



How the Jovaag Family is Using CSP to Continue & Enhance a Conservation Legacy

From the time Arvid and Lois Jovaag began renting land near the Cedar River in southern Minnesota, conservation played a key role in their farming goals.

“It’s important to do things that are good for the land,” says Arvid on a recent summer day while giving a tour of their farm near the community of Austin. “Diversity is good for sustainability.”

Now, three decades later, the Jovaags, who were recognized as “Outstanding Conservationists” in 2010 by the Mower County Soil and Water Conservation District, are utilizing a program that is helping them achieve and maintain the stewardship that’s important to them as farmers and residents of their community.

In 2009, they signed up for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). CSP is a working lands conservation initiative the Land Stewardship Project worked to strengthen and expand in the 2008 Farm Bill. It was started in 2002 and the 2008 Farm Bill made numerous improvements to the initiative, which provides payments for producers who historically have practiced

good stewardship on their agricultural lands, and provides financial incentives for those who want to do more. The program is being administered by the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

In many ways, it was tailor-made for farmers like the Jovaags. After renting land for a few years in the early 1980s, they purchased their 475-acre farm in 1985. It sits along a stretch of the Cedar River — a picturesque location that is also quite environmentally sensitive. Protecting the river is important to the Jovaags who, along with their daughter Kari and son Jon, have long enjoyed canoeing its waters. In fact, the Cedar has been in the news lately because of unprecedented flooding downstream in Iowa. Increasingly in the watershed, the replacement of perennial plant systems like pasture and hay with annual row crops is being fingered as a major culprit in this extreme flooding.

The Jovaags raise cattle, chickens, sheep, corn, beans, oats and hay. They’ve long used conservation farming techniques such as managed rotational grazing and resource

conserving crop rotations. With the help of Minnesota’s Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program, they have developed a 21-acre buffer of prairie grass, which runs along the river next to their corn and soybean fields. This has reduced soil erosion and improves the quality of the water that runs off into the Cedar. The Jovaags have also established grassy waterways that direct water into the

Jovaag contract snapshot

Maintaining existing practices:

- Rotational grazing.
- Cropping diversity and a resource conserving crop rotation that includes hay, oats and grass.
- Planted trees and adjacent wildlife areas.
- Permanent prairie grass buffer and waterways.

Enhancements with CSP:

- Shallow water habitat.
- Retrofitting watering facilities for wildlife escape.

river. Before the family started renting the farm, there was a city dump on the land. They cleaned it up and planted four acres of trees and pasture on the site.

When the family applied to CSP, the local NRCS office scored them based on what conservation measures they already had in place, and which ones they agreed to add in the future. Their rotational grazing system, resource conserving crop rotation, minimum tillage system and water-friendly buffer plantings yielded a relatively high score in the “existing conservation” category.

The Jovaags accumulated more points by agreeing to add other conservation measures. These ranged from significant projects (a sediment pond along the river) to the relatively simple (retrofitting watering facilities for wildlife escape). The sediment pond supports a shallow wetland site that has been particularly effective at collecting sediment that runs from the fields and filtering water before going into the river. It also provides habitat for wildlife, say the Jovaags.

Overall, the family qualified for a five-year contract valued at \$6,631 annually.

There was a significant amount of paperwork involved, but the Jovaags say their experience with applying to CSP was positive overall. Their local NRCS officials were helpful in the process, say the farmers.

“If we had to do it on our own, we



Managed rotational grazing is one of the tools Arvid and Lois Jovaag use on their southern Minnesota farm to protect the land while generating income.

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wouldn't have been able to make it," says Lois. Their local NRCS office was in constant contact with Lois and Arvid, and had kept a record of what conservation measures had been implemented, which made the process less overwhelming for the family.

The Jovaags feel that there needs to be good support for working lands conservation and less dependence on USDA commodity programs such as direct payments.

"It doesn't have to be a choice between being a working, productive farm and conservation," says Arvid. "Programs like CSP can help farmers strike a balance between profits and sustainability." □

This fact sheet is brought to you by the members and staff of the Land Stewardship Project, a nonprofit organization devoted to fostering an ethic of stewardship for farmland and to seeing more successful farmers on the land raising crops and livestock. For more information, call 612-722-6377 or visit www.landstewardshipproject.org.



Enhancements the Jovaags agreed to implement to increase their CSP score range from the simple—a wildlife ramp in a livestock tank, shown in the left photo—to the more complex—a sediment basin.

CSP Sign-Up Information

Sign-up for CSP is now continuous. To start the process, check with your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office. Visit <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app> for details on how to contact your local NRCS service center.

The Land Stewardship Project's updated CSP fact sheet has background on the program and how to start the application process: www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/CSP-FactSheet1.pdf.

For a paper copy of LSP's fact sheet, or more information on CSP, contact LSP's Adam Warthesen at 612-722-6377 or adamw@landstewardshipproject.org.

Other CSP Resources

- The NRCS has an updated CSP website: www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp.

- The updated *Farmers's Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program* is now available from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition: <http://sustainableagriculture.net/our-work/conservation-environment/conservation-stewardship-program>.

Minnesota Farmers are top users of CSP

Since the Conservation Stewardship Program was revamped in the 2008 Farm Bill, three sign-ups have been conducted. According to USDA data, Minnesota farmers' use of the program has consistently placed the state in the top ranking nationally in terms of CSP contracts awarded and total public investment obligated to conservation through the program. There are more than 2,000 Minnesota applicants annually.

2009

LAND USE	CONTRACTS	ACRES	OBLIGATION	AVG. \$/Acre	AVG. \$/Contract**
AG* 2009	649	410,815	\$9,578,110	\$23.31	\$14,758
NIPF† 2009	260	56,967	\$353,228	\$6.20	\$1,358
TOTAL	909	467,782	\$9,931,338		\$10,925

2010

LAND USE	CONTRACTS	ACRES	OBLIGATION	AVG. \$/Acre	AVG. \$/Contract**
AG 2010	510	406,744	\$11,094,682	\$27.28	\$21,748
NIPF 2010	159	41,356	\$351,300	\$8.49	\$2,209
TOTAL	669	448,100	\$11,445,982		\$17,109

2011

LAND USE	CONTRACTS	ACRES	OBLIGATION	AVG. \$/Acre	AVG. \$/Contract**
AG 2011	625	522,778	\$16,032,485	\$30.67	\$25,651
NIPF 2011	136	27,488	\$346,697	\$12.61	\$2,549
TOTAL	761	550,266	\$16,379,182		\$21,523

Minnesota CSP Total:	CONTRACTS	ACRES	OBLIGATION
	2,339	1,466,148	\$37,757,502

*AG = Agricultural land †NIPF = Non-industrial private forest **This is the 5-year average over the life of a contract.