

South Branch Root River Watershed Project

January 19, 2005 Meeting Notes (postponed from January 12 due to bad weather predicted)

In attendance: Jeremy Maul (Fillmore SWCD), Lee Ganske (MPCA), Fred Beier (Homeowner), Keith Voorhees (Clayton Township), Bill Sweetser (Bennington Township), Jerrold Tesmer (Fillmore Extension), Denton Bruening and Mark Dittrich (MDA), Diane Hafner (Landowner), Carol L. Kohn (Landowner, water monitor), Bob & Eloda Wood (Stream monitor, Wykoff), Donna Rasmussen (Fillmore SWCD)

Introductions

Highlights from the FANMAP interviews. Denton Bruening, MDA, interviewed 61 farmers in the watershed from February to June of 2004 about their farming practices for growing season 2003 related to tillage, nutrient management and pest management. Some of the analysis is still being completed, but he has highlights from the initial analysis about some of the nutrient management practices. The interviews covered 31,000 acres in the watershed, which has a total area of 74,000 acres, averaging about 500 acres per interviewee. Eighty-two percent of the acres were dominated by a corn/soybean rotation. Nitrogen practices vary widely throughout the watershed. More than 1.7 million pounds of N are applied in the watershed, 97% of which is on field corn. Ninety-four percent of the corn acres received commercial N fertilizer, and all the corn acres received either commercial N or manure. Twenty percent of the N was fall applied, most of which was as anhydrous ammonia. None of the anhydrous was applied before November 1st. Twenty-six of the 61 farmers had livestock consisting of dairy and hogs. Only 2700 acres received manure, of which 2400 acres were planted in corn. About 1000 acres had manure applied from outside the watershed. About 75% of the manure is fall applied, mostly as liquid manure. Corn fields with manure averaged 172 lb/acre of N (recs would be 140 lb/acre) compared to corn fields without manure, which averaged 142 lb/acre (recs would be 127 lb/acre). There were 749,000 pounds of commercial phosphorus applied in 2003. Field corn received 91% of the commercial phosphorus. There was discussion about including phosphorus charts similar to those for nitrogen and including an analysis of manure application and tillage methods with manure in the report.

This led to a lengthy discussion about nutrient management related to the question whether the analysis should divide the interviews into those that strictly follow U of M guidelines or allow a 15% overage since that has been allowed for EQIP, the feedlot rules, and the CSP sign-up in the Blue Earth River basin. It is a very small group of farmers who strictly follow the recs. But if we make the allowance for the 15%, are we sending the wrong message that it is ok to go over the U of M recommendations? Agronomically 10-15% over the recs is ok, but from a water quality perspective, we want farmers to be closer to the U of M recs in order to reduce losses to streams and ground water. The amount of overapplication of N is approximately equal to the amount lost per acre as calculated based on water quality monitoring. The recs were not developed to be used as a standard, but as a guideline, yet can this group set a recommendation other than the U of M recommendation? Some suggestions were to break the data down by those who apply over 30 lb/acre over the recs, or by acres with or without manure, or by county.

Review the watershed brochure and program fact sheets: These will be used to provide some basic information about the programs that are to be funded through the 319 grant to put BMPs on the land. Technicians in both Fillmore and Mower have had an opportunity to review them and make comments. It would be helpful to have any comments for changes to Donna by the next meeting, so we can begin distributing these very soon.

Discuss publishing the next watershed newsletter and the announcement of watershed funding: We need to set a target date for mailing, possibly March 1. Topics to include at this time include forest

stewardship grant information, an announcement of the funding awards, if there is a special event to announce the awards and if someone from the Governor's office can attend (possibly in Forestville when it's warmer, such as April), and basic information about the financial assistance programs being offered. Some information about the Conservation Security Program (CSP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) should also be included. Jerry has information about Extension nitrogen studies. Key results from FANMAP will be prepared by Denton. A short article about the livestock recommendations that are proposed for the Fillmore County Comprehensive Plan could be included. A feature story about a local livestock producer (Steve Heusinkveld?) could be used as an example of the types of land uses and BMPs that are being encouraged, plus he is participating in the MDA grazing study providing the manured corn monitoring site.

Proposed water quality monitoring activities: A table prepared by Lee outlines the water quality monitoring activities in the watershed. If there is anything that's missing, or if there are ideas on ways current monitoring activities might be improved or enhanced or suggestions for additional monitoring, please share them with the coordinators. The standards are based on impacts to aquatic life and human health risks, which apply for trout streams since they are protected as a secondary drinking water source. Atrazine questions are analyzed in the FANMAP report that can be related to the water quality data for pesticides. Well water analyses for bacteria and atrazine will be subsidized with the implementation project grant funds. Citizen stream monitoring program (CSMP) data comprise the largest data set. Those data will be used as part of the formal assessment process for waters of the state.

Updates:

CWP ISTS Loan Program: Mower County passed a resolution authorizing signing the loan agreements on Nov. 23. Fillmore County passed a resolution authorizing the chair to sign the loan agreements with the stipulation that language differences between the county and the MPCA are resolved and approved by the Fillmore County Attorney. Informational programs are planned with the Spring Valley Kiwanis and Ostrander Lions in February.

319 Implementation Grant: The final work plan was approved by MPCA on December 20th. The grant agreements are in the process of being compiled by the MPCA and should be ready for county board signatures very soon.

New Look at Livestock Initiative: The recommendations developed for the Comprehensive Plan were given to the Ag and Natural Resources Subcommittee. Several meetings were held with them in December and January to incorporate the recommendations into the Ag section of the Comp Plan while also making some revisions to the rest of the section. These were presented to the entire Comp Plan Committee at their regular January 11th meeting for their review and comments by the February meeting.

2005 Meeting Schedule: The February meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 10th at 6:30 p.m. Eric Anderson from the MDH will be the featured speaker on the topic of the health risks associated with bacteria in water. We will continue our alternating schedule of afternoon and evening meetings; the March, May, July, September, and November meetings will be on the second Wednesday at 2:00 in the afternoon while the other months will be on the second Thursday at 6:30 p.m. The June meeting may include the township officers' tour discussed at a past meeting and could possibly be on a Saturday to accommodate the tour.

The meeting adjourned at 3:55 p.m.