

Todd County Conservation District (No. 16)

Todd County is located in the south central part of the state and borders Nebraska. It comprises the present Rosebud Sioux Reservation and consequently, much of the land is tribal land. The county was created in 1909, but is not organized.

Topography of the area is generally undulating to steeply rolling with very limited level areas. The eastern part of the Conservation District drains into the Keya-Paha River and its several creeks. The western part drains into the Little White River through its creeks and tributaries. These rivers, creeks and springs constitute the natural water supply. Some of the low areas along streams have a high water table.

The soils of the area are primarily of a sandy nature, but with much variation. The heaviest soils are in the northeastern part of the county, while the south western portion is sand hills with practically no farming. The central and southeastern areas are sandy loam soils.

The Conservation District is in the 18 inch rainfall belt and does produce good native grasses suitable for both hay and grazing purposes. Over 100,000 acres are cropped, with about one third of that acreage in alfalfa. The land that is farmed is scattered pretty well over the county, except the sand hills of the southwest.

With the prevailing sandy soil and so much sloping land only a few years of cropped subjected the soil to both wind and water erosion. Of course, wind erosion is the chief culprit. The operators soon learned that the land must be handled with utmost care. As the dry years came along people were helpless to stop erosion. Many of them tried with little success. These few people decided to get together and do something about it.

They became aware of the opportunities offered by the USDA-Soil Conservation Service after the South Dakota Conservation Districts Law was passed. And so, they decided to proceed toward the organization of a district in Todd County. Since Todd County did not have a county agent, they went to Wesley Henke, the extension agent for White River, for guidance.

They held meetings, took trips to observe the operation of conservation districts, prepared news stories, and finally circulated a petition requesting a hearing to determine the need for organizing a soil conservation district in four townships in the east central part of the county.

A few of the farmers in the Rosebud area were interested in conservation work and had put conservation measures into practice for several years. This was the basic argument for organization of the Rosebud Soil Conservation District. From this interest, educational meetings, news articles, and field trips to other conservation districts in the area, leaders of the community were able to call a referendum vote of land owners in Township 38- Range 27, Township 38- Range 26, Township 37- Range 27, Township 37- Range 26, which was later to become the Rosebud Soil Conservation District. On December 2, 1940, the petition was filed with the State Conservation Committee. The State Conservation Committee acted favorably and called a public hearing at the John Carr School house on the 16th day of December, 1940. County Agent

Henke posted notice of this hearing at the Hidden Timber Store, Rock Creek Store, and the Carr School.

The interest voiced at the public hearing was encouraging, so ballots were prepared and mailed to all of the landowners in these four townships. On February 26, 1941, the ballots were tabulated at the AAA office in Mission, SD. William Whitcher was appointed superintendent of this referendum, Wesley Henke was clerk, and the Judges were Jay Tate, Tom Lyndon and John Larson. The Final count showed 60 land owners in favor of the conservation district organization and four opposed.

On March 5, 1941, at a meeting of the State Soil Conservation Committee, John B. Larson of Mission, SD, and Jay Tate of Valentine, NE, were appointed supervisors of the Conservation District for a one- year term. At this time, the Committee approved organization of the Rosebud Soil Conservation District. The board of supervisors for the Rosebud Soil Conservation District met April 3, 1941 to organize. They elected John Larson as chairman, Tom Lyndon as vice-chairman, Carl Anderson as treasurer, George Klein and Jay Tate served as supervisors on the first conservation district board. Wesley Henke acted as secretary for the Conservation District.

They immediately went to work and entered into a memorandum of Understanding with the USDA. The Soil Conservation Service assigned Robert M. Myers as the first Work Unit Conservationist.

The supervisors immediately set up a program of work and in this program they named the problems facing the area as:

- Damage from wind and water erosion;
- Too much land under plow;
- Overgrazing range and pasture lands;
- Rodents and hoppers destroyed grass stands;
- Weeds;
- Insufficient stock water supplies.

They proposed to meet these problems by using:

- Stubble mulch farming;
- Strip cropping, both contour and straight;
- Terraces.

Trees were planted, grass seeded, dams constructed and contour lines surveyed. The value of these conservation practices spoke for themselves, and soon other parts of Todd County asked to join the Conservation District. The Conservation District and the USDA-Soil Conservation Service held public hearings with landowners interested in joining the Conservation District. In 1943 twelve more townships were added, and by 1948 the entire Todd County area had been added to the Rosebud Soil Conservation District. This caused the Conservation District's name to be changed in January 1952 to the Todd County Soil Conservation District.

Many conservation practices were used by district cooperators throughout the years, but no one practice so greatly changed the landscape of the Todd County Soil and Water Conservation District as the planting of trees.

Limited tree plantings were made by the early settlers, but the tree planting program of the Todd County Soil and Water Conservation District instigated the majority of the present plantations.

The supervisors of the Conservation District were responsible for the functioning of the Conservation District program of work, the maintenance of equipment, the distribution of seed and tree planting stock, and the routing of equipment among the cooperators.

In view of the emergency that existed since the war (World War II) was declared, it was the responsibility of the supervisors to encourage production of all the needed foodstuffs that this area was capable of producing. However, cultivation and destructive grazing of the ranges and pastures would not pay, and were not advocated.

The Conservation District started its program and moved rapidly in the conservation direction. As early as 1941, funds accumulated by the Conservation District from its tree planting program and grass seeding program, were spent for the purchase of sub-surface tillage equipment. The feeling of the board of supervisors was that this type of machinery would provide the necessary tillage for effective conservation of soil moisture and reduce the hazard of wind and water erosion.

During the fall of 1941, a survey was made to locate and map different types of soil, degree of erosion, percent of slope, land use, streams, fences, and buildings. A range survey map was made in 1937 showing the vegetative types throughout Todd County.

1942 was the first complete year of Rosebud Conservation District work. The technical assistance of the Conservation District was supplied from the Soil Conservation Service, which was then located in Winner, SD. This placed the responsibility of contacting and selling conservation to landowners in the Conservation District on the supervisors.

Since this was in the time of war, conservation jobs that fell into a 'must' category for the war effort were those practices that lent themselves to an increase in crop production. The minimum essentials of the Conservation District agreement during the emergency included the starting of one or more conservation practices on each cooperating farm. The Conservation District had to adjust its work to meet the urgencies of the war effort by placing more stress on good land and livestock management, by simplifying the type of cooperative agreement used, and by readjusting work priorities.

Community spirit within the Conservation District seemed to grow with each new cooperative enterprise undertaken. During 1942, weather and growing conditions were at their best and all crop yields were good.

The Conservation District received the following assistance from the Soil Conservation Service during the early years to help carry out the conservation program: Equipment- one grass drill (full-time), one 'Cargo' truck (part-time), one tree planter (part-time), one W-30 tractor (part-time), about 3,300 pounds of grass seed, and about 45,000 trees and shrubs (enough to plant about 95 acres).

In 1943, the Conservation District increased its size from 4 townships to 16 townships completely covering the east half of Todd County. After many applications were received from farmers outside the Conservation District and since supervisors were assisting groups of farmers outside the Conservation District with conservation problems, it was decided the Conservation District should be larger. The Conservation District assisted interested groups with all the procedures required to make this addition. After fifteen months of petitioning and hearings, the territory was added.

Prices charged for conservation equipment from the Conservation District:

Drill.....	\$0.15 per acre
Fresno.....	\$1.00 per day
Planting machine.....	\$0.25 per acre
Tillage machines.....	\$0.10 per acre
Grape hoe.....	\$0.05 per acre

This was the only revenue for carrying on the Conservation District program.

The Conservation District program increased in 1944 to include control of noxious weeds. About 100 pounds of altacide chlorate was obtained by the Conservation District for the eradication of noxious weeds.

As the war continued there was less manpower for Conservation District activities as well as at home. Even so, the Conservation District program promoting conservation practices increased.

The Annual Report of the supervisors in 1943 states: "We, the supervisors of the Rosebud Soil Conservation District are still in the harness. Handicapped though we be, our boys and young men gone, our implements curtailed, each of us as well as our neighbors are straining every muscle to bring victory as soon as possible. We are sold on the idea of Soil Conservation and realize it cannot be something done, finished, and forgotten. We shall continue to plan for better methods and practices and endeavor to carry them out with the assistance of the Soil Conservation Service."

The supervisors in 1943 were: Tom Lydon, George Klein, C.A. Anderson, C.W. McCormick, and Jay Tate.

The war ended, the men who were in the service came home, and the Conservation District grew by leaps and bounds. In 1948, the remaining half of the county came into the Conservation District by the same methods as previously stated. The name of the Conservation District was changed from Rosebud Soil Conservation District to Todd County Conservation District and then to Todd County Soil and Water Conservation District. Many things changed in those first twenty

years. We have many people to thank for their donated time and effort to make soil conservation the thing that it was at the end of those first years. Many new implements came out along with new ideas on how to protect and conserve our soil and water. The original dedication of the people in this country to conserve the soil still remained.

The Next 30 Years- 60's to 90's

In the early 1960's the board was working on its Long Range Program and getting it published. In the fall of 1962, the Conservation District had a different kind of awards program and banquet. To kick off the distribution of the Long Range Plan booklet, the Conservation District held the banquet and program outdoors at the Archie Tate ranch. Displays were set up and the guest speaker was United States Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman.

The Todd County Soil Survey was also being done at this time. The field work for this was headed by Robert Springer and a crew of soil scientists from the state. It was published and later distributed to the farmers and ranchers in Todd County in 1974-75. The Soil Survey is helpful in determining the land classifications from classes I through VII and the capabilities for land use.

In the sixties, the main conservation practice was planting trees and Chinese elm was the dominate species. Strip cropping, terraces, sod water way development, dams, and dugouts were other practices. About the only income the Conservation District had was from the tree planting program. There was some native grass seeding with very little success. The correct type of drills were not available and the seed source was not native to South Dakota. A lot of low producing go-back land that had been farmed in the thirties was left to return to natural vegetation on its own. The Conservation District purchased an interseeder in the sixties to help seed these acres to native grasses with remarkable success.

In the late 60's, by an agreement of the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts, the districts aligned their titles to include all areas of resource conservation, not just soil and water. This Conservation District then became the Todd County Conservation District.

By 1967, some 4000 acres of farmstead and feedlot windbreaks were established in the Conservation District. In addition, 107 miles of single and multi-row field windbreaks had been planted. The resulting plots of green speak well for those individuals who believed trees would grow in this semi-arid district.

In the 1970's the need for more emphasis on range land was realized since over 85% of Todd County is grassland. This helped improve stocking rates and weaning weights on calves and yearlings. The Rancher's workshop began when a group of ranchers from Todd and Mellette County were invited to Mission and Tex Lewis from SDSU came to speak about topics affecting agriculture at the time. Word spread and other ranchers wanted to attend so the workshop was opened to the public. The workshop alternates between Todd and Mellette County each year.

Tree Planting was still a big part of the conservation district program. Terracing, contour farming, and strip cropping lessened because of larger machinery and the fast pace with which agriculture was changing.

In the 1980's with low commodity prices caused by surpluses, agriculture hit an all-time low. With the drop in farmland prices and high interest rates, farmers were going broke, banks were failing, and the economic impact was felt across the nation. When the 1985 Farm Bill was written, everybody hated it, but it helped turn agriculture around. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) took millions of acres of marginal farmland out of production for ten years by paying the producers an annual rental fee. Deficiency payments were also paid to farmers who participated in the acreage reduction program (ARP) to make up for low commodity prices. The lower CCC loan rates got the government out of the grain storage business and helped reduce surpluses.

The 90's were a busy time for the Todd County Conservation District. The Conservation District partnered with extension to host an environmental fair for Todd County elementary schools. Conservation District Manager Linda Blom and Extension Agent Greg Nollette started The Environmental Fair that is held annually, all schools within the boundaries of Todd County are invited to attend. The fair typically draws 230-300 kids each year.

The Bootstraps Program was developed during 1989-90 in response to requests for assistance in dealing with farm crisis related issues. Ranchers in Todd and Mellette Counties were concerned about the future of their operations and community. To address the concerns, local conservation and extension staff developed the series of programs that became known as Bootstraps. The program was built around the premise that a sustainable operation results when good resource conservation practices are followed. Families who participate in the program make a two-year commitment. The first they learn about farm/ranch management from four prospective – family, livestock and crop production, finances and natural resources. During the second, they use the knowledge gained to develop a holistic, sustainable management plan for their operation.

The Bootstraps pilot group, consisting of Todd/Mellette County farm/ranch families was formed during 1990. Based on the experiences of the group the program was refined and conducted for a second group of 18 Todd/Mellette County families before taking it a wider audience. Since its inception, approximately 350 farm/ranch families who manage over 1.5 million acres have participated in the program. Initial funding for the Bootstraps program came from the SD Conservation Commission Conservation Grants Fund. Several other agencies signed on to help, including: SDSU-Cooperative Extension Service, Todd & Mellette County Conservation Districts, SD Department of Agriculture, and the USDA NRCS (then the SCS). Some of the people instrumental in the development and implementation of the Bootstraps program include: Dave Steffen, Jeff Adrian, Dale Mallory, Milton Klein, Barry Dunn, Delvin Meyer, Clifford Klein, Harlan Schem, Bill Cumbow, Bonnie Metcalf, Sena Lauritson, Mike Carson, Darrell Glenn, Maurice Hiatt, Andy Harris, Lawrence Peacock, Robert Fronek, and Skee Rasmussen.

The Todd County Conservation District celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1992. The activities began with a range tour of the Keith Whipple ranch south of Rosebud. Mr. Whipple was the

winner of the South Dakota Range Manager of the Year Award. The Conservation District also held a program featuring a one act play 'Planting in the Dust' performed by Janet Kirschenmann, and address by South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture, Jay Swisher

The turn of the Century brought fabric mulch into Todd County. The practice reduces maintenance of newly planted trees, by reducing competition from weeds and grass, and retaining moisture for the trees to utilize. This is very critical in the dry years. Many of the shelterbelts that were planted in the 1940-60's are being renovated.

Conservation Priorities for the twenty first century include:

- Improving stock water for better grazing distribution and protection of riparian areas;
- Soil, wind, and water erosion;
- Shelterbelts for livestock and wildlife.

Todd, Mellette, Bennett and Jones Counties worked together to submit a grant to the State Conservation Commission to fund the Prairie Area Technician. Tyrell Tucker served this position for the duration of the grant and is currently working as the Mellette and Todd County technician. This allows the Conservation District to be involved in many conservation practices.

In Review

Over the years, many things have been available to cooperators through the Conservation District such as duckfoot, interseeder, culverts, grass seed, and others. Seeding of both tame and native grasses have been encouraged and made possible by the Conservation District having appropriate planting equipment available.

The tree planting program has progressed from *heeling in* trees, to a mobile unit cooler, to the present day storage facility. A tree planter and crew are provided to assist with windbreak, shelterbelt, wildlife habitat, and snow fence plantings. Todd County Conservation District has planted over 6600 acres of trees since it records were kept in 1946. Many of the future planting will be renovations of the early tree belts.

Currently, the Conservation District is also involved in water quality issues, renewable resources such as solar wells, ponds for waterfowl habitat, pipelines for livestock water and protection of riparian areas, and other projects. Education is being fostered through Range Camp, Range Days, Ranchers' Workshops, Environmental Fairs, speech and poster contests. The Conservation District is also involved in the Lewis and Clark Watershed Improvement Project.

Some responsibility for conservation practices have changed over the years. Conservation practices in the early years were done voluntarily. For the most part, people were truly concerned with soil and water erosion losses on their fields and wanted to do something about it. Today, it seems, people are forced into a compliance plan and other programs in order to qualify for government payments. All this may not be bad but it is a shame it had to come to this.

District Conservationists and NRCS staff who have served this Conservation District have been: Robert Meyers, Carl Wilker, Cecil Jones, Herb Davis, James Habiger, Thomas Pozarnsky, Howard Wagner, Kevin Kerwald, Gilbert Bierwagen, Dave Bowes, Kim Halverson, David J. Steffen, Dave George, Alvin Tucker, JR Schmidt, Seanna Rugenstein, Derek Oliver, Lealand Schoon, Nell Heying, and Mary Scott.

Extension agents have helped a great deal with the organization and continuation of the Conservation District with some having served as secretary for the board.

Persons having served as Supervisors or Assistant Supervisors are: Jay Tate, John Larson, Carl Anderson, George Klein, Thomas Lydon, Charles McCormick, James Dowd, Willie Christensen, Earl Millard, Lloyd Bristow, CW McCormick, Fred Einsphar, James Hawk, Clarence Nollette, Albert Lanz, Clifford Klein, Milford Fernen, Earl Millard, Paul Schemm, Neal Larson, Archie Tate, Verl Holmes, William Christensen, John Fernen, Harland Schemm, Ronald McCoy, Clifford Klein, Clinton Kalblinger, James Dowd, Keith Sluetter, Lloyd Bristow, Earl Millard, Albert Lanz, Milford Fernon, C.W. McCormick, Carl Waln, Virgil Mizner, John Haukaas, J.D. Shelbourn, Jr., Keith Snethen, Robert Pavelka, Kenneth Halligan, Howard Heinert, Gerald Moeller, Gladys Anderson, Scott Shelbourn, Milton Klein, Walt Lurz, Bill Cumbow, Elliot Yenglin, Mary Beth Assman, Scott Flanery, Shawn Klein.

The 2011 Todd County Conservation District board of supervisors consists of: Chairman Bill Cumbow, Vice-Chairman Elliot Yenglin, Treasurer MaryBeth Assman, Scott Flanery and Walt Lurz; Shawn Klein, advisor

Range Manager of the Year Award winners from Todd County

- 1964 Archie Tate
- 1983 E.J. "Bud" Eddie
- 1991 Keith Whipple
- 1999..Schneider Bros.

Several farms have been designated TREE FARMS over the years. This may not be a complete list but includes the following:

R.C. Hallock	Keith Schlueter	E.J. Eddie
Arnold Cattle Co.	James Dowd	L7 Ranch (Dunns)
C.A. Anderson	Walter Heinert	Melvin Haase
L.E. Jones	Albert Lanz	
Fred Einspar	Schemm Bros.	

Currently listed as tree farms in Todd County are:

Gene Eddie	Charlie Moe
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