



Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Janski Farms, of St. Augusta, Honored for their Conservation Efforts

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



The Janskis are a fourth-generation family that homesteaded their farm in 1940. The family farm is owned and operated by Rich and Marlys Janski, sons Thomas and Daniel along with their families, and Rich's parents Bob and Joanne Janski.

Currently, Janskis milk 200 dairy cows with Lely robotic milkers, feed out 750 head of steers, and graze beef cow-calf pairs and chickens.

For the past several years, Janski Farms of St. Augusta, has been implementing conservation practices on their farm. "We attended a Soil Warrior/ETS Strip-Till Conference in 2016," said Thomas Janski. "One of the topics that were talked about was cover crops and that got us thinking." From that point forward, the Janskis have moved away from conventional farming practices.

The farm encompasses a wide range of soils and landscapes, and for that, they have had to overcome a variety of management challenges to best farm the land. Yet, that hasn't stopped the Janskis from

striving for diversification. Growing seven types of crops – corn, soybeans, alfalfa, oats, cereal rye, hemp, and canning peas, the Janskis can raise their own feed, as well as cereal rye seed for cover crops.

They have adopted and utilize no-till, cover crops, irrigation water management, nutrient, and pest management, and have over 30 alternative tile inlets installed to protect water quality. “Since transitioning over to cover crops and soil health related practices, we have to walk the fields to find problems now,” said Rich. “Prior to cover crops, erosion problems were inevitable.”

Originally, Janskis started off experimenting with a single species cover crop. Since then, they have planted cover crop mixes with up to 25 different species. In addition to soil health benefits, cover crops are also planted to assist with bees, birds, wildlife habitat, and pest management. “We weren’t expecting the cover crops and no-till practices to work,” said Rich. “The first year trying out conservation practices, Thomas knifed corn into alfalfa and that was one of the best crops we had ever seen. We were not expecting that.”

The Janskis are continually looking for ways to be innovators – both in and out of the field. For example, they have modified a drill to inter-seed cover crops, they mechanically terminate cover crops with a roller crimper, as well as experiment with inter-seeding a mix of cover crops into both 30-inch and 60-inch corn rows.

By working closely with the Stearns County SWCD, Janski Farms has been able to successfully participate in various conservation programs throughout the years, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s (MDA) Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP), and NRCS’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

Their farm has been water quality certified since April 2021 through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s (MDA) MN Ag Water Quality Certification Program. Implementing conservation practices has allowed them to address their resource concerns as well as offset the risks that come along with changes in cropland management. Additionally, they have been able to continually improve their land, making it more productive than when they started farming it.

Thanks to these programs and Janskis willingness to try and be open-minded, they have not only been able to find a more sustainable and efficient way to farm, but they also serve as a model for how these working land conservation practices do work and thrive on various soil types and landscapes.

By utilizing a diverse cropping rotation along with various conservation practices, the Janskis are seeing soil health benefits such as reduced erosion and weed pressure as well as savings in fertilizer/pesticide inputs and fuel/machinery costs. The Janskis have shown they are committed to conservation practices by selling their tillage equipment. Because of their choice to commit (to conservation), they also saved numerous tanker loads of fuel due to less passes on the field.

Although Janskis have seen many successes with their conservation practices, regenerative agriculture is not without its challenges, sometimes even failures. “It hasn’t been completely successful,” said Daniel. “I am still learning.” The Janskis recognize that the one size fits all approach doesn’t apply with their diverse landscape, and that each year presents different challenges. They continually strive to adapt from year-to-year and be proactive in their planning techniques.

“For someone who may be thinking about pursuing cover crops or any type of conservation practices, start out small,” said Rich. “Walk before running. See what works best and work up from there.” “Learn as you go,” added Daniel. “Build a community you can trust and have someone to go to for questions and guidance.”

Because of their experiences and willingness to share their knowledge and findings, they have served as a mentor for other farmers interested in innovating technology and conservation practices. They partnered and continue to partner with the Stearns County SWCD and various other organizations on field days, outreach opportunities, and participate on farmer panels. Additionally, they hosted two different groups of Ukraine farmers on their farm in 2021.

The Janskis as well as their neighbors and those downstream reap the benefits of their conservation successes. Given their conservation efforts, the Janskis have been chosen by the Stearns County SWCD as the 2022 Outstanding Conservationist for Stearns County.

In December, Janskis were honored at the annual convention of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) in Bloomington, Minn. *The Farmer Magazine* presented them, along with other counties’ Outstanding Conservationists, with a certificate for their dedication to conservation.

“It is an honor to be selected and recognized for our efforts,” said Daniel. “But we certainly were not expecting this recognition. We would not be able to do what we do without our family, employees, and the SWCD guidance. They play a large role in our farm being successful.”

When Rich and Daniel are not on the farm, they can be found fishing, hunting, and spending time with family. Daniel also can be found in his garden experimenting with regenerative practices.

Adopting conservation practices has not only helped them work towards their current goals, but also their future goal – securing the next generation's ability to farm.