

CONNECTING MINNESOTA FARMERS TO SOURCE WATER PROTECTION

Communication among state agencies, local USDA offices and county Soil and Water Conservation Districts

The Problem:

Informing land owners about Farm Bill programs that can link farming practices to source water protection is difficult without the participation of county level agricultural agencies.

The Approach:

The Minnesota Departments of Agriculture and Health along with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) meet annually to identify opportunities for supporting source water protection efforts. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, which coordinates Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) efforts, and the Minnesota Rural Water Association (MRWA) also participate and provide a direct link to county SWCD staff. This partnership has developed over the past decade and has become a principle mechanism for coordinating state funds with Farm Bill funds to increase the effectiveness of drinking water protection efforts in agricultural areas.

The Outcome:

Developing and maintaining good communication between state offices and county offices is critical to landowner acceptance of alternative farming practices and focusing these behavioral changes on priority wellhead protection areas. Good communication begins with sharing information between the state and local SWCD and USDA offices about: 1) the locations of wellhead protection areas and 2) which should receive priority to reduce farming impacts on groundwater quality. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) provides updates of this information on a quarterly basis to its other partners. Participation by the MRWA groundwater technician, who is funded through the Farm Service Agency, has been particularly helpful in communicating this information to county SWCD and USDA office staff. Involvement by county level staff is essential because they have credibility with land owners and often provide advice to them regarding farming practices.

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) communicates the locations of priority wellhead protection areas to farm consultants and various farming groups because they are also contacted by landowners for advice. Furthermore, MDA has assigned staff to work with landowners on nutrient management issues in these priority areas and has state funded programs to assist with implementing management practices for reducing nitrogen loading to groundwater. The groundwater protection goals of MDA mesh very well with the source water protection goals of MDH. Both agencies view each other's efforts as mutually supportive and continued interaction has always resulted in better ways to cooperate and work with local partners.

For More Information:

Aaron Meyer
Phone: 320 – 808 – 7293
Aaron.meyer@mrwa.com

Art Persons
Phone: 507 – 206 – 2734
Art.persons@state.mn.us

Bruce Montgomery
Phone: 651 – 201 – 6178
Bruce.montgomery@state.mn.us

Key Collaborators

- County Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Minnesota Rural Water Association
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service