

As MN CREP unrolls, reasons for enrolling cropland multiply

From left: Arlyn Gehrke, Rock County Land Management engineering technician, met with Howard, Greg and Leroy Van Wyhe of Van Wyhe Farms. The Van Wyhes anticipate the land they enrolled in the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program will expand their hunting opportunities in Rock County. Courtesy Photo



Meet buffer requirements. Stop battling wet ground. Build a legacy. Nine months in to the new Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program enrollment period, those motivations have sparked the most sign-ups throughout 54 eligible counties in the southern and western parts of the state.

“It’s going to accomplish a lot as part of the conservation goals for Minnesota,” said Dave Rickert, assistant easement section manager for the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. “These are areas that are playing an important part for water quality and wildlife habitat.”



MN CREP can buffer streams, restore wetlands

or protect drinking water supplies. It puts marginal cropland into perpetual conservation easements.

The federal-state partnership works like this:

Landowners enroll property for 15 years in the federally funded Conservation Reserve Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm Service Agency. That same land is enrolled in a state-funded, perpetual conservation easement

through Reinvest in Minnesota, administered by BWSR.

MN CREP is funded with \$350 million from the federal government and \$150 million from the state. By early February, 33 soil and water conservation districts had submitted 132 applications. The 115 funded involve 4,000 acres and \$34 million.

“I would attribute the success of that to local SWCD efforts as well as wanting to leave a legacy for

future generations. These may be areas that are getting drowned out every so often. It's putting less stress on the landowner having to worry about constantly flooded areas," Rickert said.

One of the three brothers usually harvests a deer from the RIM property every year.

Leroy, Howard and Greg Van Wyhe are Van Whye Farms, a 1,500-acre corn and soybean operation based in Rock County near Hills.

"The ground is good, real good for farming and raising corn and beans. It's pretty valuable land down here," Leroy said. He advised farmers considering MN CREP to determine their soil type and payment rate.

What Arlyn Gehrke called "fairly attractive rates for marginal crop

ground" may be driving some Rock County sign-ups.

"We've had a surprisingly high interest in CREP. We're not known to have a lot of conservation easements in the county because

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— Leroy Van Wyhe,
Rock County landowner

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we have a lot of fertile ground and expensive ground as well," said Gehrke, Rock County Land Management/SWCD engineering technician.

"It takes a bit of risk out of the operation."

This spring, the Van Wyhes will seed their 12.75-acre MN CREP easement with the SWCD-recommended, six-grass mix.

"It'll be real good for habitat, and then at the same time it'll be helping the water quality, too, since it'll be acting as a buffer to keep the contaminants out of the ditch water," Leroy Van Wyhe said.

"I would hope that nitrate level would go down (and) if it is high in Mud Creek that we do see a change. That's what these buffer strips are for, to cleanse the water before it gets to the stream."