

## Water Quality is a top priority at Four Star Dairy



*Roger Erickson takes pride in the success of his dairy operation and its efforts to ensure good water quality.*

The Four Star Dairy is a family affair. Roger Erickson grew up on this farm which his grandfather started. Today his sons are co-owners and Roger's parents all work together to manage the operation. The Erickson family has worked with USDA NRCS since the 1980's. The Dairy recently applied and was accepted into the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

The farm, located near Neillsville, is a sizable operation. Every day the dairy milks 700 cows. The farm employs 14 workers that keep the farm running smoothly tending to the animals and the crops. An additional 700 heifers are housed at an adjacent acreage.

Throughout the years, Four Star Dairy has implemented a long list of conservation and water quality practices. Starting in 2003, they adopted Nutrient and Feed Management along with a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan.

"NRCS gives us quite a few ideas and guidance, helping us make good decisions on the use of our land," says Roger. "We have constructed and maintained many acres of grassed waterways on our 3000 plus acres. We constructed lot runoff and filter strips along with abandoning several wells and an old manure storage structure."

Clean water is one of the biggest concerns for Four Star Dairy. Roger wants to protect the water quality and is active in making sure that the water supply is not impaired for the surrounding farms and the wells they depend on every day to sustain their operation.



*Jane Reigel, NRCS District Conservationist and Roger Erickson work together to plan the CSP enhancements to the Dairy.*

Jane Reigel, NRCS District Conservationist in Clark County tells us, “Roger is a very proud, forward thinking, dedicated farmer. He is always planning ahead looking to make the right improvements on his farm.”

Their choices in CSP show their willingness to adopt new things. They chose five enhancements, which is fairly rare, according to Reigel. Their priorities shone through, as the enhancements target air, water and animals. To address air concerns, they will be updating and enhancing their spraying system and using a nitrification inhibitor on some of their land. To address animals they will be haying in a wildlife friendly manner along with extending some grass filters which provide nesting cover and further protect water quality.

One of the most impressive enhancements they are implementing is reducing the concentration of nutrients imported on the farm. This enhancement requires that manure must provide at least 50 percent of the N, and 90 percent of the P and K and that at least 75 percent of the feed for livestock must be grown on the farm. This enhancement is key, according to Reigel, because the balance of livestock and land is critical for a sustainable operation.

Talking about the program Roger says, “CSP has allowed me to tailor conservation improvements to my farm that meet my resource concerns.”



*The balance of good land management and livestock is important for a sustainable operation.*