

A Review of the Northwest Soil Conservation District

by FRANK RASCH

The Northwest Kent Soil Conservation District was organized in 1946. The original district was composed of six townships on the northwest side of Kent County; these were as follows, Tyrone, Sparta, Alpine, Walker, Plainfield and Grand Rapids. In March of 1950 four more townships were added. These were Paris, Wyoming, Byron and Gaines. The hearing for the formation of the district was held in the Alpine

Grange Hall on February 25, 1946. There were 129 votes cast, 123 for the formation of the district and 6 against. Thus was formed the Northwest Kent Soil Conservation District. Erwin Klenk, Russell Braman and Arthur Edison were elected as directors of the new district and the State Soil Conservation Committee appointed Norris Helsel and Lloyd Hill to complete the board.

A memorandum of understanding between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Northwest Kent Soil Conservation District was signed on September 16, 1946 and a supplemental memorandum of understanding was signed on September 24, 1946. These were in fact requests for technical help from the Soil Conservation Service of the U. S. D. A. Wilbur Kellogg was the first Work Unit Conservationist assigned to the district and the office was in Sparta.

The reasons for organizing the district were controlling of wind and water erosion, better land use, increasing the use of lime and fertilizer, use of cover crops and green manure crops, tile and ditch drainage and sod waterways. During the twenty years some practices were used much more than others. For example during the first few years contouring of orchards was a much used practice, but, with the coming of large spraying equipment and very toxic spray materials this has been replaced to a great extent by the practice of keeping the orchard in permanent sod.

Other practices which took hold quite readily, were tile and ditch drainage, liming, cover and green manure crops, hedgerow planting and conservation cropping systems.

Tree planting has been used in the past, but is losing ground the past few years.

Some practices which, in the eyes of the directors, should be used more

are grassed waterways, minimum tillage on certain types of land, pasture and hayland planting, strip cropping and water control structures. The farm pond project has become more popular in the last few years.

The heavy rains which we have received this last fall, has pointed out to conservation minded people that though we have come a long way in twenty years there still is much yet to be accomplished in the field of water control.



AWARD WINNERS

BERT THOME AND SONS, Comstock Park, Alpine Twp.

District cooperators since 1952, Bert and sons Harold and Mark have installed over four miles of tile on their 237 acre farm. Their neat and well cared for farm is made up of 108 acres of cropland and has 90 acres of orchards.

Their conservation crop rotation, minimum tillage and other conservation practices have helped to increase crop yields for the dairy herd.

Harold and a neighbor district cooperator were featured in the U. S. D. A. Soil Conservation Magazine in 1964 in an article on fescue orchard cover.



FRANK RASCH

Chairman of the Northwest Kent Soil Conservation District

Frank, with his brother, farms 320 acres of land in Alpine Township. They have a fruit and general farming operation. Their fruit consists of apples, peaches, prunes, cherries and strawberries. Most of their fruit is stored, partly in CA and partly in cold storage.

The general farming operation consists of beef feeding, about 100 steers are normally fed out. These are followed by about 50 hogs. About 20 acres of wheat are usually raised. Frank has been a director for eight years.



WARD SHEPPARD Member Northwest SCD Board

Ward was elected to the Northwest Board at the Annual Meeting last year, but has been a cooperator of the District for 8 years. He operates a fruit and dairy farm of 400 acres in Sparta Township. Of these acres 320 are owned, and the rest rented. His livestock consists of 69 milking cows and 60 head of young stock. About 30 acres of the farm is in fruit. Ward uses loose housing for his dairy herd and has installed a pond, tile and 15 acres field strips and 15 acres of contour strips on his farm as called for by his Conservation Farm Plan. Son Richard works with Ward on the farm.

Ward is a Trustee of the Ballard Church of Christ.

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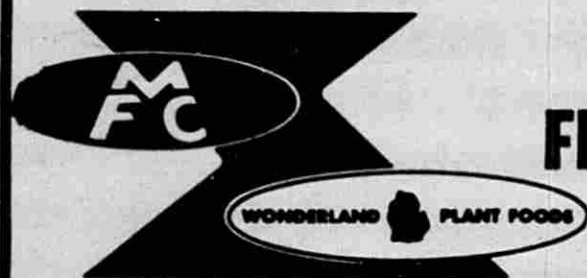
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JIM EMERY, Soil Conservation Technician

Jim was transferred to Kent County from Big Rapids in December 1952 where he had worked for SCS for 8 months.

Jim graduated from Big Rapids High School and served 6 years with the Army. Three years of this was in Africa and Italy during World War II. After being discharged from the Army Jim managed the family farm in Mecosta County 4 years before starting with SCS.

Jim lives in Rockford with his wife Beverly and 3 of their 4 children. Juanita, Julian and Jimmy are attending school at Rockford and another daughter, Dawn, is a freshman at Oakland University at Rochester, Michigan.

The above photo shows Jim about to take off on a days follow-up which is his major winter duty. This consists of calling on district cooperators with basic plans and reviewing these plans with the farmer.

Peach Pits Used

An answer appears to have been found about what to do with 120 million pounds of peach pits accumulated annually by California

canneries. Robert T. Collier, a Santa Clara manufacturer, decided that he could use them to make charcoal briquets. His plant now converts more than 500 tons of pits into charcoal daily.

After 20 Years - The Northeast Soil District

In 1945 a group of farmers around Bostwick Lake in Cannon and Grattan Townships asked for help on their soil and water conservation problems. This group held meetings with Frank Trull of the Soil Conservation Service and Keats Vinning of the Extension Service. They mapped their farms and made plans to put certain soil saving practices into effect. In the spring of 1945 at a meeting to discuss township zoning some of those present asked about forming a soil conservation district. During the winter of 1945 - 1946 meetings were held in eight of the ten townships of the proposed district. On February 25, 1946 the State Soil Conservation Committee held a hearing on the formation of a district at the Bostwick Lake Church. Seventy five interested farmers were in attendance and no opposition to forming a district was expressed.

The referendum on creation of the district was held on March 25, 1946. In seven of the ten townships the township Supervisors acted as polling Officials. A total of 158 votes were cast, 151 for and 7 against the creation of the district.

John Jakeway, Lynn Post and Merle Cramton were elected as directors. The State Soil Conservation Committee appointed Carl Hessler and Victor Weller to complete the Board.

At the first meeting of the Northeast Kent Soil Conservation District Board it was decided to request assistance from the U. S. Soil Conservation Service. Glenn Con-

verse was then sent by S.C.S. as the districts first Work Unit Conservationist. This meeting was held on May 13, 1946.

The Northeast Kent Soil Conservation District originally consisted of the townships of Spencer, Nelson, Solon, Algoma, Courtland, Oakfield, Grattan, Cannon, Vergennes and Ada. In March of 1950 the townships of Lowell, Bowne, Caledonia and Cascade.

At the same time all this was taking place in the east side of Kent County, the same thing was being done in the west side. By 1950 all of Kent County was part of either the Northeast or Northwest Kent Soil Conservation Districts.

When the district was first organized farmers were about the only people receiving help. Today there are urban land owners, clubs,

schools and business organizations in addition to farmers being served by the district.



"Automated date maker— as the girls go by, select your number, press the pedal and 'kapow!'—"



MILTON WYLIE

Vice Chairman of Northwest Dist.

Milton operates a 200 acre farm in Tyrone Township, of which 135 acres are owned. It is mainly a dairy farm with present stock consisting of 25 milking cows and 20 head of young stock.

Milton is a member of the West Michigan Holstein Friesian Association and of the National Association, and is a Director of the Kent County DHIA.

In his spare time, Milton sells and installs dairy barn equipment, (barn cleaners, etc.)

Milton was graduated from Sparta High School in 1932. He is a member of the Mamrelund Lutheran Church, a member of the Farm Bureau, and is Treasurer of Tyrone Township. He has been a Director of the Northwest District for 8 years and has served as chairman of the Board.

Milton is married and has 3 children.



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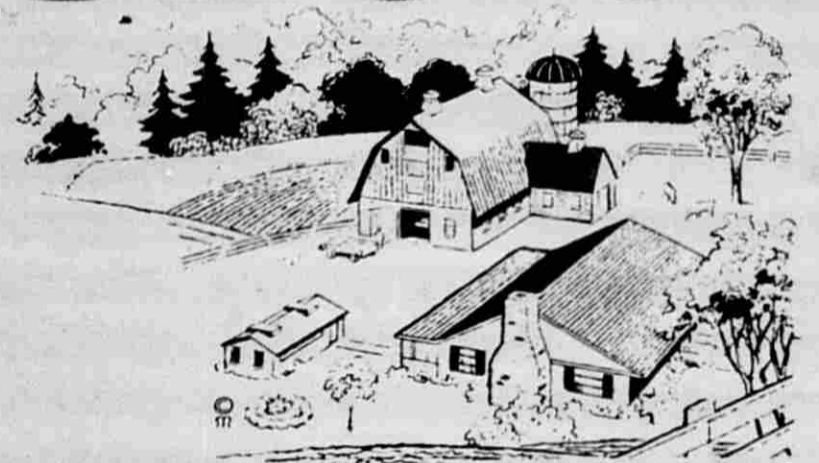
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