuous Sign-up CRP, a subset of CRP primarily targeted toward buffers, filter strips and grass waterways, climbed steadily throughout the duration of the grain market bubble, reaching 549,000 acres in 2014.

Nitrate Screening Aids in Building Awareness

With all the attention currently devoted to nitrates in groundwater and surface waters, we think it would be useful for farmers and others to know more about local water conditions. Are wells in your area being affected by nitrates? What are nitrate levels in tile outlets, ditches and streams?

To help shed some light on these questions, the MAWRC will be offering free nitrate screening at Farmfest. Bring water samples from wells, ditches, streams, or tile outlets—anywhere that you would like to learn more. The screening is quick and completely confidential. Analysis only takes about twenty minutes, and if you don't want to wait, you can drop off your samples and stop back anytime during Farmfest to get your results.



- To take a sample of your **well** water, run your cold tap for five to ten minutes, then collect about one cup of water in a clean plastic or glass container (bottle, baggie, or jar). Freeze your sample in advance of Farmfest and bring it in cool to the MAWRC booth. Samples taken and brought to Farmfest the same day do not need to be frozen, just kept cool. One sample per well is sufficient for the screening.
- To take a **ditch, stream** or **tile** sample, collect about one cup of water in a clean plastic or glass container. You can take a sample anytime. If you would like to see how your nitrate levels change throughout the growing season, take a sample now and then every couple of weeks until Farmfest, freeze all samples immediately, and bring all samples in cool to the MAWRC booth. Be sure to label and date the samples clearly so that you know when the sample was taken and where it was taken from.

Urban Development Continues to Cut Into Available Farmland.



photo courtesy of NRCS

Acreage planted to corn and soybeans in the 5 county metro area (Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington Counties) declined by 17% from 403,300 in 2004 to 335,200 in 2014, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Statewide, NASS reports that overall farmland area, including cropland, building sites and uncropped grasslands, wetlands and wooded areas associated with farmland, fell from 27.5 million acres to 26.9 million acres between 2002 and 2007. And according to the University of Minnesota, the state's urban area grew from 2.2 million acres in 1990 to 3.2 million acres in 2000.

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.

