



Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Steve and Cheryl Schlangen, of Albany, Honored for their Conservation Efforts

Each year the Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District recognizes an individual(s) or organization for outstanding accomplishments in implement conservation practices and improving Minnesota's natural resources.



In 1986, Steve Schlangen rented a barn, bought a small Holstein herd, and started milking.

Shortly after, Steve married his wife, Cheryl. Together they purchased the farm in rural Stearns County near Albany, Minn., that they still own and operate today and where they raised their children. This farm also is where the Schlangens have established a long history of conservation work that most recently has included cover crops, vegetative buffer strips, grassed waterways, water-and-sediment control basins, reduced tillage, and no till.

These efforts by the Schlangens also have significantly involved working with the Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) and Waite Park Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Office.

Given their conservation efforts to improve their land's soil health, prevent soil erosion, send cleaner water downstream and serve as role models for others, the Schlangens have been chosen by the Stearns SWCD as the 2021 Outstanding Conservationists for Stearns County.

“Being recognized for continuing to improve our land and our story every day is quite the honor,” said Steve. “Each person has a great story to tell and should be continually improving that story every day. Be open-minded about the possibility of conservation practices and talk with other landowners and farmers to hear about their experiences while continuing to share your story.”

The Schlangens will be recognized in December at the annual convention of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) in Bloomington, Minn. *The Farmer Magazine* will present them, along with other counties' Outstanding Conservationists, with a certificate for their dedication to conservation.

Currently, the Schlangens milk 60 Holsteins with a Lely robotic milker and raise their own feed on 200 acres of corn, soybeans, barley, and alfalfa.

With funding assistance from NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Schlangens built a manure-stacking slab that allows them to store manure and use it to apply the nutrients at the right source, rate, time, and place. They also use low-disturbance manure injection to ensure the manure's nutrients are incorporated in the soil to reduce runoff risks.

They also work with a Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) to determine nutrient needs and conduct grid soil sampling to help select the fields needing additional or minimal nutrients.

The Schlangens have participated in the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) in 2005, 2015 and 2021. Through this program and working with NRCS and SWCD staff, the Schlangens have been able to continually improve and expand their existing nutrient and pest management while working to reduce nutrient runoff.

In 2016, the Schlangens became water-quality certified through the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP), which provided a whole-farm review of their operation to see where they could improve conservation efforts.

“We want to make sure that the land will be here for the next generation,” said Steve. “By implementing conservation practices on our farm, we are doing the most we can to contribute to ensuring our land is here for generations and that we have clean, safe water.”

The Schlangens dairy farm is in the Backes Lake Subwatershed. Water from their farm eventually flows into the Sauk River and then into the Mississippi River. Their choices to conserve soil, prevent erosion and improve water quality positively affect many downstream in their watershed but also people hundreds of miles away.

“The Schlangens have set an excellent example of what it means to be environmentally sound stewards of the land in Stearns County,” said Dennis Fuchs, Stearns SWCD district administrator. “They are open-minded on trying new ways to improve their land and serve as

role models for neighboring farmers not only in the area but throughout the county with Steve's involvement in the agricultural community.”

Steve has been an advocate for conservation practices and management by working with neighbors as well as being involved with many agricultural organizations. These groups have included: AMPI Board (chairman); National Milk Producers Federation; Headwaters Agricultural Sustainability Partnership (HASP); Minnesota Milk Policy Committee; and Minnesota Dairy Initiative.

Steve also has traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with legislators to discuss agricultural policy and issues. He was invited to the U.S. Capitol for the signing of the 2018 Farm Bill by then-U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson, of Minnesota.