

One of the fondest memories I have involves wandering through the fields behind grandpa's yard. My sisters and I would run through the corn, and pretend that we were on an African safari being chased by a dangerous lion or throw a piece of wheat in our mouths and be sheriffs from the west attempting to catch the dangerous outlaws. Every year there were different games to play as every year there was a different crop. From corn, to soy to wheat to oats to alfalfa, the farmers would rotate their crops in order to ensure that their soil would maintain its nutrients. However in recent years the fields have become a little less diverse. Farmers have traded their habits of crop rotation and other conservation methods and efforts in order to initially bring a large profit. What many of these farmers fail to see is that conservation efforts can actually have positive a economic impact on America.

So let's run through the corn to see how our recent lack of conservation is the dangerous lion chasing us through a safari, then mosey on through the wheat fields to see the valiant efforts of conservation sheriffs across South Dakota and the economic benefits ending the outlaws' crusades can bring the town.

As we enter the cornfield it becomes apparent that in recent years farmers have strayed away from their post dust bowl conservation efforts. Crop rotations have become less and less common as farmers opt to sew only the crops that will sell for the highest price. The New York Times reported in 2012 that the number of crops farmers rotate has dwindled down to two: corn, and soybeans. Along with nixing crop rotation

farmers have also turned to reducing their shelter belts and weed control. When farmers choose to not replant the trees that function as a windbreak they fail to see the detrimental effects not doing so can have on their land and home. Shelterbelts help to avoid the erosion of precious topsoil which crops need to survive, and can take upwards of seven years to replace. These strategically placed trees can help to protect livestock and encourage weight gain, and increase crop yields by 20 percent annually, ultimately making what the farmer produces a higher quality and far more profitable. Shelterbelts also help to save money on fuel costs used on snow removal as they can help control drifting snow.

Another problem farmers face when they chose not to participate in conservation efforts are noxious weeds. Various forms of noxious weeds such as Canadian thistle and leafy spurge can produce thousands of seeds per plant. They can easily spread throughout an entire field over the course of just weeks, and devastate crop yields for years to come and reduce land values by over ten percent. States like South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, and North Dakota spend millions of dollars each year trying to control and maintain these dangerous weeds.

Thankfully we have a savior from these dangerous outlaws; South Dakota Conservation Districts. For example the Conservation Stewardship Program provides a supplemental source to farmers, who are willing to partake in crop rotations aimed at conservation, which provides an incentive for farmers who are focused on short term profits.

Another group working to ensure a more profitable way of life for farmers via conservation is the South Dakota Weed and Pest Commission. They help to provide awareness of costly noxious weeds by raising awareness through mapping infestations and doing workshops throughout the year to educate farmers on how to combat the infestation. They work with farmers to rid their land of invasive species and attempt to lobby for more state, local, and federal funding for education and eradication programs throughout the state of South Dakota.

Conservation Districts also help to preserve shelterbelt replanting in the state. Any farmer or large land owner can draw up a shelterbelt plan and send it in to their regional conservation district. The conservation district will work with the farmers to provide a functional plan, species diversity and can help guarantee delivery from local tree nurseries. They also go a step further in aiding farmers by providing free of charge assistance from the Resource Conservation and Forestry Division of the South Dakota Department of Agriculture.

Together these conservation habits can help bring back millions of dollars to the state of South Dakota by ensuring higher quality crop and agriculture yields. If we continue to support the Conservation Districts of South Dakota we will be able to see our lions and outlaws caged and put away –ensuring a better economic situation for the state of South Dakota and America.