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Master Conservationist Presentations - 2003

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MASTER CONSERVATIONIST PRESENTATIONS – 2003

September 22, 2003

Production Agriculture – District A

We begin our Master Conservationist recognition in Production Agriculture with the "Buskirk Family" of Hemingford in the Panhandle. Will David and Toni Buskirk, Dean and Sonya Buskirk, Chad Buskirk, and Dustin and Shelly McConville, please come forward? They started with a "half-section" which has grown to 2,855 acres, as well as a tree-planting business. The family "formed" a partnership in 1995 and named it "Trees Are Us" in 1998. They have used no-till farming on 1,000 acres of cropland since 1980 and planted over 165,000 trees. A low-pressure irrigation system "saves" about 400 acre inches of water "every" growing season. They built their own "no-till" tree planter for "differing" soil conditions and a machine to install biodegradable weed barriers. Their enthusiasm for trees is "contagious" as they visit with others and perform "volunteer-work" in the area. Their "unique" tree-planting equipment is made available nationwide, which results in "the planting" of more than 2 million trees in over 10 states "annually." Congratulations to the Buskirks.

Production Agriculture – District B

The Hugh and Joyce Clarke and the Michael and Michelle Clarke families of Berwyn are the Master Conservationists in the north-central district. They operate the Plainview Ranch, which began as 160 acres of grassland in 1899 and now includes nearly 7,000 acres. This highly-erodible land has benefitted from pasture rotation, windbreaks, cross-fencing, reduced tillage, terraces, and a grassed waterway. Range-seeding and converting cropland to native grasses improved both the quality and quantity of forage, which then made it possible to increase the stocking rate. Trees provide windbreaks for 550 cows and calves, reduce wind erosion, and provide additional wildlife-habitat. The Clarkes host a two-day event for children in nearby pre-schools so young people can get hands-on experience for the "Ag in the Classroom" program. The Clarkes also sent videos and visited the classrooms of the students. Hugh Clarke is a charter-member of Pheasants Forever and raises birds for the local chapter. Congratulations to the Clarke families.

Production Agriculture – District C

Master Conservationists in the northeast district are Don and Julie Jarecke (Ja-re-key) of Fullerton. Conservation does not have to be fancy to work for the Ja-re-keys. The family takes pride in water-savings through the Lower Loup Natural Resources District's "gates and gaskets" program. Don and Julie believe in keeping the groundwater both clean and safe. The Lower Loup NRD's test plot on the farm demonstrates ways to keep non-point source pollution from contaminating the aquifer below. By taking part in the groundwater nitrate demonstration program, valuable information can be obtained for use by the Lower Loup NRD and University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Extension for other farmers. They have cut back on their fertilizer inputs by making use of nitrates in the water. Other savings have come from ridge till, more efficient water control, low pressure pivots, drop nozzles, surge valves, and storing water until it can be used beneficially to meet crop irrigation requirements. Congratulations to the Ja-re-keys.

Production Agriculture – District D

A fourth generation family farm operated by Dennis and Ruth Demmel (Dem-al) of Ogallala took Master Conservationist honors in the south-central district. Their operation includes 1,250 acres of cropped dryland, 240 acres of irrigated cropland, and nearly 84 Conservation Reserve Program acres. A diverse crop rotation system is used on both dryland and irrigated acres. The dryland rotation includes wheat, corn, sunflowers, peas, and fallow. The irrigated rotation is wheat, sunflowers, corn, and soybeans which also includes a tillage rotation of no-till, conventional tillage, and ridge till. Dennis and Ruth have added to windbreaks and use an innovative technique alternating six tree species in the same row. Several different cover crops on irrigated and dryland acres help fix nitrogen in the soil, build humus, and provide carbon sequestration. Each year, the Dem-als host a farm tour sponsored by the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, and he makes presentations to various groups. Congratulations to the Dem-als.

Production Agriculture – District E

Master Conservationist honors in the southeast district go to Craig and Marge Buescher (Bush-er) of DeWeese who operate a 1400 acre diversified crop and livestock farm. They began conservation-efforts on the farm in 1978 with contour and no-till crop practices. They rented a buffalo-slot-planter to use on dryland, side-hill acres and later used no-till and minimum-till on other dryland-and irrigated acres. They rebuilt terraces, installed 18,650 feet of new terraces, replaced a dam, and installed tile on an adjacent 320 acres, as well as windbreaks. The benefits were evident last year when the Bush-ers harvested 59 bushels of grain sorghum per acre when most dryland fields simply could not be harvested. In 1979 they built a waste storage pond for a new hog building. The pond provides aerobic-degradation of manure which is pumped on fields through a center pivot. In 1996 they planted 7,280 evergreens, walnut trees, and shrubs for buffers on both sides of the Little Blue River. The project was featured in a University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Extension circular. They also participated in the "Neighbor to Neighbor" project sponsored by Nebraska Natural Resources Districts. Congratulations to the Bush-ers.

Community Private Residence

No award given in 2003

Community Public

One of Northeast Nebraska's most diverse collections of woody plants is located in the Gilman Park Arboretum southwest of Pierce. The Park took Master Conservationist honors in the Community Public category. Gary Zimmer, park superintendent, will accept the award. Gilman Park features more than 200 labeled varieties of trees and shrubs, as well as 70 perennials. The Park is located around the 10-acre Bill Cox Memorial Lake and features a 1.2 mile wood chip path which is accessible by those with disabilities. The path takes visitors over a historic bridge which was moved to the Park in 1994. The bridge, built in 1913, is one of two remaining "rigid-connected lattice pony truss" bridges in Nebraska and possibly in the entire nation! Other features of Gilman Park include playground and picnic areas, an enclosed shelter house, a camping area with electric and water hookups, lighted sand volleyball courts, and a new swimming pool. Gilman Park began as a city project in 1992.

The formation of a 12-member Arboretum Committee in 1994 became the basis for an arboretum friends group. The Arboretum Committee developed a master plan with the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum headquartered at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. A memorial gift program was started to reduce the city's share of the cost and the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District provided a grant. Volunteers work nights and periodically are scheduled for both educational and labor projects. Seventeen area schools have the opportunity to use Gilman Park Arboretum for an outdoor classroom. Congratulations to all those involved.

Community - Business

No award given in 2003

Community- Youth Individual Award

No award given in 2003

Community Youth - Group Award

FINAL AWARD

Master Conservationist recognition in the Community Youth Group category goes to the Norris High School FFA Chapter. I would like to ask the chapter representative(s) (TBA) to come forward. The

FFA Chapter's "Safe Water Tomorrow Through Pollution Prevention Today Project" began in 1994. The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department provided instruction on wellhead safety. Students were trained in collecting water samples, completing a water safety checklist, and interpreting nitrate levels. Water samples were tested by the State Laboratory and students shared their results with well owners. In 2000 a comprehensive joint project was developed with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, Norris FFA, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Extension in Gage and Lancaster counties, as well as the Lower Platte South and the Nemaha Natural Resources Districts. A Federal 319 grant was obtained to help finance the project. More than 465 wells have been tested to date toward the goal of 600 wells. Norris FFA members have identified 20 wells which will be sealed and capped. Through this project, Norris FFA members have completed a variety of activities designed to educate the Nebraska public about taking care of the water supply for future generations. These students have been able to experience natural resource conservation and

education through hands-on learning. They also have learned
valuable" career skills, not only the water testing skills, but also
communication, problem solving, pride in their work, developing a
quality product, and many more work skills. Congratulations to the
Norris High School FFA Chapter and the agencies and individuals
involved in this outstanding project.