

# Farmers, city partner to improve water

La Porte City man  
joins with groups  
to reduce nitrates

**COREY MUNSON**  
Iowa Farmer Today

LA PORTE CITY — Standing in a field surrounded by other fields as far as the eye can see, it's easy to forget how quickly runoff makes its way to the out-of-sight rivers and streams that jog through farm country.

Their presence, however, is not lost on Nick Meier, who farms near La Porte City in the Middle Cedar River watershed. He is part of a growing number of farmers working with local governments and regional water authorities to reduce nitrates in municipal water supplies.

"I started no-till about 30 years ago and went to strip tilling a few years after that," Meier said. "When we had heavy rains, it really bothered me to see the soil loss. I wanted to try to change that. Once you see that soil go, it's gone forever."

In addition to strip tilling, Meier also uses cover crops on his fields to improve soil structure and reduce runoff. On the edge of his fields he installed bioreactors and saturated buffers.

He also sits on the board of the Miller Creek watershed, a waterway that feeds into the Cedar River. The Cedar then runs downstream about 60 miles



**COREY MUNSON, IOWA FARMER TODAY**

Nick Meier, who farms in the Middle Cedar River watershed north of Cedar Rapids, works with the city as part of the Middle Cedar Partnership Project, which helps farmers and landowners install best management practices.

through Iowa's second largest city, Cedar Rapids. The city's well lies close to the Cedar and is affected by what's in the water. Nitrates are a major concern.

The Middle Cedar Partnership Project — of which Meier is a partner with the city — works with local conservation partners, farmers and landowners to install best management practices such as cover crops, nutrient management, wetlands and saturated buffers to help improve water quality, water quantity and soil

health in the Cedar River Watershed.

"When you marry the two local initiatives, you see a holistic approach to what we're doing here," said Tariq Baloch, manager of the Cedar Rapids Water Utility Plant.

Baloch said his team is addressing water quality issues in several ways, including reducing the quantity of contaminants in the river by slowing water runoff.

"The No. 1 partner in all this are the producers and land owners up stream," Baloch said. "As

we help them, we'll see gradual improvement."

Two key events encouraged action of this issue. In 2008, Cedar Rapids experienced major flooding from the Cedar River, which impacted much of the center of the city. And in 2015, the Des Moines Waterworks attempted to take three north-central Iowa counties to court in hopes of forcing them to reduce nitrate runoff from area fields.

Please see **PARTNERSHIP**, Page D2