SWCD honors Rutten for his work

Conservation has always been important for family

By Carol Stender

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OSAKIS, Minn. — Doug and Joan Rutten knew their Osakis farm needed help after they purchased it more than 30 years ago. Their land had gullies and the rocky soil was eroding.

They called the Douglas County Soil and Water Conservation District and, using SWCD's suggestions, started strip cropping and implementing a conservation program.

The SWCD, noting the couple's strong conservation ethic, asked Doug to run for district supervisor. He did and is celebrating 30 years on the board. His efforts and commitment to conservation garnered him the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Outstanding Supervisor award for 2005.

His initial conservation efforts weren't fruitful. Everything washed out the first year, he said.

"The guys at the SWCD said they would put it in next year," Doug said. "And they did."

They alternate crops in their strip cropping program between alfalfa and corn, Joan said. Waterways remain grassed and are cut and baled.

They started farming 30 years ago with 12 cows and a few brood sows, Doug said. They got rid of the hogs but continue to milk 24 cows.

"We like it this way," Doug said. "We are making a decent living."

They raise 30 to 40 Holstein steers each year, selling them as Tenderlean. They use a Doboy product that finishes the steers at 14 months, Doug said. Klinder Processing by Belle River processes the animals and direct market the tender meat as mixed quarters.

The farm's rolling terrain is good land for livestock.

He's taught the importance of conservation to the couple's five children and 13 grandchildren.

As SWCD district supervisor, he works with farmers in a four-township area and discusses SWCD projects with producers.

"This isn't a problem-type job," he said. "I like it. I like being around people."

Their children aren't interested in taking over the farm but several share another passion with the couple—a love for old tractors and cars. Doug and Joan belong to the Lakes Area Cruisers and the Pioneer Power Club, a group of vintage tractor enthusiasts.

Ken, their son, focuses on tractor restoration and painting. Other family members share Doug's mechanical ability to restore the machines.

"I always took care of my tractors," Doug said. "I've owned one of them for 41 years."

He got the mechanical talent from his father.

"I always wondered why he carried an oil can with him," Doug said. "If he worked on something and he had to remove a bolt, he would put oil on it so the next time, it was easier to remove."

Pioneer Power Club members own a variety of makes and models. Doug's passion is in Farmalls as can be seen by his toy tractor collection in the couple's kitchen. A rack above the kitchen sink was meant for a plate collection but Doug's tractors took the spot.

Joan merely laughters about the collection's inclusion in her kitchen decor. She's as enthused about the hobby as Doug.