

2017 NEBRASKA CHAPTER SWCS AWARDS

At the Annual Meeting and Technical Workshop of the Nebraska Chapter of Soil and Water Conservation Society five awards were presented on June 22-23, 2017, at Beatrice, Nebraska.

Thomas Mountford	Commendation Award
Paul C. Hay	Honor Award
Randy Pryor	Honor Award
Richard Schotte	Honor Award
Lower Big Blue N.R.D.	Merit Award
Jim Harder	Staple Award
Claudia Stevenson	International Commendation Award

The commendation award is given to members of the Society for professional achievement and for service to the society at the state level.

The honor award recognizes non-members for outstanding accomplishments compatible with the objectives of the society.

The merit award recognizes a group for conservation work accomplished.

The "staple award" is for longstanding, mainstay leadership, and exceptional service contributing to the success of the Nebraska Chapter of SWCS.

The Soil and Water Conservation Society is a private scientific and educational association dedicated to advancing the science and art of good land use and improvement of natural resources. The awards committee is Anita Nein, Wally Valasek, & Doug Garrison. Anita Nein submitted this article.

2017—Nebraska SWCS Commendation Award—Thomas Mountford

Tom Mountford has made a significant impact during his career in natural resources conservation. He has been an employee of three different natural resources districts in Nebraska including the Little Blue NRD, Nemaha NRD, and the Lower Platte North NRD. He has been the Assistant Manager of the Lower Platte North NRD (LPNNRD) in Wahoo, Nebraska for 23 years.

Tom's efforts in conservation have been vital for the Lower Platte North NRD. He has provided leadership for involvement with the DEQ 319 Program. This program includes the sub-basins of Wahoo Creek and strives to stop soil erosion and improve water quality. Initial efforts were in Sand Creek and Duck Creek, followed by Cottonwood Creek. Today the program efforts are active in the North Branch of Wahoo Creek, Dunlap Creek, and Miller Branch Creek.

Tom has played an essential role in the LPNNRD conservation efforts in the Shell Creek Watershed. The Shell Creek Watershed includes around 330,000 acres. There was very little conservation work in this area prior to Tom's involvement. Overtime, conservation efforts progressed with implementing no-till farming, tile outlets, and sediment basins. No-till farming efforts were beginning in the Shell Creek Watershed even before this became a common practice. Successful conservation efforts in the Shell Creek Watershed are extremely evident and the proof is in the results. This watershed got its namesake from the mussels and clams that were found in the creek. When projects began around 2000, no mussels or clams were to be found. Today, populations are existent thanks to the conservation practices being implemented in the area. In Nebraska, Shell Creek will be the first water course to be de-listed for pollution due from atrazine which will occur later this year.

In 2016, the Lower Platte North NRD received a Regional Cooperative Conservation Program (RCCP) grant. Tom led all efforts to obtain these federal NRCS funds, and this will be the first time that this program will be utilized for flood damage reduction and water quality structures (dams).

Tom is instrumental in a variety of small community projects. He has had a strong involvement with numerous conservation projects in Platte Center and Colfax County, as well as the development of road structures in Butler and Saunders Counties. As Assistant Manager, Tom manages NRD/NRCS clerks in each of the four NRCS field offices in the Lower Platte North NRD. He works closely with NRCS in the hiring and evaluating of these employees. Tom is also responsible for organizing and coordinating a national meeting with NRCS headquarters and NRD representatives each year in Washington, D.C. Tom is an active partner with conservation work on the local, state, and national level.

Nebraska is beyond lucky to have an individual like Tom Mountford contributing to conservation efforts. His leadership style is to lead by example. He is charismatic, selfless, and hard-working. Tom's commitment to natural resources conservation is evident and his efforts are simply invaluable.

2017--Nebraska SWCS Honor Award--Paul C. Hay

Paul C Hay is a University of Nebraska Extension Educator located in Beatrice, Nebraska. Paul serves Gage County as a generalist and is focused on cropping systems education in Southeast Nebraska. Paul is a native of Michigan with a BS degree from Michigan State University in Crop Science. He has a MS degree in Agronomy from the University of Nebraska working with Dale Flowerday. Paul has served as an Extension Educator in Frontier County starting in the Eco Fallow years 1975-1980. He has served in Beatrice since 1980. The focus of his work in Gage County has been a strong 4-H program and Agronomy focus on dryland cropping systems. He has had considerable influence in the 85% no-till farming adoption rate in Gage County. Key current efforts are soil health, soil conservation in no-till, cover crops, irrigation scheduling,

farmland leasing, farm management, farm bill education, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (manure management) and atrazine education in response to atrazine levels in surface water.

Extension Educator Paul Hay partners with Randy Pryor. He was active in working with NRCS and NRD with the Swan lake restoration project, and implementing land treatment for special projects including Swan Lake and Turkey Creek watersheds. He admits not being a very good “play actor” at Saline Center meetings drumming up support for new conservation efforts but attendance and signups by landowners were quite successful. He uses a variety of teaching methods including on-farm demonstrations, conferences, tours and workshops to help producers lower their input cost, reduce water usage and maintain or increase yields and profitability and save precious topsoil. He has lead programs on irrigation management, chemigation training, no-till farming management and reducing atrazine runoff. Furthermore, he has worked with industry and producers in the innovative Field to Market carbon footprint and field efficiency project. He was there at the beginning effort in 2010 at Bunge mill in Crete with a coalition of agri-business, NRCS, Nebraska Corn Board and 22 local corn growers. This led to Nebraska Extension becoming a member of Field to Market and teaching others just like the program today. His vetting of the computer tool has led to change at the National level.

Paul is well regarded by agribusiness professionals in Southeast Nebraska as an Extension Educator for the clients and the professionals, a peer in the effort to respond to industry needs, improve yields, protect the environment, and embrace new technology.

2017--Nebraska SWCS Honor Award--Randy Pryor

After growing up on the family farm near Nemaha, NE, Randy Pryor attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where he received a Bachelor’s Degree in Mechanized Agriculture in 1980 and Master Degree in 1982 studying Mechanized Agriculture and Soybean Biodiesel. He began his career with UNL Extension in Saline County in August of 1983 and has provided significant contributions to Nebraska agriculture for the past 35 years. His work has had impact on both agriculture and the local community.

From organizing the first conservation field day and no-till planting field demonstration with planters and drills in 1983 and partnering with the NRD and NRCS, to increasing soil carbon and cover crop education and adoption of new irrigation management technologies, he has made a substantial difference. Pryor’s vision in the 80’s stemming from success in the Tobias area, to increase soil conservation and agricultural profitability through no-till farming demonstrations, field days and tours planted the seeds of positive change. Today, the highest concentration of long-term continuous no-till farming on dryland can be found in Saline, Jefferson and Gage County, a large shift in farming practice. The highest concentration of soil carbon contracts

through the Chicago CCX exchange occurred in Southeast Nebraska because of initial education efforts by Pryor.

Pryor initiated a new cost-share program five years ago through the Lower Big Blue NRD and board of directors that started a new practice to adopt ET Gages and watermark sensors for irrigation management that now has reached over 200 producers. Pryor created the Wilber Crop Clinic with collaboration of industry partners and has hosted regional conferences on no-till farming and cover crop education. Pryor has led 12 groups of Southeast Nebraska farmers to attend regional no-till farming conferences and tours in Des Moines, IA; St. Louis, MO; Indianapolis, IN; Salina, KS and Pierre, SD.

On the youth side Pryor is active teaching at 4-H Camp Jefferson with 8-10 year olds, the Earth Festival reaching area 5th graders, special clover college camps like the pollinator workshop this year and utilizing a groundwater flow model to teach about water quantity and quality to 4th graders in the Wilber and Crete Schools. In all, there has been a lot of positive change with soil and water conservation in the area during his Extension tenure.

2017—Nebraska SWCS Honor Award – Richard Schotte

The Richard Schotte operation started in the early 1960's. Richard and his brother Don formed a partnership and bought their first farm. No conservation efforts had ever been done on the farm. The two brothers learned quickly to be good stewards of the land. They contacted the local S. C. S. who laid out the waterways and terraces. The work was done within a few years.

A few years later the Schotte Brothers decided to have a cow-calf operation and were able to purchase land west of Hollenberg, Kansas. Some land had been farmed during the war years. They enrolled in a program through F.S. A. & S.C.S allowing the land to be idle for three years. They sowed those acres back to good native seed mixtures making good pastures.

Richard and Don purchased several farms within a few miles of their Dad's farm. All the new farms needed conservation work done. They were glad for the thoughts and advice from their Dad. In 2000, Richard and Don's son were beginning to farm, so they decided to dissolve the partnership and each farm with his own sons.

Richard's sons each bought farms of their own. Kevin's was nearby, but Bill's was southeast of Odell, Nebraska. Both of these farms had been terraced 55-60 years ago. So Natural Resources Conservation Service staked out new tile lines and terraces. Bill's was completed two years ago. Richard's will be finished this fall.

Two years ago Todd, Richard's Son-In Law, and Bill started working with cover crops. Kevin and Richard sowed some a year ago. Working well, cover crops became part of their normal farming practices.

Richard became interested in watersheds. With the damage the Horseshoe Creek was doing to roads, culvert, bridges, fields and stream banks, Richard realized something needed to be done. He contacted Ed Wieggers, an attorney with watershed knowledge. Ed was helpful to Richard to understand the process by directing him to law books and steps to take to get organized. Richard contacted some people in the community who were willing to get the process going. With patience and hard work the steering committee organized the Horseshoe Creek Watershed District #110 with President Richard Schotte. That drainage area includes the northwest part of Marshall County in Nebraska, the northeast part of Washington County in Kansas and three miles northwest of Lanham to the northern edge of Paddock Township, Nebraska. The Horseshoe Creek Watershed was a high priority area and drained into the Tuttle Creek Watershed. Many watershed structures have been built with the tile outlet terraces starting at the top of the drainage.

Schotte currently serves on the Marshall County Conservation District Board of Directors. He is married to Ruth. Their family lives within a few miles of their home. They are members of Immanuel Lutheran Church north of Bremen, Kansas.

2017—Nebraska SWCS Merit Award--Lower Big Blue Natural Resources District

Dave Clabaugh graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a Bachelor of Sciences in Natural Resources with a Water Resources Option. Dave was hired as the Assistant Water Department Manager for the Upper Big Blue NRD in York, Nebraska, in 1979. His responsibilities included working with the District's Groundwater Control Area rules and regulations.

Dave came to the Lower Big Blue NRD in Beatrice Nebraska, in 1987, as Water Resources Specialist. Major responsibilities related to the District's groundwater programs, both water quality and quantity. Other responsibilities were the District's land treatment cost-share programs.

The Lower Big Blue Board of Directors hired Dave as General Manager in 2004. As General Manager of the "Watershed Capital of Nebraska", Dave oversaw the completion of the Lower Turkey Creek Flood Control Project, one of the last major watersheds in the NRD that did not have any flood control. This 10 million dollar project consisted of seven flood control structures in northern Saline County.

The Wymore Rural Water Project was completed in 2013. The system purchases water from the town of Wymore and has over 200 hookups and 150 miles of pipeline. In spring of 2015, part of the Lower Big Blue NRD experienced record rainfall and flooding in the Swan Creek area. Fourteen of the eighteen watershed dams in that watershed had water flowing through the emergency spillways. This storm was rated as a 500 to 1000 year storm event. There was severe erosion where the emergency spillways ended in crop fields, but no major damage to the

structures. There was considerable cleanup of debris, mostly corn stalks, on the face of the dams. The NRD did have to reseed areas where the water was high for several days.

The Lower Big Blue Board of Directors updated its District's Groundwater Management Plan following the 2013 drought, with a scoring system that new wells must meet to be drilled.

The district completed several dam rehabilitation projects at public use areas. Facility use has greatly increased with the improved water quality and access to the lakes. Improved amenities for campers that included electrical hookups and storm shelters/restrooms were completed.

In the past year the NRD has completed the installation of 40 dedicated monitoring wells across the District. These wells will provide valuable information on water quantity and quality. The wells are equipped to continuously record changes in groundwater levels. One of the biggest challenges in the Lower Big Blue NRD will be to address the problems with the over 250 PL-566 Watershed structures in the NRD that have reached or passed their designed life expectancy.

2017--Staple Award--Jim Harder

Jim grew up on a farm east of Gretna where he learned the importance of conserving the soil. Jim was assigned to work in Nuckolls County SCS Field Office. Jim worked in Cass, Nuckolls, Dawes, Pierce, Furnas, and Lancaster County Field Offices during his SCS/NRCS career before retiring in 2007. He continues his support for the objectives of the SWCS and has maintained membership over many years. Jim feels it is important to continue to promote education of all citizens in the art and science of resource management. Jim currently manages his family's farm partnership land by supporting their tenants with their conservation efforts.

2017—International SWCS Commendation Award—Claudia Stevenson

Additionally, Claudia was introduced to the chapter membership because she is nominated for a SWCS International Commendation Award for her exceptional service contributing to conservation. Stevenson created a combined effort between Nebraska and Colorado NRCS and SWCS to form FARMING EVOLUTION. She has served as a co-chair for the past four years (2013-2016, planning started in mid-2012) for this annual workshop. As co-chair, the responsibility of securing speakers, event site, agendas, and caterers is a yearlong process. The keynote speaker for the 2018 event lined up as of last September.

Averages of 200 people have attended for two days each February. Another 300-500 have listed on-line to the live radio broadcast by BARN Media. Participants have traveled from Canada and Missouri representing eight states and two countries.

Speakers for FARMING EVOLUTION have included Ray Archuleta, Gabe Brown, Dr. Jill Clapperton, and Odette Menard. The emphasis is Soil Health with discussions ranging from soil structure, earthworms, microscopes, and microorganisms, Rainfall Simulator, and Cover Crop mixes.

Nebraska and Colorado SWCS members have participated in the event and the respective chapters have helped sponsor the event for the past four years.

Over the past 30 years as an SWCS member, soil health and education have gone hand-in-hand in the discussions with landowners. The over-riding goal is to give landowners the education/information necessary to make informed decisions about their land. This has ranged from No-Till education on fields around the county to education in the elementary to high school classrooms. Introducing landowners to the world below the soil surface is an amazing experience.

Claudia serves as the "At Large Director" on the SWCS Nebraska Chapter Board.