

# CONSERVATION *Showcase*



## Farmer Helps Protect Top Iowa Tourist Attraction

This year one million people will likely enjoy cleaner water at the Iowa Great Lakes thanks, in part, to Mark Ingwersen. He is a Spirit Lake farmer and chairman of the Dickinson County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). Ingwersen worked the past 20 years to improve water quality in the area which is a top Iowa tourist attraction.

Ingwersen says it takes teamwork to tackle conservation challenges. As SWCD chair, Ingwersen works closely with district staff, farmers, business leaders and elected officials on a wide variety of clean water programs. Projects include promoting traditional soil conservation practices on

farm ground and non-traditional practices in urban areas. Non-traditional practices include building large scale rain gardens to protect the lakes from polluted storm water runoff from impervious surfaces like highways and parking lots.

“Mark Ingwersen is chair of a very good board of commissioners,” said Carroll Oskvig, an NRCS district conservationist and head of the Dickinson County SWCD’s paid staff. “Tourism is very important to the county, but the commissioners provide leadership to take care of all the



*Mark Ingwersen*



*Iowa Great Lakes Watershed*

county’s resources. They take a balanced approach and are the go-to board when people and other government groups have resource questions and concerns of either a rural or urban nature.”

Ingwersen, an SWCD board member for 20 years, has served as chair the last 10 years. His father, Robert, held the same position from 1964 to 1988.

“I love being a commissioner,” said Ingwersen. “I have a passion for soil and water conservation and helping others. Some of this work is to set a good example for the way I farm and the time I donate. I have a heart for conservation.”

Ingwersen owns 120 acres and rents another 1,000 acres from six landowners. He does custom work, raises red Angus cattle

# CONSERVATION *Showcase*



and grows corn, soybean and alfalfa using 100 percent no-till on his soybean acres. He doesn't think fall tillage is necessary and he uses smaller, lighter field equipment to minimize soil compaction. On corn ground, Ingwersen mulch-tills using one pass of a field cultivator and applies fertilizer using grid sampling.

Oskvig says this passion for conservation shows in Ingwersen's actions. "Ingwersen leads by example," said Oskvig. "He consults with me or the other conservationists on many of the things he does. NRCS helped him install a number of conservation practices. On his rental ground, he encourages the landowners to install conservation practices and structures. Some practices NRCS helps install and others, like grassed waterways, he puts in on his own."



*Ingwersen points past his newly constructed sediment control basin to nearby Spirit Lake, one of the Iowa Great Lakes. The sediment control basin will and to help protect the water quality and the tourist appeal of the Iowa Great Lakes.*

He also acts quickly. Oskvig said, "Ingwersen completed the installation of sediment control basins on his new farmland six months after buying it."

Ingwersen encourages creative solutions to problems. The district worked with the Iowa Lakes Resource Conservation and Development council to convince a local co-op to make and sell a no-phosphorus, lake-friendly fertilizer to urban residents. The district hired an urban conservationist to promote low-impact development and to use new and farm tested conservation

practices in urban areas to reduce pollution entering the lakes. The district spearheaded the creation of the Dickinson County Water Quality Commission, which is an interagency commission which provides funding for water quality improvement projects. Through this commission, Dickinson County provides the Jackson County SWCD additional money and resources to improve water quality in the Minnesota portion of the Iowa Great Lakes watershed.

The Dickinson SWCD's conservation work is paying off. Testing shows phosphorus in the lakes is significantly reduced and overall water quality trends are positive. Water in the Iowa Great Lakes is cleaner and other groups are recognizing the district's work.

Early this year, out of 3,000 counties in the country, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), selected the Dickinson SWCD as the "Best District in the Nation" in the Urban, Community and Coastal Resources category.

"The award and water quality improvements in Dickinson County please us all," said Oskvig, "but we all know more needs to be done. Mark Ingwersen is helping us do that by being an environmental leader and setting a good example in northwest Iowa."

DSC) and district employees funded from a number of sources, including the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

###

*Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist  
USDA-NRCS, Des Moines  
June 2008*

***Helping People Help the Land***

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.