

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



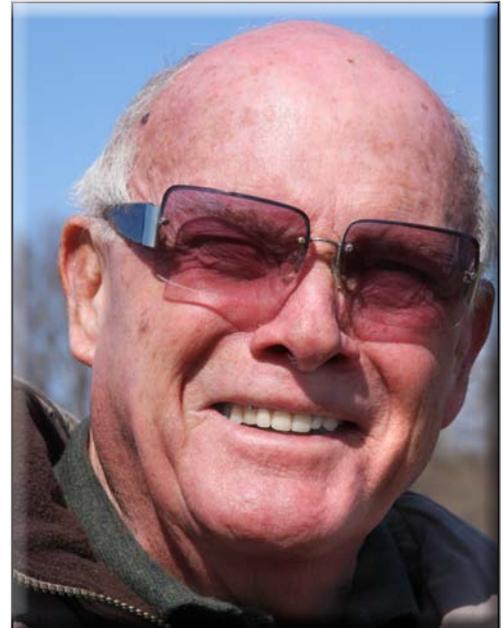
Dam Stops Land Theft

During the years nearly 10 percent of Sid Baumert's Woodbury County farm disappeared; carried by water erosion down a no-name creek to the Missouri River. It left behind a 100-foot wide, 45-foot deep gully preventing him from accessing a 40-acre field. Without intervention, the gully promised to continue cutting through Baumert's fields, eroding more soil and taking more land.

Jerry Sindt, district conservationist with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), says gully erosion on Baumert's land is now stopped. He says a 300-foot dam, completed last fall across Baumert's gully, is giving him access to his formerly landlocked field and will stop additional soil loss.

Sindt's Woodbury County office helped the 75-year-old landowner with the dam's design, funding and construction. "Baumert took control of his soil loss and gully erosion by building this dam," said Sindt.

NRCS Soil Conservationist Chris Parizek and Baumert stand on the new dam. The structure was recently built to stop gully erosion by slowing the volume and velocity of a stream cutting through his farm.



Sid Baumert

"This one erosion control structure is protecting landowners both up and downstream from his farm. It controls water flow which will greatly reduce stream bank erosion and prevent tons of additional soil loss from entering the Missouri River each year," he said.

Baumert and his wife Maria purchased the 120-acre farm near Oto as a recreational hunting area in 1989. The truck stop and convenience store owner says he bought it to enjoy the outdoors and protect it for future generations. Baumert's farm is in the highly erodible Loess Hills of western Iowa.

Baumert says his conservation goals have not changed. He wants to protect the land, provide wildlife habitat and prevent soil erosion. He enrolled 80 acres in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and planted the other 40 acres to trees.



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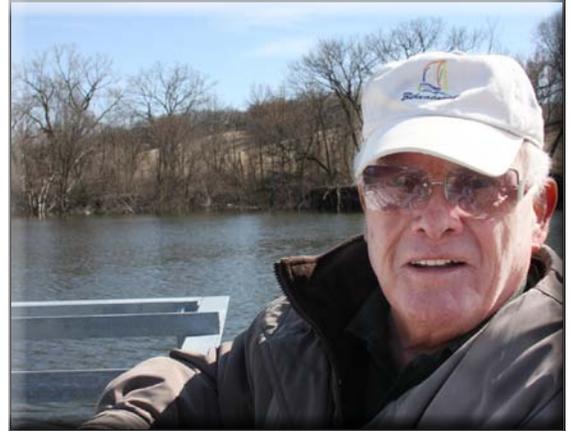
Baumert is doing everything right, Sindt says. "He has a complete conservation plan and he follows it. His farm is seeded into soil-protecting CRP grasses and woodlands. Baumert's only problem is his farm has a classic Woodbury County creek cutting through it stealing soil," he said.

Creeks and gullies near the Missouri River are deepening and washing away tons of soil each year, Sindt says. "The problem stems from the straightening of the Missouri River. Each year the Missouri River water action deepens its channel. This river deepening works upstream into the tributaries causing creeks and streams to deepen. As creeks beds burrow into the loess soil, the steep stream banks collapse washing soil towards the Missouri River and to our southern neighbors. This widens our creeks and causes more gullies. As the soil disappears we end up losing more valuable farmland," he said

Many times the only solution to this ongoing erosion problem is to build a dam or other structure to control the amount of water and its velocity, said Sindt. "It's usually the only way to keep water from taking more of our highly erodible loess soil," he said.

Sindt said NRCS, through the Little Sioux Flood Prevention Program, provided 65 percent of the dam's \$151,000 construction costs. The Iowa Financial Incentive Program (IFIP) provided 10 percent of the funding with Baumert bearing the remaining 25 percent.

"I spent the money to stop gully erosion from taking more of my land," said Baumert. "If I didn't build this structure, I would lose more ground to erosion and I fear the value of this farm would go down. It is difficult to sell something that is disappearing."



Baumert stands on a Woodbury County dam he recently built with a design and financial assistance from NRCS.

Woodbury County Engineer Mark Nahra says the loess soils, hills and steep slopes create a "perfect storm" for soil erosion. "We have a great deal of trouble with stream bank degradation around our bridges," he said. "As gullies get wider exposing pilings, bridges become unstable and can fail. The Baumert dam will help protect a nearby bridge that has been lengthened once because of collapsing stream banks. In the long run, this dam will save Woodbury County taxpayers a lot of money."

Nahra credits NRCS for being a key Woodbury County partner and landowners like Baumert for stopping gully erosion. "We appreciate the efforts of our partners and landowners for stopping the soil loss and protecting county assets," said Nahra.

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