

# Technical training builds skills, boosts trust



**From left:**  
*Landowner Bob Christie, Winona County SWCD resource specialist Lance Klessig and Christie's son-in-law DJ Mueller discuss the transition to a no-till farming operation on Christie's Winona County farm in April.*

**Below:** *Klessig examines root growth on recently planted cover crops on Christie's farm.*

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Melissa Wenzel, BWSR



For Winona County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) resource specialist Lance Klessig, conservation is much more than a job that pays the bills: It's a lifelong passion.

Raised on a beef farm near Stevens Point, Wisconsin, Klessig said he grew up living and breathing agriculture and natural resources stewardship. Even his first name — Lance — means “of the land.”

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire with a bachelor's degree in resource management geography, Klessig worked in a variety of resource conservation roles in Wisconsin and Minnesota before taking his current position with the Winona County SWCD in 2016.

Klessig has pursued numerous professional



training opportunities through the Technical Training and Certification Program (TTCP). The program is a partnership among the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), the



**Left:** Landowner Bob Christie and his son-in-law DJ Mueller met with Winona County SWCD resource specialist Lance Klessig in April to discuss the progress of cover crops recently planted on Christie's farm near St. Charles. Christie and Mueller planted a diverse mix of cover crops this spring including oats, peas, lentils, forage brassicas, turnips and radishes.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE) and the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD). The program has offered or organized more than 115 training courses reaching more than 2,000 participants since 2015. Training opportunities include live webinars and in-person courses.

Trainings offered through the TTCP helped Klessig become a certified conservation planner and a certified crop adviser. Both certification programs are rigorous. For example, certified crop advisers must pass comprehensive exams and complete 40 hours of continuing education every two years to remain certified. Klessig said the training he gained during these certification processes greatly enhanced his ability to provide landowners with specific advice regarding conservation practices and crop profitability.

"I believe in the conservation practices that I'm recommending," Klessig said. "Farmers have told me they can trust my perspective and recommendations because I'm a certified crop adviser as well as a certified conservation planner. I bring a lot to the table that's not driven by sale of an agricultural product."

Klessig applies his technical training background directly to his work with landowners. On April 23, he met with Bob Christie and his son-in-law DJ Mueller at Christie's Winona County grain farm near St. Charles to discuss the progress of their recent transition to a no-till operation. The conversion to no-till began in 2017, according to Klessig. This spring, Christie and Mueller planted a diverse mix of cover crops including oats, peas, lentils, forage brassicas, turnips and radishes.

Christie said his decision to add cover crops and transition to a 100 percent no-till operation was a major

adjustment, but knowing he could rely on Klessig to answer questions, perform site visits and provide sound recommendations helped ease the process. Christie said he pursued conservation practices to increase soil health and fertility.

"Some things have to change (in agriculture)," Christie said. "I want to be a part of that, and I want to help create long-term healthy soil."

Klessig said he would recommend TTCP trainings to other conservation professionals, especially to those who are new to the field or did not grow up around agriculture.

"We have a real opportunity to help get conservation practices applied to the land," Klessig said. "With all of my technical training, I've remained open-minded and continue to listen to landowners and what their needs are. I keep on learning along the way, which has helped me become a more well-rounded conservation professional."