

Regional Watershed Management Taskforce

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Submitted by Wayne Smith, SDFB

South Dakota Farm Bureau develops policy beginning at the county level where members by a majority vote pass resolutions concerning local, state and national issues. State and national issues are voted on at the SDFB annual meeting and resolutions must be passed by a majority of the delegates representing county Farm Bureaus. Neither the SDFB board of directors nor I can make policy – that is business conducted by the membership. The concept of water management covers a wide range of issues and is a high priority for SDFB members.

SDFB supports the concepts highlighted by Matt this morning. Regarding mandatory mediation of disputes, SDFB policy states “when disagreements about drainage affecting individual parties cannot be resolved, we recommend a qualified mediator or water expert be brought in to seek an agreement, prior to filing legal action. Parties should bear the cost of mediation.” When planning a tiling project, having a proper outlet is one key to success. This may require cooperation with one or many neighbors. Many times this requires give and take by all parties involved. Legal disagreements can cause generations of ill feelings, which can result in less than the best care for the resource. Mediation will provide incentives for adjoining land owners to work together and assists with the standardized disclosure of new projects.

Another component is Identifying Current Water Management Assets. SDFB policy states “We favor revisiting the SD Vested Drainage Rights law to include new drainage and previously undiscovered drainage systems.” As Matt mentioned there are many water management assets in place in central and east South Dakota. Many assets were put in place 75 to 100 years ago and are in need of cleanout or repair. One example is Lincoln County, SD. They have had 36 water management or drainage districts in place since the early 1920s. District #34 is one I have worked with directly. It covers approximately 20 sections and has miles of clay tile. The system outlets into a drainage ditch. The system was put in during the 19-teens, and was paid for by assessments on the land in the district. The district has reorganized informally to address repairs that are needed. An issue or challenge is dealing with the desire to add additional tile lines to the system. This could overload the system. The solution is for the district to formally reorganize and properly manage the system. An interesting side note is that many of the roads in this district have clay tile in the ditches on both sides of the road. All of the records are in the Lincoln County court house. Many of our members across eastern South Dakota tell me they have discovered old clay tile while plowing in new tile. Drainage tile is only one of the water

management assets that need to be identified. Identifying current water management assets and having them recorded is valuable now and more valuable in the future.

Another point is Funding Best Practices Research. Beginning in 2000, SDFB began working with SDSU on research and demonstration projects to identify practices that maximize water management effects on land, water, and other resources. One of the projects included measuring water flow and analyzing water quality from a small watershed without tile drainage. Then tile was installed according to NRCS and county rules. After tile installation, the quantity and quality of the water flowing on the surface and subsurface were evaluated. The results showed reduced overland flow, therefore reduced sediment and phosphorus runoff. The subsurface flow showed the nitrate content increased for only a short time after nitrogen fertilizer was applied. Other current projects include BMPs for spreading manure on frozen ground to reduce movement of nutrients on the surface, installing and testing bioreactors and saturated buffer strips to reduce nitrogen levels in discharge water, and using flow control devices to regulate soil saturation levels. Advancements in technology for water management are making it possible to manage water and protect the resources to a higher degree than ever before.

Water management district establishment and rejuvenation is another important part of water management. SDFB policy states “We support the formation of smaller drainage districts primarily composed of landowners, governed by landowners, as state statute already allows, and to include SDSU participation, USGS maps and professional ag specialists as needed.” Farmers and landowners need to step up, take control of and be responsible for water management on agricultural land. Farmers and landowners are a larger part of the solution than the problem. Small watersheds need to work together with each other and larger districts through agreements so complications and sizing issues on structures can be avoided. This will be a major change from what we are doing now, but we should not let that stop us from developing a structure that will meet the needs of the resource well into the future.

Water management involves much more than tiling. Building a water management system can involve flood relief, system of retention dams, development of drainage outlets areas and much more. SDFB remains available to assist in moving forward on effective water management for the 21st century.