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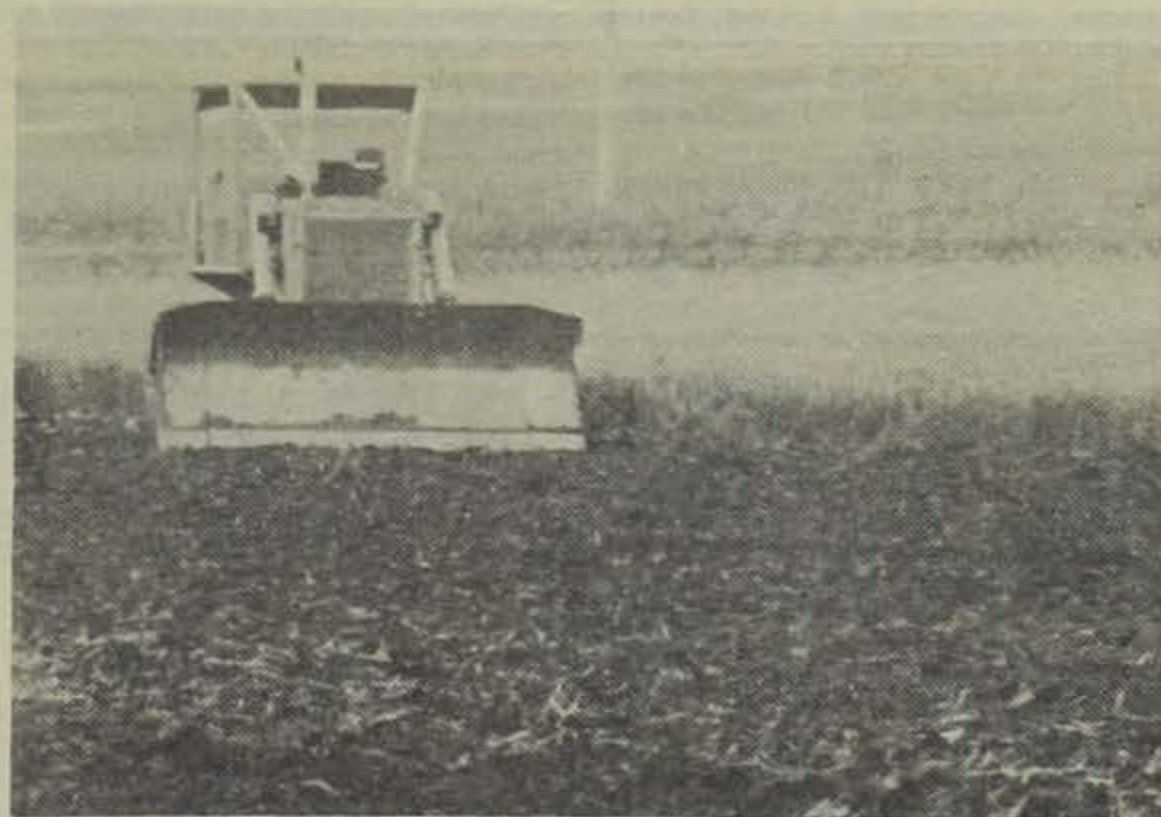


Don Knaack wins the county Soil Conservation Contest, and now competes in regionals.

See page 2

McQuilken, Kemp, Frush and Hanna — four men who cooperate to preserve their soil.

See page 5



Marge Block's investment is in the future, not money.

See page 7

Don Knaack wins county conservation contest

By ANTHONY BOFF
Staff Writer

KEYSTONE — Preserving Iowa's soil for future generations has become a matter of increasing priority in this state — and particularly in this portion of the state.

Each year more and more Benton County farmers are learning the value of protecting the soil, keeping it on the land they farm, and the Soil Conservation District is more than willing to help out.

They certainly gave Don Knaack a helping hand. Knaack, of rural Keystone, is advancing to regional competition in the Soil Conservation Service contest.

Knaack won the county contest in the New Cooperator Division, one of three contest categories. The others include Owner-Operator and Owner-Tenant divisions.

Knaack took the top honors in the county contest with an 80-acre farm he only recently purchased.

"It was hilly and eroded," Knaack said. "I wanted to fix it up."

Knaack said the farm was losing approximately 75 tons of topsoil per acre. With his conservation practices, he has cut that erosion level to just five tons per acre.

The estimated soil loss is figured by the way the land is farmed and the runoff present in the ditches, Knaack said.

"Mainly you can save that much just by the difference in farm practices," Knaack said.

The specific conservation practices he used on his newly-acquired farm included no-till planting and strip cropping. He said that some sort of conservation practice was sorely needed on the farm, since the slope of the land varies from between five percent to 14 percent. If the ground gets to 18 percent, Knaack said, it is very severe and needs to be terraced.

"I just did it because I wanted to save the soil," Knaack said. "I had no idea about the award deal."

Now that he has won the county contest, he will put his conservation practices up



UP THERE — Don Knaack points toward the strip of cropping he has done on part of his hilly land. This work

was partly the reason he recently won the county award for soil conservation.

against 12 others in this area of the state in the regional contest. Should he win in that contest, he will go to districts, and from there could go all the way to the state level.

The only way to enter the contest, Knaack said, is to go through the Soil Conservation Service and get their help, and he said that is one thing they are more than happy to give.

"They really are helpful," Knaack said. "They laid out the strips, set up a rotation. I had never strip cropped before. This year I did a lot of it on my own, but they laid out the initial contours of the land."

"They (Soil Conservation Service) really are helpful. They laid out the strips, set up a rotation. I had never strip cropped before. This year I did a lot of it on my own, but they laid out the initial contours of the land."

Don Knaack

"They can show soil loss on their charts by whatever farming you do," he continued.

Knaack has been farming since 1969 after he came home from the service. At that time he had 86 acres to till. Now he has 400 — "Too many," he says.

But in 1973 he rented a farm from his uncle near Luzerne, and noticed that he had been contouring, and that is what started Don Knaack contouring also.

When he bought the farm ground he won the contest for, he noticed that every time it rained "the water would be running up and down the rows, especially in the early 70s. There were some wet years. Mainly I did this to cut down on the washing of ground."

In the contest, the conservation operations were judged by the local soil

commissioners. There is a possibility of getting up to 1,000 points, and Knaack took 919 to claim the lead.

How he will do in advanced competition he doesn't know.

"It all depends on how bad their (other contestants) ground was when they started," Knaack said. "I don't know what I'm up against."

Knaack began his no-till with beans, and then moved into corn, which he said he really likes. And although he already farms 400 acres, he said he wouldn't mind getting some more land, because no-till really saves on the labor.

Also, he would like to implement some more conservation practices in the future.

"Down the road, I wouldn't mind terracing some of that ground," he said. "I have no idea when I can get to that, though."

This year Knaack farms 150 acres of corn, 120 acres of beans, 30 acres of oats, and the rest of the land is hay, pasture, and PIK ground.

He has been appointed assistant soil

KNAACK

Continued on page 3



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An investment in soil, not money

By LYN HANSON
Times Staff Writer

SHELLSBURG — Usually, people make investments primarily to make money. But Marge Block's recent investment was for the sake of something more enduring—the soil on her farmland.

Block, who lives in Vinton, and her tenants, brothers Jerry Hartz, 31, and

Doug Hartz, 27, shared this year's Benton County Soil Conservation District achievement award in the owner-tenant division, mainly for the terracing which was done recently on Block's 160 acres near Shellsburg, which the Hartz brothers farm.

BLOCK

Continued on page 8



AID TO DRAINAGE— Brothers Jerry and Doug Hartz show one of the perforated drainage pipes which is part of the terracing system on the 160 acres they farm near Shellsburg. The Hartz brothers and Marge Block of Vinton, who owns the land, shared honors in the owner-tenant division in this year's Benton County Soil Conservation District awards.

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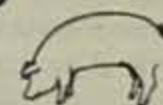
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Vinton

Block

Continued from page 7

Terracing is an expensive project, and, like many other farm owners, Block delayed taking that step until she found out that other soil-saving techniques—including minimum tillage and contour farming—weren't sufficient in combatting erosion.

"One time we had a four-inch rain, and when I saw all those furrows washing away, I decided I'd had enough," she said.

Block made the decision to terrace, with the cooperation of the Hartz brothers, who have farmed the land since 1976. The terraces have been incorporated into the farm's soil-saving program, which also includes minimum tillage, contour plowing and extending waterways.

Block and her tenants—whom she sometimes calls "the boys"—toured the field in the fall of 1980 with Floyd Peters, who then worked for the Benton County Soil Conservation District. Peters drew up specifications for the terraces, thereby meeting requirements which allowed Block to qualify for federal funds to help pay for the terracing.

Contractors began building the terraces in the fall of 1980, and they were completed in the spring of 1981.

The cost of the four parallel terraces, which have a total length of about 5,000 feet, was staggering—\$2.20 per foot. And Block is the first to say that terracing is not an investment which is generally reflected in direct financial rewards.

"I didn't do this to save money," she said. "I did it to save soil."

The savings in land is indeed noticeable, according to the Hartz brothers. Water which once carried the farm's soil to a creek now is accumulated in a drainpipe and conducted to tiles laid underneath the terraces, allowing it to flow away harmlessly.

The terraces also qualify Block for a deduction on her federal income taxes, because of their effectiveness in preventing erosion. In addition, she said the terraces should increase the land's value if she ever decides to sell it.

Jerry Hartz said the terraces have caused only minimal inconvenience in farming. Aside from having to hand-seed the sides of the terrace with grass—a one-time job—they don't require any extra work, he said. "When you get right down to it, there's not much inconvenience at all."

Block's husband, Alvin, who died in 1970, was an innovator in soil conservation in the Benton County area when the couple farmed near Shellsburg, according to Block. He used a chisel planter to sow corn on furrows, at a time when few farmers knew about conservation tillage and most who did scoffed at it.

"All the neighbors would come and look," recalled Block, who is a registered nurse at Virginia Gay Hospital. "When he was in the hospital, nobody knew how to plant his fields. They kidded him and asked him why he didn't plant like a normal farmer."

The 160 acres now farmed by the Hartz brothers was to be a home site for Mr. and Mrs. Block. But the couple's dream of living there never came true; the house was sold and the land was rented to the brothers, neither of whom live on it.

Jerry and Doug Hartz farm the land in exchange for 50 percent of the crop. Normally, the land is 50 percent corn and 50 percent beans; but the brothers are participating in the Payment-In-Kind (PIK) program, and half the corn acreage is now seeded with oats.

Their rental agreement with Block stipulates that the owner and tenants share costs of seed, fertilizer, etc., while Block pays for major, permanent improvements, such as the terraces.

Block said of the Hartz brothers, "I trust their judgment completely. A lot of people want land, but it's hard to find good tenants. They get the crops in and keep the weeds out, and I appreciate that."

The Hartz brothers, who grew up between Newhall and Shellsburg (both now have rural Shellsburg addresses, though Jerry has a Newhall phone number), have long practiced minimum tillage on their corn acres. In the future, they are con-

sidering an experiment with no-till planting.

Addition of more terraces to Block's acres may also be in the future, Block said—but not the immediate future.

Block said the Soil Conservation District

award was a surprise to her—a pleasant one.

"I was surprised because I didn't think I did that much for soil conservation," she said. "I guess it just shows that not many people do this."

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Kirk's Pony Pumper — hardworking firefighting unit

By ANTHONY BOPP
Staff Writer

VINTON — Three years ago Jim Kirk made a miniature fire fighting pump that will fit into any pickup bed. He made it on special request from the Vinton Fire Department.

Today, he is still making his "Pony Pumper," and has sold several of them throughout Iowa and Nebraska, and even has distributors for them in Minnesota and Illinois.

"The Vinton Fire Department decided they needed one," Kirk said, explaining how he started constructing them. "The board of directors decided they could have one made locally with the features they wanted."

Kirk said his Pony Pumper sells for at least the same or lower costs than any other model with the same features put out by other companies. He described it as a self-contained unit with a 200 gallon tank, a two cylinder gas engine, and with connections for a hose or whatever the buyer specifies.

Kirk has done some checking, and he has figures that back up his estimate that 80 percent of all fires can be extinguished with 200 gallons of water.

It is this feature, he said, which has made it even more valuable to fire departments than they themselves realized.

"Most fire departments think of them as something to fight a grass fire with," Kirk said. "But as they use them, they realize they can be very useful as an attack unit. They are usually the first unit on the scene of a fire by several minutes, and that can mean a lot."

Not only will the Pony Pumper fit into any standard sized pickup bed, it hooks up

to the truck's electrical system.

Pony Pumper, Kirk said, suggests to the mind exactly what this unit is: a small, hard working and dependable device.

Kirk said that after he made the first one for the Vinton Fire Department, he realized that it could have a great deal of potential for other departments as well, and continued to manufacture them at his home south of Vinton on Highway 218, where he has been in the manufacturing business since the 1960s. He also does truck and trailer repairs, sandblasting and painting of trucks and equipment.

Last week, Kirk took his Pony Pumper to Ames, where a four-day fire fighting school was being held for fire departments across the state.

"The Extension Service runs the school," he said. "It consists of fire fighting classes and displays."

Obviously, the Pony Pumper was one of the displays, and was viewed by about 1,400 people who attended the convention.

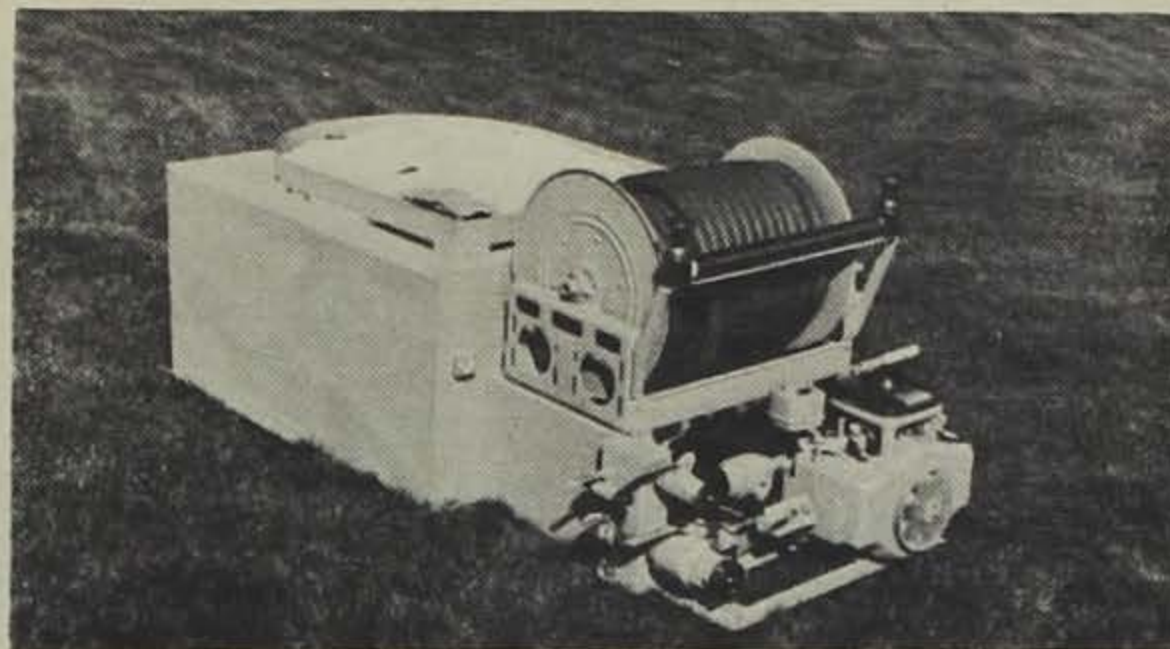
Kirk said the Pony Pumper also has possibilities in other areas. With a few attachments, he said, it could possibly be used to spray agricultural chemicals.

Of course, Kirk has in the past built quite a bit of fertilizer equipment, and he said there are a lot of similarities between the two, each constructed basically of a tank and a pump.

The Pony Pumper is a versatile machine, and can be altered slightly to conform to individual specifications.

"We build up the tanks first," he said. "Then we put the pumps on. It depends on if they want high pressure or high volume, that sort of thing."

But if you want a small, yet dependable piece of fire fighting equipment, the Pony Pumper is a good place to start.



PONY PUMPER — Jim Kirk's Pony Pumper, described by its creator as "hard working and dependable," will fit into a standard sized pickup bed, and will hold 200 gallons of water. Kirk said that 200 gallons of water will put out 80 percent of all fires.

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Knaack

Continued from page 2

commissioner, and says his main function as such is to "sit in on the meetings and find out what's going on. Also to help the directors, assist them in any way."

Because he has already won the county soil conservation contest, Knaack will be speaking at the Conservation Tillage show at the Five Seasons Center in Cedar Rapids next January.

"I use a lot of different herbicides and ways of farming," he said. "I could report on them down there."

Knaack has a wife, Janet, who works at the Van Horne Telephone Company, and four children, Kristi, 15, Jason, 12, Jennifer, 5 and Andrew, nine months.

He is president of the Benton Community Booster Club, director of the Van Horne Telephone Company, and is affiliated with the Van Horne Businessmen's Club, the American Legion, and several other groups.

When he finds time, he is also on the Advisory Board of Sieben Hybrids of Geneseo, Ill., and the last three or four years has been doing several test plots. Last year, he said over 200 people stopped by to examine the plots.

If he sounds like a busy man, it's because he is. Yet he is still adding new responsibilities to his schedule. He said he would eventually like to become a soil commissioner himself.

"Some day, if I learn all the ropes, I'd like to become a commissioner. But there's a lot to it."

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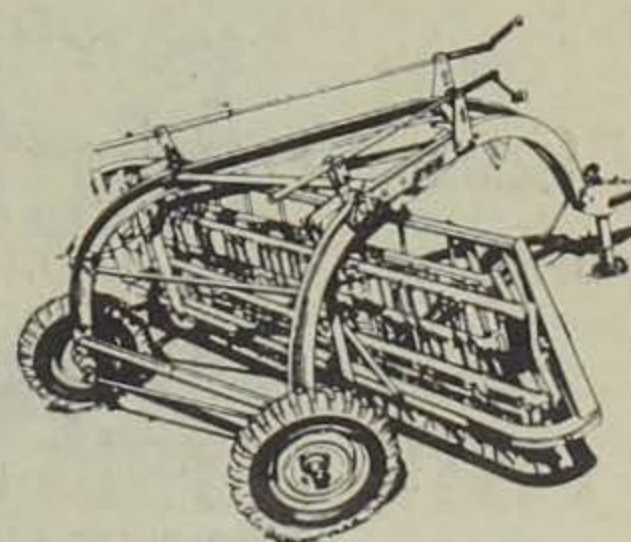
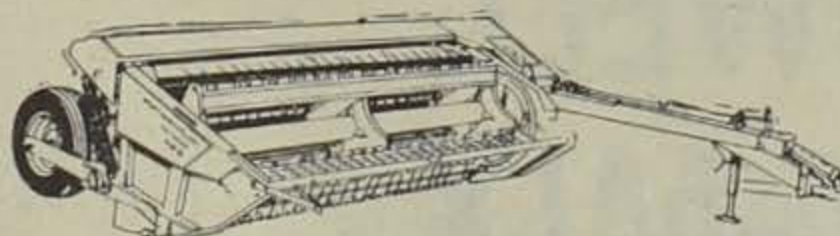
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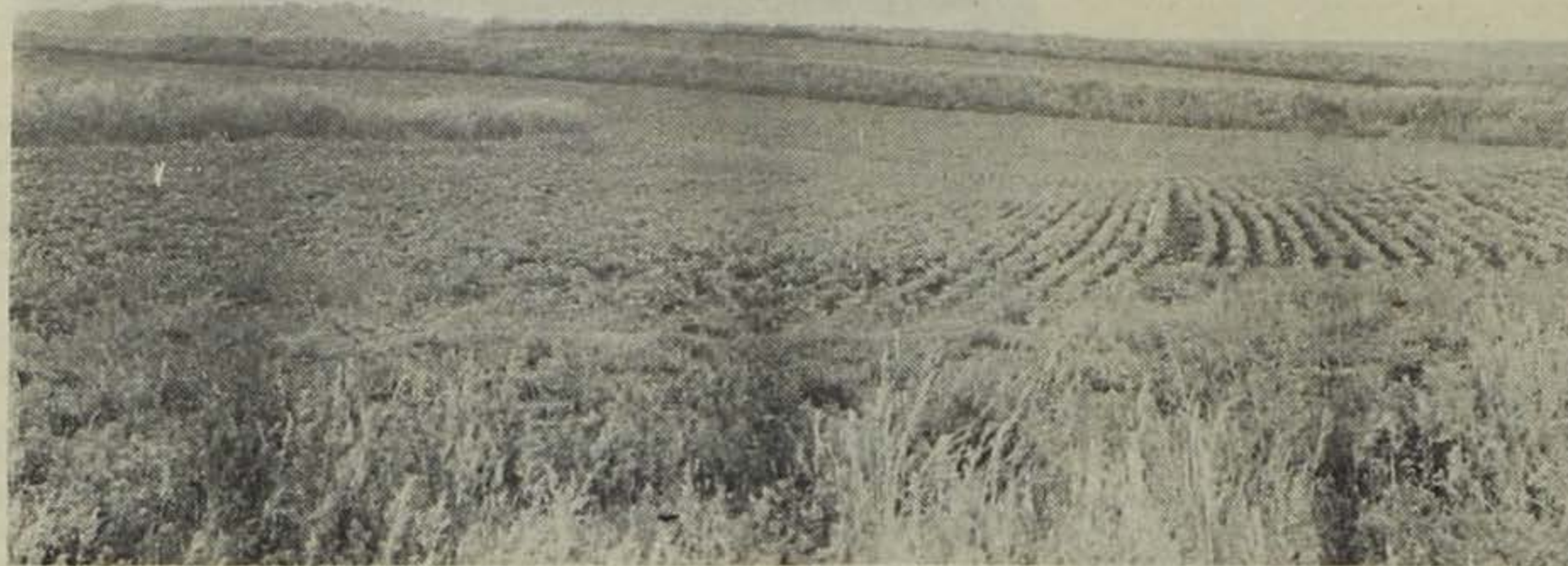
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TERRACING HILLSIDE— Jerry McCarty and John Strawn built these terraces in 1980, and McCarty credits

them with keeping his top soil in the field and not in

McCarty, Strawn develop conservation projects

By JEFF BUTTS
Times Intern

GARRISON— Jerry McCarty probably won't get to enjoy the fruits of his labor on the farm he operates until he's an old man, if even then.

McCarty operates a 340-acre farm south of Garrison owned by his father-in-law, John Strawn. McCarty, with Strawn's help, started three projects on the farm: a system of terraces to control soil erosion, a wildlife habitat area, and a windbreak.

All three of the projects have short-range impacts on the farm but it will take several years for them to develop as they were originally planned.

Recently, the terrace system that McCarty and Strawn built on the farm in 1980 won an Iowa Soil Conservation award in the Owner-Operator category.

McCarty's terrace system has three tiers that extend around a hill on the farm. An older system of terraces, built in the middle 1970s, also extends around a nearby hill.

The parallel terraces are currently drilled with soybeans, which McCarty alternates with corn each year.

"As far as I can tell, the terraces are working pretty well," McCarty said. "We have such a steep slope here that terracing is the best way to go."

McCarty said he doesn't quite know what the return on the investment of money on the terraces really is, but he said top soil on the field now would be in the ditches below the hill if it weren't for the terraces.

"I'm sure that most of the farmers in this area are very conscious about soil conservation," McCarty said. "They've got to be if there's going to be good top soil left in the fields for the future."

McCarty also started a wildlife habitat area on a strip of land on the farm. He is concerned about the loss of fence rows for nesting areas. McCarty, along with his wife, Melinda, children Kara, 8, and Scott, 6, and help from Strawn, planted several trees, shrubs and grasses.

What started four years ago as a grassy strip of land is still a grassy strip of land with the exception of several four to five foot honeysuckle and dogwood shrubs that were planted there. The area is also planted with red cedars, white pines, autumn olive trees, ninebark trees and switch grass (a sturdy type of grass.)

Most of the trees planted in the habitat are berry-bearing, so the birds and other wildlife will have food available.

McCarty hopes that pheasants, which have all but disappeared in the area, will return to nest in his habitat area. Already redwing blackbirds, meadowlarks and horned larks make their homes in the area.

Another one of the McCartys' projects is the planting of a windbreak to the west and north of their house.

The project, started just this year, consists of 89 trees and 400 shrubs. McCarty said the first row of trees are lilac bushes. Colorado blue spruce, Black Hill spruce, and caragana make up the next three rows of the windbreak.

"You see, we don't plant things just for ourselves; we're doing it for our children and so forth down the line," McCarty said. "We'll be old or dead before many of the benefits of these projects are known."

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Joint effort goes a long way to help conserve soil

By BILL MARTIN
Staff Writer

LA PORTE CITY— A little cooperation will be going a long way when four farmers in Bruce Township, some four miles southwest of La Porte City, complete their joint tiling and terracing project this summer.

John McQuilken, Mike Kemp, Dennis Frush and Jim Hanna Jr. farm neighboring plots in Bruce Township. They got together earlier this year, along with representatives of the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), discussed their soil conservation and water drainage needs, and decided on a program that would suit those needs.

McQuilken, Kemp and Frush own the land they have involved in the project. Hanna rents his from Gene Mathern of Muscatine.

"It wouldn't be a complete project without the cooperation of all four," said Jim Brown, district soil conservationist.

Brown, Robb Morrow, soil conservation technician, and Becky Clark, state aide to the district, helped work out the project, which will eventually include a 1900 foot water way, 3800 feet of terraces and about 5000 feet of clay tile, Brown said.

Water from the four plots of land in-

"It wouldn't be a complete project without the cooperation of all four."

Jim Brown

involved will drain out to a creek on Kemp's land.

"It's kind of two different projects, water way with tile and terracing with tile," Hanna said. "What we're doing is a group project between farmers, cooperating to get things done."

"The water wash and problems we had with the rain kind of prompted the whole thing," said Kemp. "It's kind of a combination of different guys doing different things. We went to the SCS people and they figured it out for us."

"We went out to see what would be required and got an estimated cost," Brown said. "We got the four parties together one day, presented them with the figures, and in March, they all agreed to do it."

"We got the estimates and took the applications before the district soil commissioner, who approved the project for cost-share," said Brown.

Cost-share, a result of state legislation in July, 1973, pays for 50 percent of the estimated or actual cost, whichever is less, of approved conservation projects like the one in Bruce Township.

That means the four landowners involved will only have to pay for about half of this project, which has an estimated cost of \$32,000.

"They're doing the water way now," Brown said. "The tile goes in next, then the terraces."

To be eligible for a cost share payment on a waterway project, at least 75 percent of the drainage area must have a soil loss of less than five tons per acre a year.

The water way, located on land owned by Kemp and McQuilken, is on a drainage

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JIM HANNA JR.



MIKE KEMP



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Project

Continued from page 5

area where the soil losses are already below the five tons per acre mark, and Brown said the two farmers "just wanted to get rid of the water" in the area. Mathern's land is losing an estimated 11 tons an acre every year, Brown said, and the project will cut that figure down to about five tons.

The water way will be about 1900 feet long, 60 to 80 feet wide at the bottom, and is being dug out now with bulldozers. Work on the water way has been delayed recently by the weather, but will resume when dryer conditions prevail.

A 12-inch main will run along one side of the waterway for draining the terraces. After the tile is put in, some of it running

under gas and telephone lines, grassback terraces will be built on land Hanna farms, and Frush may build them on his own land in the future. All four land owners are paying for parts of the cost of the tile.

The payments they will make for the project will contribute towards slowing the loss of soil. Brown said soil can not renew

more
produ
harve

The deter... equation. Factors involved include rainfall, length and percentage of the slope, type of soil, cropping and tillage, and practice.

"It's kind of two different projects, water way with tile and terracing with tile. What were doing is a group project between farmers, cooperating to get things done."

Jim Hanna Jr.

"The water wash and problems we had with the rain kind of prompted the whole thing. It's kind of a combination of different guys doing different things. We went to the SCS people and they figured it out for us."

Mike Kemp

"They all have certain values," Brown said. "They're plugged into computers, which come out with the soil loss figure."

So when the project is completed later this summer, four farmers from Bruce Township will be very interested in the new soil loss figures—and they'll probably be pleased with the results of their conservation efforts.

"We went out to see what would be required and got an estimated cost. We got the four parties together one day, presented them with the figures, and in March, they all agreed to do it."

Jim Brown

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HELPING—Jim Brown, district soil conservationist, and Robb Morrow, soil conservation technician in Vinton, helped four farmers in Bruce Township work out their soil conservation and water drainage project. Assistance also came from Becky Clark, state aide to the district.

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