

# Hand-watered windbreak wins Bankers' award for man

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Richard Hoff has worked hard over the past 12 years to maintain the windbreak around his home in southern Thomas County, about 20 miles southeast of Colby on the county line, and his work paid off this year.

Hoff was chosen by the Thomas County Conservation District to receive the 2011 Kansas Bankers Association Windbreak Award.

"I think it's an honor," his wife, Beth, said. "He worked really hard trying to keep them up."

Debbie Potter, district manager, said the rules for award say an award-winning windbreak has to provide some sort of protection for a house or livestock, the landowners must plant trees or shrubs, the area must be managed and in healthy condition and the windbreak must be a minimum of three years old. She said the district also looks at location, density and how long the rows of a windbreak are to determine the recipient.

Many people who create windbreaks apply for the district's cost-share program, which provides landowners with financial help from

the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service to plan and plant a windbreak. Potter said the owners have to submit an application. Then they are ranked according to the agency's criteria. The one that ranks the highest under the criteria gets the most money.

The Hoff's applied for the program and received 50 percent cost share help to pay for their trees, planting and weed barrier, a black fabric that goes around the trees to keep weeds from competing for moisture.

Hoff said he began planting the trees in 1999, right when he and his wife purchased 34 acres of land on County Road A just northwest of Oakley. They planted 265 trees in two rows, with another 200 in 2002. Their house wasn't even finished when he planted the first trees, he said; it wasn't done until the next year.

He said he went through the district when he purchased the trees and the district helped them design the windbreak, telling them how far it needed to be from the house to get the most protection. Potter said people creating a windbreak aren't required to buy trees from the district, but it tends to be cheaper.

Hoff said he and his wife use the windbreak to protect livestock along with their house.

When they first planted the trees, a drought that continued for two to three years had a grip on the area. Hoff said he had to water the trees with a hose out of a tank for several years because they were not able to afford a drip system.

Potter said each person's situation is different, but most people use a drip system when they first plant their trees.

"Some opt to haul the water," she said, "and that takes a lot of dedication."

Hoff said he hasn't had to water the trees in about four years because the roots are deep enough in the ground now and they have the a weed barrier, which helps hold the moisture in around the trees.

Another problem Hoff faced was an ice storm which hit the area in 2007. Beth Hoff said a lot of the trees died, so her husband had to replace them, leaving the break with trees of different heights.

"It really takes a long time before you really get the benefits of a windbreak," she said. "Someone said it was like 20 years by the time they get enough height, but I think now we're starting to see some benefits."

That's only 12 years now.

The Hoff's will receive a certificate from



KAYLA CORNETT/Colby Free Press  
Richard and Beth Hoff in front of their wind break at their home on County Road A in Oakley.

the Bankers Association and a sign from the conservation district at the district's annual meeting at 6:30 p.m. Monday (Jan. 23) at the Colby United Methodist Church.

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