



Stearns Conservation District

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Kerfeld Hill-View Farm 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.



Situated amidst the rolling hills of rural Stearns County, sits Kerfeld Hill-View Farm. Owned and operated by the Kerfeld family, conservation is a top priority, with a focus on protecting the environment, improving the land for future generations, and producing high-quality products for their animals.

The farm has been in the Kerfeld family for 60 years ever since Art and Rosie Kerfeld (first generation farmers) purchased it in 1963. Since then, the farm continues to grow and has evolved into three generations working together – Art and Rosie, Tim and Carrie, and their children - Nicholas (Kristin and their three children, Carly, Henry, and Aiden), Jessica (Michael and their daughter, Kennedy), Nathan, Isaac, and Riley.

“Involving the next generation brings a whole new level into farming,” said Tim. “Both Nicholas and Nathan attended Ridgewater College, which has expanded their knowledge. Both have been able to bring that knowledge back to the farm,” added Carrie.

The Kerfelds currently milk 300 dairy cows using Lely robotic milkers, raise 80-100 beef steers, and farm 600 acres of corn (grain and silage), alfalfa, soybeans, grass-legume hay, and cover crops.

Despite the challenge of diverse landscapes and soil types, the Kerfelds have persevered by implementing conservation practices that maintain productivity while preserving natural resources and promoting long-term soil health on their farm. “We have variable soil,” said Tim. “It goes from sand to gravel to peat ground and everything in between.” Because of the variable soil types, Art started with contour strip-crop farming in 1965 which the Kerfelds continue to implement it.

Because of their conservation mind set, they have adopted and utilize no-till, strip-till, vertical tillage, nutrient and pest management, grid soil sampling, precision ag technology, and buffer strips between fields and waterways. In fact, Art installed the first grassed waterway in 1965, which is still in place today.

“Some of the practices that are recommended now, we have been doing them for years,” said Tim. “It is just a given on our farm.”

They also utilize low disturbance manure injection on their fields utilizing the dairy cow’s manure, which helps replenish their soil nutrients, increase the water holding capacity and reduces the chances of runoff into nearby bodies of water.

“We really take into consideration the neighbors because there are a lot of lakes and homes surrounding the farm and land,” said Carrie. “We are conserving where we can and keeping nutrients at bay.”

Additionally, they utilize variable rate population and precision maps to ensure that there is no overlap of applications across the field. This ensures that only the recommended rate is applied when and where the field requires, resulting in less inputs and saving the Kerfelds time and money.

In addition to managing their farm and land, they also offer custom crop services including soil sampling, GPS mapping, planting, and harvesting. Because of this, other farmers are involved with conservation practices. “We share information with them, and they share information with us,” said Tim. “Whenever there is an opportunity to use and share the information, we do.”

The Kerfelds experience and willingness to share knowledge make them not only a valuable mentor for their neighbors and other landowners, but also for their Tim and Carrie’s daughter, Jessica, and her husband, Michael, who recently started farming on their own.

“Don’t be discouraged by one bad year,” said Tim. “Be opened minded on trying new practices. You’re going to have a bad year, but you can have a bad year on anything. It is not a fool proof system.”

By working closely with the Stearns County SWCD, the Kerfelds have been able to successfully participate in various conservation programs throughout the years, including the Natural Resources Conservation Services' (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's (MDA) Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP), and NRCS's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

They participate in the Headwaters Agriculture Sustainability Partnership (HASP) Return-on-Investment project through Environmental Initiative, with support from the Stearns County SWCD. The Return-on-Investment project analyzes the relationship between on-farm conservation and finances on row crop and integrated dairy operations.

Kerfelds have been water quality certified since August 2019 through the MAWQCP. 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.

Given their conservation efforts, the Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) has chosen the Kerfelds as the 2023 Outstanding Conservationist for their dedication and commitment to conservation.

They will be recognized 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.

The Kerfelds were also named the Stearns County Family Farm of the Year in 2000. Additionally, the family was the first host site of the Farm City Tour in 1998, later becoming Breakfast on the Farm, hosting it in again in 2021.

In their spare time, the Kerfelds enjoy snowmobiling, fishing, and spending time together in the evenings and at the lake.

Though the Kerfelds continue to build their three generational farm doing what they love together – working and caring for the land – they are humbled to be acknowledged for their conservation efforts.