



Annual Meeting of the Jackson County Conservation District

Wednesday, Feb. 13, 2019

Dinner at 6 p.m. • Meeting and Award Presentations at 7 p.m.
Holton First United Methodist Church



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Conservation District to recognize farmers, students at annual meeting

Jackson County farmers and landowners will be honored for their conservation efforts, and local students will be honored for their study of conservation during the 71st annual meeting of the Jackson County Conservation District on Wednesday, Feb. 13.

Dinner, which is provided by area banks, will begin at 6 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church in Holton, followed by a business meeting and award ceremony at 7 p.m. Entertainment will be provided by ventriloquist Greg Claassen.

During the business portion of the evening, an election of one board supervisor will be held by secret ballot.

The Kansas Bankers Award will be presented to Charlie and Katrina Barrow.

The Outstanding Conservationist Award will be presented to Gerald "Corky" and Jeri Albright.

Pat and Sherry Ireland will receive this year's Grassland Award.

The Kurt and Heidi Kathrens family will be the recipients of the Soil Health Award.

Ed Webber will be presented with the Wildlife Habitat Award.

His son, Rees, will be present to accept the honor.

The award winning conservation speech, covering this year's topic "Healthy Soil Grows Life" was given by Joel Kennedy, a junior at Jackson Heights High School.

Kennedy is the son of Kelly and Kim Kennedy of rural Holton. His FFA instructors are Paul Lierz and Michaela McKenzie.

He will receive a \$300 cash scholarship from the conservation district to be used upon enrollment at the college of his choice.

On Oct. 24, Kennedy competed at the KACD Area VI speech contest and earned second place.

Second place in the local speech contest went to Kortnee VanDonge (\$200) of Holton High School, third place to Tanner Reed (\$100) of Jackson Heights High School and fourth place to Jerilyn Nelson (\$75) of Jackson Heights High School.

Holton High School student Cailin Parks received honorable mention and \$50.

Lexis Mick is the winner of the Jackson County Conservation District's first-grade poster contest based on the theme "Water-sheds - Our Water, Our Home."

Mick is the daughter of Skyler and Heather Mick. She attends Holton Elementary School and her teacher is Abbey Althof.

Second place went to Brenna Bontrager of Holton Elementary. Honorable mentions are Liam Hillrichs (Holton), Brooklyn Hinman (Holton), Corbin Latham (Jackson Heights), Aaliya Hale (Holton) and Mason Cadue (Holton).

April Slipke of Jackson Heights Elementary School won the second-grade poster contest. Slipke is the daughter of Allen and Phyllis Slipke. Her teacher is Greg Nilges.

Second place went to Emersyn Nicol of Holton Elementary. Honorable mentions are Luke Robertson (Jackson Heights), Natalie Carvajal (Holton), Ashlynn Chermok (Holton), Langston Jenkins (Holton) and Andrea Gallo-Ramos (Holton).

Grant Warner was named the winner of the district's third-grade poster contest. Warner attends Holton Elementary School, where his teacher is Lakota Bohl. He is the son of Tyler and Liza Warner of Holton. He also won first place at the KACD state competition.

Second place was awarded to

Tucker Terry of Holton Elementary. Honorable mentions are Tylie Bienhoff (Royal Valley), Julianna Whipple (Holton), Ashlyn Brucken (Jackson Heights), Madeline Jones (Jackson Heights) and Kaia Uhl (Jackson Heights).

The winner of the fourth-grade poster contest is Adalie Alley. Alley attends Holton Elementary, where her teacher is Brooke Stallbaumer. Her parents are Ryan and Lindsay Alley.

Second place was awarded to Marley Gilliland of Holton Elementary. Honorable mentions are Lanna Brown (Royal Valley), Dasno Mills (Royal Valley), Shawnot Evans (Royal Valley), Kinsey Will (Holton) and Jacey Willard (Holton).

Bailey Kathrens was the winner of the fifth-grade poster contest. Kathrens is the daughter of Kurt and Heidi Kathrens. She attends Holton Elementary School and her teacher is Kelli Thompson.

Second place went to Mya Marten of Holton Elementary. Honorable mentions were Melissa Castro Tino, Jacob Warner, Emily Ditzler, Kolbie Noel and Presley Phillips, all of Holton Elementary.



Featured entertainer

Greg Claassen, shown above with one of the ventriloquist dummies that feature in his act, can make just about anything talk — and that's exactly what he's been doing with his ventriloquist act for more than 30 years. Claassen, who has established a reputation for unflinching audience rapport, will be the featured entertainer during the 71st annual meeting of the Jackson County Conservation District on Wednesday, Feb. 13, it was reported.

Submitted photo

Financial aid applications for conservation practices to be accepted during March

Jackson County Conservation District is conducting a sign-up March 4-29, 2019, to accept requests for state financial assistance to install enduring conservation practices, it was reported.

The conservation district administers state cost-share programs locally to improve water quality and reduce soil erosion. Funding is provided by the Division of Conservation, Kansas Department of Agriculture (DOC) through appropriation from the Kansas Water Plan Fund.

Landowners with natural resource concerns on their property are urged to visit the Jackson County Conservation District to discuss the possibility of receiving state financial assistance.

Funding is provided through cost-share payments to landowners for eligible practices such as terraces, grassed waterways, diversions, grass plantings, livestock water supplies, cross-fencing, upgrade failed septic

systems, etc.

The sign-up does not guarantee approval of cost-share financial assistance. Projects started or completed prior to being approved for funding are not eligible for these funds.

Following the sign-up deadline, each request is carefully reviewed to ensure eligibility. The proposed project is ranked according to a system developed by the Jackson County Conservation District. The ranking system ensures fairness to landowners and ensures cost-share funds are used to meet local conservation priorities.

Landowners approved for the program are notified of the practice(s) approved and the estimated amount of cost-share that will be provided. Before the work can begin, the contract is approved by the DOC and must be signed by the landowner(s).

The conservation district works closely with the USDA

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to protect and conserve natural resources, primarily soil and water. Conservation practices funded with state cost-share funds must be installed and maintained according to NRCS and DOC specifications.

All failed septic systems upgrades must meet county code requirements. It is necessary that landowners work closely with

NRCS in the planning stage to ensure practices are applied correctly. Technical assistance for these practices is provided free of charge by the USDA.

For more information concerning state cost-programs and other available services, please contact Brian Boeckman, district manager, Jackson County Conservation District, (785)364-3329, ext. 136.

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Outstanding Conservationist Award

Albrights have been farming for more than 50 years

By Ali Holcomb

Longtime Jackson County farmers G.M. "Corky" and Jeri Albright will receive the Outstanding Conservationist Award during the Jackson County Conservation District's annual meeting on Wednesday.

"It's always such a neat thing to go to each year and see people we know be recognized for their work," Jeri said of the annual meeting. "It's a really good program for the community because it helps encourage people to continue to improve the land."

The Albright farm eight miles west of Hoyt near Delia, just two miles from where Corky grew up.

Both Corky and Jeri went to Kansas State University where Corky received a degree in animal husbandry.

In 1968, two years after they married, the couple bought their first 80 acres in Jackson County.

The Albright grow corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa, as well as brome and prairie hay. They also manage a cow-calf operation.

"We typically have 100 heifers this time of year that are due," Jeri said. "We do background steers and some heifers to be sold as feeders or finished out at the feedlot — feeding our own silage, grain and hay."

For a few years, the couple also had hogs.

"Everybody did at that time," she said. "We keep busy year-round."

The Albright established Dutch Creek Farms in 1993 when their son, Scott, graduated from college and returned to the farm.

Some of the family's accomplishments include the installation and maintenance of 65,427 linear feet of gradient terraces and 19.8 acres of grassed waterways.

"There is always something that needs doing," Jeri said. "We have tile terraces and the rest are contour terraces and waterways."



Gerald "Corky" and Jeri Albright, who are shown above, are the recipients of the 2018 Outstanding Conservationist Award. The Albright have been farming in southern Jackson County — near Delia — for more than 50 years.

Photo courtesy of the Albright family

The Albright family received the Jackson County Conservation District's 2010 Grassland Award.

"We've never broken out any grassland," she said. "When it was sown down, it was for a reason. It's thin and rocky. There's also nothing like natural grass."

To maintain the grassland, Jeri said they spray for sericea lespedeza.

"It's kind of everywhere, and we try to keep ahead of it a little bit," she said.

Corky served on the Jackson County Conservation District Board for 21 years.

"We're dedicated to soil con-

servation practices and building up the soil," Jeri said. "We started no-tilling the land in the 1970s and that works well in Jackson County."

Jeri said receiving this year's Outstanding Conservationist Award is humbling.

"Most farmers do practice conservation, and there are a lot of people who deserve to be recognized," she said.

The Albright have four children, Marty, Scott, Amy and Kay, and eight grandchildren.

"Everyone helps when it's cold and miserable," Jeri said. "All our children know how to work hard."

Learning how to manage nutrients will benefit producers, communities

By Robert Schiffner
Resource Conservationist
Hays

Managing nutrients has always been a concern in both agricultural and non-agricultural settings. Production levels suffer if there are inadequate nutrients in the soil.

Off-site water quality concerns can be a problem if there are excessive levels of nutrients in the soil. Learning how to manage nutrients at an optimum level will benefit both producers and communities.

Managing nutrients is an ongoing process. It is important to determine reasonable yield goals, test the soil to discover what nutrients are already available and then apply nutrients to meet your crop needs.

The timing of nutrient application can reduce loss potential

if the nutrients are applied all at once. There is a higher potential for loss before the plant can use the nutrients. Split applications can provide the plant with the proper nutrients when needed the most and allows producers to adjust yield goals based on weather conditions.

Utilizing manure for nutrients is a way to reduce manure stockpiles and benefit crop production. However, this management of nutrients becomes more of a concern. In many cases, manure cannot be applied at levels low enough to meet crop nutrient needs, so stockpiling nutrients in the soil is commonly done when applying manure.

This technique often increases the potential for the loss of nutrients. It is very important to test soils and manure prior to the applications of manure then

manage excess levels of nutrients through proper conservation practices.

There are two pamphlets developed by Kansas State University that can be very helpful in setting up a nutrient management plan. These are "Soil Test Interpretations and Fertilizer Recommendations, MF-2586" and "Estimating Manure Nutrient Availability, MF-2562."

Your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office is also a source of information to help you get started, or help you assess your current plan. Remember nutrient management doesn't cost, it pays.

For assistance, please contact Brian Boeckman, district manager, Jackson County Conservation District, (785)364-3329, ext. 136.

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As always, we are proud to help sponsor the annual meeting and promote the conservation of our natural resources.

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Pat and Sherry Ireland are shown above, and they are the recipients of the 2018 Grassland Award for proper grazing use, alternate water supplies, brush and weed control and fence maintenance.

Photo courtesy of Brian Boeckman

Grassland Award Ireland tends a variety of grasses

By Ali Holcomb

Pat Ireland will receive this year's Grassland Award from the Jackson County Conservation District during the organization's annual meeting on Feb. 13.

The award is based upon Ireland's proper grazing use, alternate water supplies, brush and weed control and fence maintenance.

Ireland raises cattle and has row crops — corn and soybeans — on his farm near Muscotah.

He has a variety of grassland, including brome grass, where he grazes cattle from April 1 to June 15.

"That's the best growth period, and when it's most productive," Ireland said.

He also has a fescue grass program, which supplies winter grazing in the late fall and early winter, as well as a crabgrass program.

"The crabgrass comes up

where we've intensively grazed all the cattle during the winter," he said. "That grass is good from June 1 to Sept. 15 depending on the moisture."

Ireland said he's thankful for three reliable springs on the land that "never give up."

"We try to keep all our ponds and fences maintained," he said. "We spray all our pastures."

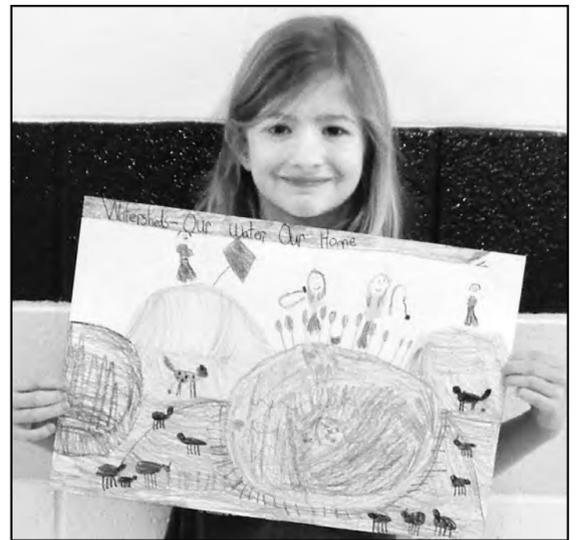
Ireland said he was surprised when he learned that the conservation district was honoring him and his family this year.

"My father and neighbors all implemented soil conservation practices," he said. "I grew up around it."

His parents, the late Ralph and Gladys Ireland, farmed for about 50 years in Straight Creek Township.

Ireland and his wife, Sherry, who owns Dragonfly Yoga and Persian Rugs in Holton, have three adult children, Aric, Molly and Katie.

Conservation Poster Winners

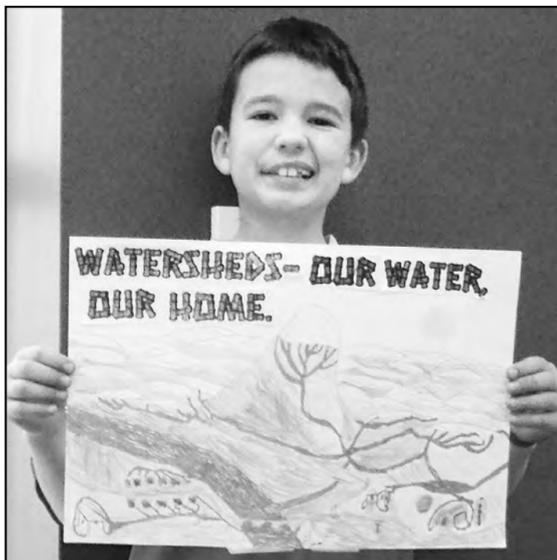


In the photo at upper left, Lexis Mick won the first-grade division of the Jackson County Conservation District's annual poster contest. Mick is the daughter of Skyler and Heather Mick and attends Holton Elementary. Her teacher is Abbey Althof.

In the photo above, April Slipke was selected as the second-grade winner in the conservation district's annual poster contest. Slipke is the daughter of Allen and Phyllis Slipke. She attends Jackson Heights Elementary School where her teacher is Greg Nilges.

In the photo at left, Holton Elementary student Grant Warner won the third-grade division of the conservation district's annual poster contest. Warner is the son of Tyler and Liza Warner of Holton. His teacher is Lakota Bohl. Warner's poster also won first place at the KACD state competition, it was reported.

Photos courtesy of Jackson County Conservation District



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Kansas Bankers Award

Barrows see potential in any piece of land

By Ali Holcomb

When it comes to farming, Charlie and Katrina Barrow can see the potential in almost any piece of land.

"Our goal is take land that someone doesn't think is any good and see if we can make it better and get it back in production and improve the soil health," Charlie said.

The family has earned the Kansas Bankers Award from the Jackson County Conservation District for their efforts to install and maintain terraces, diversions and underground outlets on their land southeast of Denison.

The family will receive the honor at the district's 71st annual meeting on Wednesday.

Charlie's parents, Dan and Deb Barrow, received the same honor in 1983.

"They taught me to leave your land better than you found it," Charlie said. "I think the terraces we're building in Jackson County are going be here for a long time."

Charlie grew up a mile from their current homestead, and Katrina grew up near Holton. Charlie has always been involved in his parents' livestock operation.

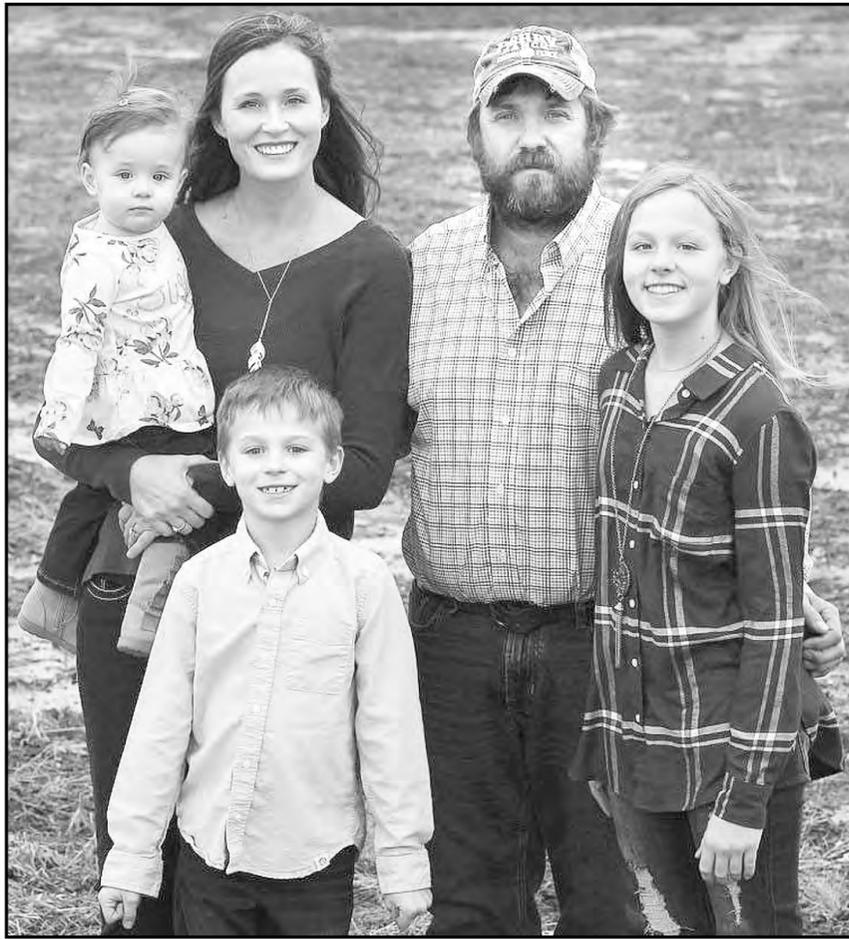
"Everything we do, we do as a family," Charlie said. "We all help each other out. Our family has received grassland awards in Jackson and Jefferson counties. We're trying to be conservationists."

In the last few years, Charlie said he's been able to get back into row crop farming, managing about 500 acres of corn and soybeans.

"Farming started as a hobby that got out of control," he said.

According to the Jackson County Conservation District, the Barrows' honor is centered around the installation of 26,807 linear feet of storage terraces, 8,659 linear of underground outlets and 7,861 cubic yards of diversions.

"I remember my dad building terraces when I was very little," Charlie said. "From a young age,



Charlie and Katrina Barrow are the winners of the 2018 Kansas Bankers Award. The family's farmstead is located east of Denison on 166th Road. The couple is shown above with their three children, (from left) Emmy, 15 months; Beau, 6; and Josie, 12.

Photo courtesy of the Barrow family

my parents bought rough farms, tried to clean them up and make them better for the future."

The family also practices control grazing on their land, as well as no-till farming practices.

"The soil would just wash away if we didn't," he said. "We've started to get more into cover crops as well, and I think that's a really good thing for the

soil."

Charlie said the honor was a complete surprise.

"You don't do it to get recognized," he said "We're fortunate to have a conservation district that can help us do some of these things. Without them, it's tough for people to do things on their own."

In addition to farming, Char-

lie keeps busy with Barrow Logging Co. and Dan Barrow Trading, a fur shop in Denison.

The couple have three children, Josie, 12; Beau, 6; and Emmy, 16 months.

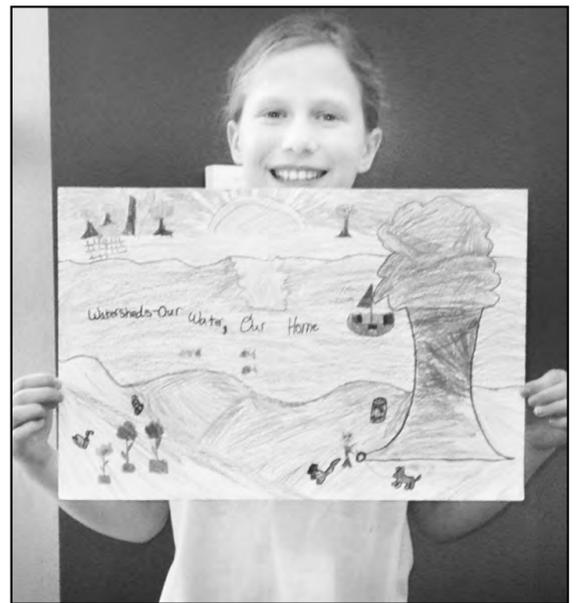
"We want to teach our children responsibility and a work ethic," Charlie said. "What they learn on the farm benefits them for the rest of their life."

Conservation Poster Winners



Adalie R. Alley is the winner of the fourth-grade division of the Jackson County Conservation District's annual poster contest. Alley's parents are Ryan and Lindsay Alley. She attends Holton Elementary School, and her teacher is Brooke Stallbaumer.

Photo courtesy of Jackson County Conservation District



Bailey Kathrens is the winner of the Jackson County Conservation District's annual fifth-grade poster contest. Kathrens is the daughter of Kurt and Heidi Kathrens. She attends Holton Elementary School where her teacher is Kelli Thompson.

Photo courtesy of Jackson County Conservation District

How soil compaction affects growth of your crops — and what to do about it

By Steven Graber
Resource Soil Scientist
Dodge City

Soil compaction occurs on nearly every farm in the United States, with the results of compaction evident in crop growth.

Recent research has shown that organic matter on the surface and within the soil is an important factor in reducing soil compaction. Low soil organic matter levels have been shown to make the soil more susceptible to soil compaction.

Organic residues on the soil surface are able to cushion the effects of soil compaction. Organic matter is able to be compressed but retain its shape and structure even after the traffic has passed over it.

This is unlike mineral soil

aggregates which tend to compress under the pressure of traffic. Excessive traffic or tillage will break up organic matter and accelerate its decomposition.

Organic residues in the soil profile may be even more important than residues on the surface. This is because organic matter attaches to soil particles and helps to keep the particles from compacting, maintaining soil tilth.

Soil compaction has a biological component, and research has shown that a root cause of soil compaction is a lack of actively growing plants and active roots in the soil.

Plant roots create voids and macro pores in the soil for air and water movement. Plant roots also provide the food source for

soil microbes and fauna.

Finally, organic matter is lighter and less dense, and when mixed with mineral soil material, it helps to reduce the density of the mineral soil material.

Compacted soil is not easy to alleviate. Although subsoiling or chiseling can alleviate compaction immediately, the second pass by a single vehicle or implement may nullify the effort. The use of different strategies will be the best solution in solving the problem.

Reducing tillage, controlling

traffic, planting deep rooted cover crops and increasing organic matter will all benefit the soil, improve soil quality and increase crop production.

For assistance, please contact Brian Boeckman, district manager, Jackson County Conservation District, (785)364-3329, ext. 136.

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Soil Health Award

Kathrens family favors using cover crops

By Ali Holcomb

The decision to plant cover crops on his land several years ago was an easy one for Kurt Kathrens.

"My dad has always been good about adopting new practices, and using cover crops has worked for us with our cattle," Kathrens said. "The cattle are able to graze it late into the winter, and we don't have to feed hay. It's also better for the ground. It just works well."

Kathrens and his wife, Heidi, have found that the use of cover crops on their land the past several years is also making a positive difference to their soil.

For their efforts, the family is receiving the Soil Health Award from the Jackson County Conservation District.

A cover crop is a mixture of plants seeded in late summer or fall on a harvested field. They have the potential to help prevent erosion, supply nutrients and improve soil's physical and biological properties.

Kathrens farms alongside his father, Steve, and his uncle, Jeff, northeast of Holton. He also uses land owned by his grandfather, Wallace, great-uncle, John, and another uncle, Larry, to run cattle and plant cover crops.

"They are all very generous towards me," Kathrens said.

In addition to running cattle, Kathrens plants a variety of row crops, including corn and beans and some wheat and rye.

He began planting cover crops five years ago.

"We have a little bit of everything - rye, turnips, radishes and peas," he said. "Usually after rye, we plant soybeans. And for some reason, the soybeans really thrive."

Kathrens also uses rotational grazing practices with his cattle.

"If you have cattle, I think



Kurt and Heidi Kathrens are the winners of the Soil Health Award for their use of cover crops and rotational grazing on their farm northeast of Holton. They are shown above with their children (from left) Jaxton, Bailey, Arabella and Kyler.

Photo courtesy of the Kathrens family

having cover crops is a no-brainer," he said. "Plus, it's good for the ground."

Kathrens said he's followed the example of his father and uncles when it comes to conservation methods.

"My family has been practicing no-till for years and years,"

he said.

Kathrens and Heidi, who grew up in Mayetta, graduated from Kansas State and moved to Colorado for several years before returning to Jackson County in 2013.

"I grew up farming, and it was a natural progression for

me to return to it," he said.

The couple have four children, Kyler, 13; Bailey, 10; Arabella, 5; and Jaxton, 2, who they enjoy raising on the farm, he said.

"I think it's the best way to raise a family, but I might be biased," Kathrens said.

Area counties list conservation award winners

Three area conservation districts have also announced their 2018 award winners, it has been reported.

The Jefferson County Conservation District has announced the following seven 2018 award winners:

- *Soil Conservation Award presented to Rita Smith.
- *Soil Conservation Award

presented to Cindy Miller.

*Water Quality Award presented to Jim and Susan Phillips.

*Wildlife Award presented to Chris and Sean Self.

*Grassland Award presented to Mike and Judy Jameson.

*Grassland Award presented to Lucas and Andrea Coppinger.

*Cooperator of the Year Award presented to Bernard Noll.

The Pottawatomie County Conservation District announced one award winner for 2018.

*Grassland Award was presented to William R. Edwards of the Olsburg area.

The Atchison County Conser-

vation District announced three award winners for 2018:

*Bankers Conservation Award to Gary and Kathy Handke.

*Bankers Conservation Award to Joe and Diane Schletzbaum.

*Windbreak Award to Kevin and Jennifer Gigstad.

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Ed Webber's efforts to maintain 280 acres east of Hoyt as grassland and timber for wildlife have earned him this year's Wildlife Habitat Award. Webber, who is shown above, also received this honor in 1996. Photo courtesy of Tyler Warner

Wildlife Habitat Award

Webber a proponent of "leaving land natural for the wildlife"

By Ali Holcomb
When Charles "Ed" Webber started purchasing land east of Hoyt in the 1970s, he said he wasn't thinking about himself. "I'm a big proponent of leaving land natural for the wildlife," Webber said.

Webber and his son, Rees, both Topeka dentists, have worked hard through the years to improve the land, and their efforts have earned them this year's Kansas Wildlife Award from the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. They will be honored at the annual conservation district meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 13.

Tyler Warner, local KDWPT wildlife biologist, nominated the Webbers for the honor.

"Their main concern as landowners has been creating a wildlife habitat, especially for bobwhite quail," Warner said. "They've cleared a lot of brush and cedar, and the prairie comes back up. It's time consuming."

Webber owns 280 acres east of Hoyt near 114th and X Roads. "It's pretty remote," Webber

said. "I started buying the land in the 1970s, building the pond in 1978. I started with 60 acres, turned it into 80 acres and it kind of grew."

Webber said he's put most of the land back into native grass and timber for wildlife.

"It's not real good cropland," he said. "It needed to be back into natural grass."

With the use of a skid steer, Webber said that Rees has been instrumental in helping him clear the land through the years.

Webber has been involved in several conservation programs, including KDWPT's Habitat First program and USDA's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

In the past, Webber said some of the land was also enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Webber said he used to burn the native grassland every three years to maintain it. That schedule, however, has slowed down in recent years.

"It's a lot of work, and I have

to rely on more help," he said.

He also sprays for weeds, such as bush honeysuckle and sericea lespedeza.

The turkey and deer populations are thriving in the native grassland, he said, especially since he doesn't allow hunting on the property.

One of Webber's biggest passions is hummingbirds, and he keeps 25 to 30 hummingbird feeders around his property through the summer, attracting more than 100 hummingbirds.

"I have no lack of hummingbirds all summer long," he said.

Webber also won this award in 1996, and he said he feels honored to be recognized again.

"My dad took me hunting a lot in the 50s so I've always enjoyed being outside in nature," he said. "It's lots of fun, and I really get into wildlife."

Besides his son, Webber has a daughter, Suzanne, and several grandchildren.



Members of the Conservation District Board of Supervisors include (from left) Jarrod Bowser, Dan Pollock, George Phillips, William Conley and Henry Hill. Photo courtesy of the conservation district



The staff at the Jackson County Conservation District is shown above and includes (from left) Brian Boeckman, district manager, and Joseph Kennedy, KDA-DOC technician. Boeckman replaced Roberta Spencer, who had served as the conservation district manager for several years. Submitted photo

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Outlining nine steps of conservation planning

By Karrie Honaker
Resource Conservationist
Hays

The Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) provides sound conservation guidance to landowners and producers.

Providing technical expertise stems from a process that is a priority with the agency. It should also be a priority for anyone who desires to implement conservation practices to start a more sustainable approach to their farming or ranching operation.

There are nine steps identified by NRCS that outline conservation planning. These steps include: identifying problems and opportunities, determining objectives, inventorying resources, analyzing resource data, formulating alternatives, evaluating alternatives, making decisions, implementing the plan and evaluating the plan.

In short, the planning process is focused on having a planner work closely with a producer to determine their goals and objectives for the land, identify resource concerns and provide guidance for solutions to alleviate those concerns.

The planning process is not static — rather, these steps are accomplished in a dynamic fashion so that the producer and planner can make decisions and

have flexibility to proceed in a way that they both believe is the most beneficial for the land.

NRCS requires employees working with landowners and producers to become "Certified Conservation Planners." They are required to meet certain requirements to be qualified to work with producers to develop a plan. These requirements include extensive training in resource concern identification, as well as management and planning techniques.

There are many types of resource concerns that could indicate the need to start the conservation planning process. These resource concerns range from soil and water erosion to inefficient use of energy and water quality issues.

NRCS has the tools to help producers identify these concerns and implement practices that will address natural resource concerns and contribute to their preservation. If resource concerns exist on your property, contact your local NRCS office. They will be happy to guide you through "The Nine Steps of Conservation Planning" and help you achieve your conservation goals.

For more information, contact Brian Boeckman, district manager, Jackson County Conservation District, (785) 364-3329, ext. 136.

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Kennedy wins district's speech contest

Note: Joel Kennedy (pictured) is the winner of the Jackson County Conservation District's local high school speech contest. His topic was "Healthy Soil Grows Life."



Kennedy is a junior at Jackson Heights High School. He is the son of Kelly and Kim Kennedy of rural Holton. His FFA instructors are Paul Lierz and Michaela McKenzie.

He will receive a \$300 cash scholarship from the conservation district to be used upon enrollment at the college of his choice.

On Oct. 24, Kennedy competed at the KACD Area IV speech contest and received second place.

"Healthy Soil Grows Life"

One day I was working in our shop on one of our trailers. I was trying to get a nut off of a bolt so I could then take the bolt out because it was bent. I was having a lot of difficulty taking off the nut because it was rusted on.

As I struggled for what seemed like hours, my grandpa came up with a better idea. As I was about to ask for help, Grandpa came over to the trailer and started to cut off the bolt head with the torch... while I was still under the trailer. As sparks and hot pieces of metal are flying everywhere, I'm taking cover and hoping I don't catch on fire.

Once he was done, he told me one thing I'll never forget: "There is more than one tool you can use to get the job done."

Just like there is more than one tool to get a job done, there is more than one way to help with soil conservation and keeping our soils healthy.

There are several ways to keep our soils healthy, one being to plant cover crops. Two is to prevent soil erosion. And three is to do crop rotations in your fields.

First, let's talk about the benefits of cover crops. There are many different types of cover crops like legume cover crops and grass cover crops. Some legume cover crops are soybeans, red clover, alfalfa and field peas.

One of the main reasons for planting legumes is their ability to take nitrogen out of the atmosphere and put it back into the soil. Many plants take nitrogen out of the soil, but don't put any back into the soil, therefore leaving none for other plants. Legumes like red clover and field peas can put as much as 100 pounds of nitrogen back into the soil.

Now there are other types of cover crops like grass cover



The Natural Resources Conservation Service recently held a speech contest where Holton and Jackson Heights FFA students competed. Joel Kennedy of Jackson Heights won first place in the local NRCS competition, earning a \$300 scholarship, then went on to compete at the area contest on Wednesday, Nov. 7, earning second place. Local winners included, front row, from left: Kortnee VanDonge, Holton High School, second place and \$200 scholarship; Cailin Parks, HHS, fifth place and \$50; and Jerilyn Nelson, Jackson Heights High School, fourth place and \$75. Back row, from left: Tanner Reed, JHHS, third place and \$100; and Kennedy.

Photo courtesy of Paul Lierz

crops. Grass cover crops, such as Sudan grass, wheat and oats, have a deep root system which helps reduce soil erosion and suppress weed germination. Grass cover crops hold the dirt in place reducing soil erosion in your fields. However, grass cover crops take the nitrogen out of the soil, but don't put any back in the soil.

To prevent this, you can kill them off before they are mature, or a better practice is to plant a grass-legume cover crop mix in your field. Doing so, you would be able to put nitrogen in the soil and suppress weeds at the same time.

Cover crop residue also contributes to a reduction in evaporation of moisture, and preserving it in the soil during drought periods. The residue of cover crops also helps put organic matter back into the soil for organisms such as microbes to break down the decaying matter.

Microbes are microscopic organisms in the soil. In fact, there are more organisms in a teaspoon of soil than people on this earth. Microbes help put nutrients back into the soil as well as help crops become resistant to diseases. Microbes partner with cover crops to put nitrogen back into the soil. Microbes are instrumental to keeping our soils healthy.

The second way to keep our soils healthy is to prevent soil erosion. There are several differ-

ent types of soil erosion - rain-fall, runoff, wind and tillage.

Let's focus on wind and water erosion. Water erosion is the wearing away of a field's topsoil by natural physical forces of water. Wind erosion is caused by the wind blowing away the topsoil from farming practices such as tillage.

Soil erosion reduces cropland productivity and contributes to the pollution of wetlands and lakes. Earlier I mentioned how microbes are important in keeping our soils healthy.

Microbes live in the soil and when soil erosion occurs, it takes their habitat away, and this is counterproductive to keeping our soils healthy. Think of soil erosion as Hurricane Michael and the topsoil is the homes.

Soil erosion carries the soil away and, with it, the microbes, leaving none left in the topsoil to convert nitrogen and provide nutrients for plants and the soil. Several ways to prevent this is to plant cover crops when you don't have a cash crop in your field.

Doing so, the cover crops would hold the soil in place and prevent the topsoil from washing away. To prevent wind erosion, you can plant windbreaks to slow the wind down and prevent it from blowing the topsoil off your field.

Now we've come to my final point to do crop rotations in your field. Earlier I talked about

how cover crops put nitrogen back into the soil for other crops. Some crops like corn require large amounts of nitrogen, but don't put any back into the soil. Other crops like soybeans put nitrogen back into the soil.

Many farms, like my family's, do a year with soybeans and the following year plant corn. Doing so, the soybeans put nitrogen into the soil and the following year the corn may use most of the nitrogen, but the soybeans will put it back the next year.

According to the UCS, nitrogen put into the soil by soybeans remains there longer than when nitrogen is applied by synthetic fertilizers. This saves farmers money by not having to buy as much fertilizer that will eventually wash away with the water before it is absorbed by the crop.

In conclusion, by planting cover crops, preventing soil erosion and rotating crops, we can improve our soil health and better our yields. Without microbes, we would have to spend more money applying fertilizers to help our crops grow. And with the help of windbreaks and cover crops, we can prevent soil erosion from destroying our fields and causing our rich topsoil to wash downstream.

If we implement these farming practices, then we can improve our farms and help our soils grow life.

Manage nitrogen when utilizing cover crops

By Donald Gastineau
Resource Soil Scientist
Emporia

Cover crops can provide many benefits. They can reduce erosion, increase beneficial soil organisms, and add nutrients to the soil - particularly nitrogen fixed from the air by legumes. They can also provide forage for livestock.

The roots of cover crops help hold soil particles together. Roots and their fungal extensions act like threads of fabric through the soil. Root exudates function like "soil glue," making soil more durable than it would be without living roots present in the field between crops.

Cover crops increase beneficial soil organisms. As fungal hyphae colonize roots of cover crops, the reach of those roots into the soil is increased. This is especially beneficial to plants growing in soil that is low in moisture or soils with low available phosphorus.

These fungi leave spores behind that can colonize the roots of the following cash crop, which reduces moisture stress of the crop and increases the amount of available soil phosphorus.

Cover crops can add nitrogen to the soil. Decomposed roots and shoots leave nutrients in the soil for future plants. Please note, depending on the carbon to nitrogen ratio of the residue, microbes will scavenge soil nitrogen while decomposing dead plants.

Research by USDA Agricul-

Marshall Co. awards

The Marshall County Conservation District announced five 2018 award winners, including:

- *Bankers Conservation Award to Fred and Julie Lienemann.
- *Bankers Conservation Award to Lindsey and J.I. Hornung.
- *Bankers Conservation Award to Robert and Cindy Voet.
- *Wildlife Award to R.J. and Sharon Vogelsberg.
- *Grassland Award to Ken and Zita Duensing.

tural Research Service scientists in 1994 found that decomposing wheat residue can scavenge soil nitrogen for weeks or even months, depending on moisture conditions.

It is important to plan for the nitrogen demand of microbes to avoid yield loss in the cash crop that follows. Over the long-term, nitrogen is added to the soil system by cover crops, but deficits occur while residues are being decomposed. This microbial nitrogen demand must be managed to avoid damage to the following cash crop.

The growing cover crop stores carbon, phosphorus, nitrogen, sulfur, etc. in plant tissue. Once the cover crop is terminated, microbes decompose the plant parts. Some of the nutrients from the cover crop are mineralized in the soil. These are available immediately.

The remaining nutrients from the plant residue are either processed and excreted by the decomposers or stored in their "bodies." The nutrients stored in the dead microbes are released as those microbes decompose. More research is needed to develop systems that manage the nutrient

cycling in a way that benefits not only the soil resource but also the cropping system.

Grazing animals can enhance or decrease the benefits of cover crops depending on how they are managed. Some producers have used "mob grazing" of cover crops to improve soil health. Livestock grazing and trampling of cover crops can accelerate nutrient cycling.

If cover crops are grazed too early, too heavily, or both, the soil can be degraded. The livestock enterprise may benefit at the expense of the soil resource.

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