

Campbell Conservation District (No. 44)

History from 1969 publication:

Campbell County is located in north central South Dakota along the North Dakota border, with the Missouri River as the west border. The county was created in 1873 and organized in 1883. The early settlers were of German and Scandinavian background, and at the turn of the century, groups of Russo-Germans migrated to the eastern part of the county.

The major drainage of the county is into the Missouri River through Spring Creek. In the eastern and southern part of the county are many shallow lakes and sloughs. The topography of the county varies, with some steep land along the Missouri River, while most of the county is rolling with some fairly level areas. The soils vary from silt loams to loams in the west part of the county, and in the east mostly loams with some bordering onto sandy loams in the southeast and south. The soils are all well drained except in the areas of sloughs and shallow lakes. These soils are productive and well suited to general farming and livestock production, but attention to moisture and soil conservation has always been very important, as well as the maintenance of organic matter and fertility.

Early settlers found many types of variation in the soils of Campbell County. Some areas produced a short, nutritious grass, while others produced a tall slough grass. They found that lands in many parts of the county were very productive. Many of the early settlers established farmsteads on this productive ground while others settled on the sandy, rocky soil.

The resources of Campbell County's soils were exploited from the early 1880s to the 1940s. To the early settlers, a good burn meant a good crop. The exploitation of the soil, plus a severe drought in the 1930s, caused many of the original residents of Campbell County to leave the area. Many of the people migrated west and found other occupations. As a result of the organization of the Conservation District and similar conservation agencies, this misuse of the land steadily decreased and Campbell County soon became productive again.

Eight Extension Demonstration Farms, some of which were started in 1939, did a great deal to help farmers become acquainted with the different ways of conserving soil and moisture. The first demonstration farm was laid out on land controlled by G. M. Anderson in the southwest part of Campbell County. This farm was on very rough land but showed that farming on the contour will hold considerable water that otherwise runs off. The next demonstration farm in the northeast part of the county was land owned by Calvin Ochnser and his brothers. Soil conditions in this part of the county were better for contour farming and water spreading.

By the late 1930s, the demand for assistance for this work was increased. Many farmers were cooperating with the Extension Service and had excellent conservation programs on their farms before the Conservation District was formed, and AAA had farm committee men trained to assist farmers in the development of dams and dugouts. The idea of organizing the Campbell County Soil Conservation District was to obtain better trained technical help. The people at this time could foresee that the workload for this type of work was greater than the farmer, field man, county agent, and specialists could carry out in the county. In 1939, the county Extension Agent held twelve meetings regarding soil and water conservation. Four tours were held for Campbell County farmers. Three of these tours were held in Campbell County, and the other tour was held at the Brown-Marshall Conservation District. From 1939 to 1947, the Extension Agent developed a committee on soils and water. As this committee grew and learned more about the methods of conserving soils and water, the need for a soil conservation district became more apparent.

Although there was some opposition to the organization of the Conservation District, after 78 educational meetings, of which 24 were held in 1947, in June of 1947 the Conservation District was voted in with 96.8 percent of the voters in Campbell County in favor. At that time, the Conservation District covered all of Campbell County except two townships.

Soon after the Conservation District was organized, the supervisors were chosen. They met and elected officers, prepared and signed the needed agreements with cooperating agencies, and prepared their program of needs and activities. They named their major problems as erosion, both wind erosion and water erosion, and poor soil structure. They proposed to meet those problems by establishing such practices as wind strip cropping, planting windbreaks, improving crop rotations, planting grass for hay and pasture, improving tillage practices, and irrigation where possible.

The original supervisors were Chairman George Titland of Mound City, Vice-Chairman Calvin Ochser of Herreid, Treasurer G.M. Anderson of Glenham, Secretary Mike Madden of Mound City, George M. Seiler of Artas, and David C. Wittmeier of Pollock. Others who were very active in the organization of the Conservation District were Otto Schick of Eureka, John Steiger of Glenham, Hans Hanson of Mound City, Karl Deibert of Herreid, and Emanuel Ochsner of Herreid. Some of the first personnel assigned to the Conservation District were Ray Huxtahle, Clem Kehrwald, Henry Dahlquist, Donn Bastian, Roy V. Kundert, Norval Rosengren, Verle Anderson, Wayne Noble, and Doug Stulken.

Updated information provided in 2012:

Soon after its induction, the Conservation District found much success in planting windbreaks and shelterbelts throughout Campbell County. Farmers and landowners were rapidly discovering the need for soil and water conservation, wildlife habitat, and the necessity to control erosion. Conservation District personnel promoted the planting of shelterbelts and the early years of the Conservation District were some of the most successful tree planting years in the Conservation District's history. At this time, John Bechtold was a technician with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) with which the Conservation District shared an office. Bechtold assisted the Conservation District in their tree planting, and would throughout his career with the SCS. With this success came the need for a new tree planting machine, a "Nu-Way" planter purchased in 1968, which served as the Conservation District's only tree planting machine until it was replaced in 2010. It is estimated that the Nu-Way planter planted over one million trees in Campbell County during its tenure.

Throughout the years, the Conservation District became very instrumental in assisting landowners in their conservation efforts. The Conservation District used range tours and the Norbeck Pasture Research Center to educate landowners on the importance of planned grazing systems and to show the negative impacts of overgrazing. The Conservation District supported programs such as the Soil Bank and Water Bank, the Pollock/Herreid Irrigation Project, and the development of the Soil Survey by the Soil Conservation Service (SCS). Farming practices such as no-till and minimum till were also encouraged to further the prevention of soil erosion. The Conservation District's annual banquets became an avenue to award landowners throughout Campbell County for exemplary efforts in conservation. These annual awards banquets were highly attended, often times with four to five hundred Campbell County residents present. An award was given each year to a landowner for his efforts in planting and conserving trees, and another was given to a landowner for his efforts in conserving soil and moisture on his land. The banquets offered a meal, and each year a guest speaker was brought in to address conservation topics and congratulate the award recipients. Some of these speakers included SD

Governor Richard Kneip, outdoor radio & television host and wildlife conservation advocate Tony Dean, Attorney General Bill Janklow, and representatives from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and Department of Agriculture.

As many of the county's landowners got on board with the Conservation District's conservation efforts through the 1960s and 1970s, the Board of Supervisors wanted to continue to assist those landowners in implementing conservation practices on their land. As no-till and minimum till farming was becoming more popular, and farmers were seeing the benefit that it had in their operations, the Conservation District felt that renting no-till farm equipment to landowners was a critical way to continue their conservation efforts throughout the county. In the early 1980s, the Conservation District purchased a Horizon Grass Drill to provide landowners the opportunity to re-plant or enhance the grass on their farm. The conception of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) gave landowners the opportunity to convert cropland back to grass to aid in erosion control and provide wildlife habitat, and produced an even greater demand for a grass drill. A Concord 16-foot no-till air seeder was also purchased and provided to farmers to begin practicing no-till farming on their land. Marvin Volzke of Java was hired as equipment manager to oversee the maintenance and operation of the drills and tree planter. Marvin stayed with the Conservation District for over 10 years. During Marvin's last years as equipment manager, John Bechtold, a long-time SCS employee in the Herried Service Center was hired by the Conservation District. Bechtold had been hired by the SCS in 1965 and worked in the Herried office until his retirement 1993. It was that following season he began full time for the Conservation District and remained as the District Technician until he passed away in 2008. John worked in the Service Center for a total of 43 years, and was considered an expert in shelterbelt planting and conservation practices throughout Campbell County. Because of his accomplishments in conservation, in 1980 John was awarded runner-up as "Outstanding Conservation Technician" by the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts (SDACD). Throughout his years of service to conservation in Campbell County, John became the face of the Conservation District. His understanding of the field of conservation was immeasurable, and the knowledge he passed down to the landowners and Conservation District personnel is still widely used today.

The Campbell County Conservation District went through many more changes during the 1990s, including moving the office to Mound City. The county's Farm Service Agency (FSA) office was located in Mound City, and in an effort to provide producers with "one-stop farm shopping", in 1995 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) made the decision to move the SCS office, which was now renamed the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), into one building with the FSA in Mound City. Dependant on the assistance that the NRCS provided, the Conservation District soon followed suit and joined the NRCS in the Mound City USDA Service Center. In 1997, the Conservation District built a storage shed behind the Service Center, where it still serves as the Conservation District's tree cooler and cold storage today.

As the Conservation District's conservation efforts evolved over the years, thousands of acres of trees were planted, and the conversion to no-till farming was seen throughout the whole county. The Conservation District still provided no-till drills to producers, as well as continued planting shelterbelts and providing hand-plants, however in 2006 the Board of Supervisors wanted to further their conservation in Campbell County through water quality. With assistance from the South Dakota Department of Agriculture's Conservation Commission and the South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), they began the Spring Creek Watershed Assessment Project. The goal of this project was to target areas of non-point source pollution to Spring Creek, which flows throughout Campbell County and drains into the Missouri River, and offer landowners conservation practices to control the sources of pollution. Casey

Eisemann was hired in 2006 as Coordinator of the project, and remained in that role until the end of Phase One of the project in 2008. With the passing of Bechtold in 2008, the Board of Supervisors hired Eisemann to split his duties between Phase Two of the Spring Creek Watershed Project and assuming the duties of Conservation District Technician. Following the end of the Watershed Project in 2010, Eisemann became the full-time Technician for the Conservation District, and soon thereafter took over the secretarial duties from Cindi Rossow and became the Conservation District Manager, the position he remains in today. It was also in 2010 when long-time Conservation District Supervisor Lawrence Senftner passed away. Lawrence first joined the Conservation District Board of Supervisors in 1953 and remained on the Board for more than 57 years. Senftner's wife Alpha also played a significant role in the Conservation District's history, serving as the Bookkeeper and Administrative Secretary from 1967 to 1995.

Today, the Campbell County Conservation District offers the same services to Campbell County residents that it set out to when it was inducted in 1947. Shelterbelt planting and providing hand-plants remains the main service to landowners. It's estimated the Conservation District has planted over two million trees on over 4000 acres in Campbell County since 1947. The continued success of the CRP program and newly offered Cover Crop Initiative also provides a lot of business for the Conservation District's John Deere no-till drill. In addition, the Conservation District also offers custom seeding, grass and cover crop seed sales, and shelterbelt mowing. The Conservation District has also expanded its operation into a new shop building in Mound City. In 2010, the Board purchased the former Campbell County Highway Department shop building to provide more storage and equipment maintenance area, as well as the addition of bulk fuel to the Conservation District's operation. Today, the Board of Supervisors includes Chairman Jack Goetz of Eureka, Vice Chairman Darrell Bentz of Artas, Paul Weisbeck of Herreid, Brandon Ritter of Mound City, and Donald Wittmeier of Pollock, who is in his 54th year on the Board.

Others who have served on the Board since the original members include Ervin Grenz of Artas, 1949-1970; Lawrence Senftner of Mound City, 1953-2010; Eugene Rau of Java, 1956-1978; Albert Berreth of Artas, 1958-1976; Vernon Meyer of Pollock, 1970-1980; Wallace Kusler of Artas, 1977- 1988; Virgil Biel of Java, 1979-1985; Raymond Tangwell of Herreid, 1981-1983; Steve Martens, 1983-1986; Todd Biel of Java, 1986-2006; Alvin Fjeldheim of Pollock, 1986-1991; Martin Mickelson of Mound City, 1992-2006.