

## McCook County Conservation District (No. 46)

History from the 1969 publication:

McCook County is located in the southeast part of South Dakota and joins Minnehaha County on the west and is the third county north from the Nebraska line. The county was created in 18973 and organized in 1878 and is a rich agricultural area.

McCook County is drained by four streams belonging to two drainage systems. The western part drains through Wolf Creek, which flows into the James River. The eastern part drains by Little Vermillion and East Fork Vermillion rivers, which converge just north of Montrose. The latter is the largest stream in the county. The central part drains through the West Fork Vermillion River. All these streams are sluggish and carry very little water except in the spring, in wetter years, or just after heavy rain falls. Wolf Creek and West Fork and Little Vermillion Rivers usually dry up and contain only isolated pools of water during the summer months.

It would seem that with this number of streams, the drainage would be adequate, but the streams have not dissected the broad, flat divides. Thus, these areas have poor surface drainage. In the undulating area, the surface drainage accumulates in basins or potholes that dry up during the summer months.

The soils are developed mainly over glacial till and vary from a heavy clay to a moderately permeable soil. The heavier soil is found in the level part of the North and western part of the county and in potholes. Wind erosion has taken some of the top soil where cover has not been adequate. The top soil varies from a loam to a silt loam and can be found in 90 percent of the land area. Soils that are underplayed with gravel are located on terraces adjacent to streams and have a tendency to be droughty. Sandy areas are not too prevalent and are not a problem in this area. The stonier and thin soils are located adjacent to stream channels and on knolls or ridges which is characteristic of glaciated terrain. The bottomland soils are deep and medium textured and are subject to overflow during the spring and heavier rainfall.

The principal source of water for domestic and livestock use is shallow wells. However, properly placed dugouts and dams would be beneficial in some areas. Drainage has been established to some extent near the vicinity of Spencer, South Dakota, in Benton Township, but has not been maintained. Other small, local drains have been established by the farmers but many more drains could be used, or diversion ditches and water spreading systems could be established where the water could be used beneficially, rather than wasted.

Resources of the County had been exploited, especially soil resources, and were beginning to create problems in lower land values, lower production per acre, and necessity of diverting cropland from cultivated crops to grassland and trees. This lowered potential income with the attendant social and economic consequences.

Prior to the Conservation District organization, some work had been done by the County Extension office through demonstrations and educational devices to inform people of the need for conservation practices. This necessarily had been limited and no personnel was available to give farmers individual assistance. Interest in soil conservation movement was first evidenced in 1946 by groups of interested citizens. The first real interest, however, was late in 1946 or 1947 when a group of businessmen from Canistota and Salem approached Bob Kelton on the need for soil conservation because of economic impact of allowing soils to erode away. This group of businessmen helped set up a steering committee and some of them were on the committee.

With the help of the steering committee, an educational program was set up to inform people of the value of conservation and the need for a conservation district organization to direct the conservation work. This educational program included meetings (some eight to ten were held throughout the county), newspaper articles in local papers, circular letters, and individual effort on the part of the steering committee talking to friends and neighbors.

The ballots were counted on June 1, 1948. Of the 678 ballots cast, 584 were in favor and 94 against, and the Conservation District was approved. The state committee appointed C.A. Hamaker, Spencer, for a one year term and Harold Heitgen, Salem, for a two year term. The two were to supervise the election of the three additional supervisors. Leo Weber, Bridgewater, was elected for the three year term; Ben Koepsel, Canova, for two years; and L.A. Eichman, Salem, for one year.

The following land owners were on the steering committee to help with organizing the Conservation District: Walter Triebwasser, Salem; J.S. Jorgensen, Montrose; Peter Hansen, Salem; John Smith, Montrose; Harold Heitgen, Salem; Leon Erickson, Montrose; Ernest Heting, Salem; Ted Anderson, Montrose; Steve R. Weber, Salem; Joe Werner, Canistota; Bill Westhoff, Salem; Walter Neuberger, Canistota; William Luehn, Salem (deceased); Victor Schlueter, Canistota; Art Anderson, Salem; Dwight Godfrey, Canistota (deceased); Marvin Duxbury, Salem; V.R. Knox, Canistota (deceased); Leo Weber, Bridgewater; Sam Woltzen, Canistota; Fred Forsch, Bridgewater; Chellis Hamaker, Spencer; Joe R. Hofer, Bridgewater (deceased); Mervin McDaniel, Spencer; Ben Koepsel, Canova.

Soil and water problems of the county, as listed in the original Conservation District Program of Work and Work Plan were: water erosion; wind erosion; water conservation; tree planting (lack of trees in county); flooding; shelterbelt management; crop rotation; soil fertility problem; proper drainage; weed control; grass seeding and pasture management.

The Conservation District has moved ahead with a program to correct these problems. A survey was made in 1958 to determine the conservation needs. The survey shows what needs to be done to protect the lands of the Conservation District. These needs are all based on soil maps and other sources, including other agencies and individuals with problems in agriculture.

The table below shows the practices needed and completed by June 30, 1969:

Practice	Needed	Applied	To Be Completed
Conservation cropping system	264,000 ac	249,819 ac	14,181 ac
Crop utilization	264,000 ac	260,396 ac	3,604 ac
Contouring	15,419 ac	12,200 ac	3,219 ac
Conservation strip cropping	29,012 ac	1,900 ac	27,112 ac
Terracing	1,576 mi	157 mi	1,419 mi
Waterways	2,248 ac	997 ac	1,251 ac
Dams and dugouts	825	616	209
Tree planting	3,832 ac	3,188 ac	644 ac
Wildlife development	1,500 ac	916 ac	584 ac
Springs	27	12	15
Wind strip cropping	4,731 ac	320 ac	4,411 ac
Diversion	22.0 mi	1.5 mi	20.5 mi

Supervisors of the Conservation District until 1969: C.A. Hamaker, Spencer; Harold Heitgen, Salem; Leo Weber; L.A. Erickman, Salem; Ben Koepsel, Canova; Lloyd Wasser, Montrose;

Duane Wrage, Canistota; Vernon Weber, Bridgewater; Gregory Streff, Salem; John Stiefvater, Salem; Eugene C. Painter, Montrose.

The 1969 supervisors were Vernon Weber, Bridgewater, Chair; Duane Wrage, Canistota, Vice-Chair; Ronald Sandine, Salem, Treasurer; Eugene Painter, Montrose; Wendell Anderson, Canistota; and R.B. Kelton, Salem, County Agent, Secretary.

Updated information provided in 2012:

**Original Board Members**

C.A. Hamaker, Harold Heitgem, Leo Weber, L.A. Eickman

**Former Board Members**

Ben Koepsel, Gregor Streff, Duane Wrage, Eugene Painter, Vernon Weber, John Stiefvater, Wendell Anderson

**Current Board Members**

Dean Christensen, George Leitheiser, Fred Zimmer, Ronald Sandine, Matt Anderson