

Agriculture

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Thursday, October 27, 2011 • Daily Sentinel

Petersen points to terraces as multi-benefit conservation effort

BY JOLENE STEVENS
Contributing writer

Jeff Petersen was smiling as he stepped down from his combine last week having completed the bean harvest. He felt "pretty good" he said about the 55 bushel per acre yield what with the weather ups and downs of the growing season.

Petersen said he "was satisfied," too, with his 270 bushel per acre corn crop taken from the fields earlier on his farm near Merrill. As he surveyed the network of terraces in this soybean field he considered his next task — that of building additional terraces.

"I think Dad taught me how important terraces can be, and I've seen how well they can work," he said referring to those originally built by his father, Larry Petersen, of Le Mars. "They're good for saving soil and can do a lot to maintain water quality."

A Plymouth Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Commissioner, Petersen is preparing to add an additional 5,000 feet of new terraces to what he estimates are the "miles and miles" of the existing older structures, some of which he said need rebuilding. He said

terrace maintenance is something he feels is important every year.

"Our older terraces were put in 20 years ago before the bigger farm equipment we use today," he said. "Back then you were using four-row planters with 13-foot widths. Today, when you're planting in widths up to 30-35 feet, the old ones just don't work."

The new terraces Petersen said will be "tepee" or A-frame structures, which Jim Lahn, district conservationist Natural Resources Conservation Service, Le Mars, said represent 95-plus percent of the terraces built in Plymouth County.

Petersen said he finds the tepee terraces "cheaper to build" with the added advantage of "working better" when it comes to holding water.

"You see the results after a big rain when the water is standing alongside them in the morning and in the afternoon, it has gone slowly back into the soil," he added.

"Good conservation efforts are a matter of economics. You start saving soil and improving it," Petersen said. "This means better yields. Using terraces may take a few extra acres, but I think it's a



(SENTINEL PHOTO BY JOLENE STEVENS)

Merrill producer Jeff Petersen says conservation terraces provide him opportunity to save valuable soil and maintain good water quality in his fields while at the same time adding to farm profitability.

good trade-off for improved profitability in a farming operation."

Petersen has also, "slowly" he said, gotten into no-till in his farming operation noting

that for him the practice is considered a fuel-saving factor in his crop production.

He has also, he said, had some limited filter-strips and is considering putting in some

grass waterways on the farm.

An added incentive for implementation of such conservation practices is, as he sees it, a benefit for wildlife and pheasants.

Petersen's concern on the adequate availability of wildlife habitat is not a surprising one.

A member and past president of the Plymouth County Chapter of Pheasants Forever, he describes himself as a life-long hunter.

He said he enjoys his opportunity when joined by his two small Munsterlander spaniels, Ace and Max, to take to the fields to hunt.

While acknowledging numerous reports on a decline in the local and regional pheasant population due to weather extremes and extended planted farm acreage, Petersen said it appears the situation is not the same everywhere.

"I saw lots of pheasants back on the land where there was habitat as I wrapped up combining," he said. "If you give them a place to winter, they'll be there. It's good to see conservation being used more and more. It shows people care about their land and their environment and the wildlife as well."

Breuer, Wilken national FFA award recipients

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FFA Organization's American FFA Degree award for work in

put her reaction this way.

"It's a highlight of the time

Also recipient earlier of an Iowa FFA degree and an Iowa