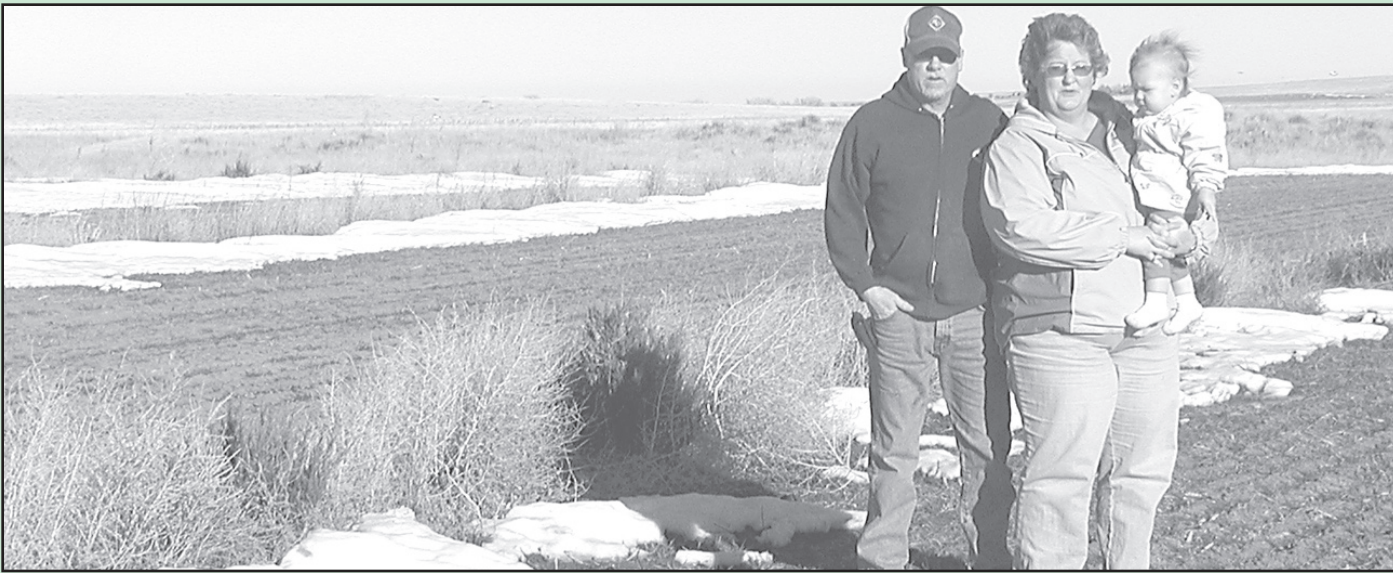


The Goodland Star-News

Presents

Conservation 2008

February 8, 2008



**Conservationist
of the Year**
Keith and Gina
Snethen



Windbreak Award
Perry and Jan Lohr



Banker's Award
Larry Gutsch

Awards Banquet 6:30 p.m. Monday,
Feb. 11, Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall

Windbreaks, no-till keys to conservation

By Sharon Corcoran

slcorcoran@nwkansas.com

Planting about 500 trees, building a "wildlife guzzler" and putting in wildlife habitats, along with no-till farming practices, contributed to Keith and Gina Snethen being chosen for the Conservationist of the Year award.

He planted a 160-tree windbreak in 1988, and they added two wildlife habitats in 2004 and in 2006, with 150 to 200 trees in the first and 150 in the second. They received a \$1,250 grant from Water for Wildlife of Lander, Wyo., in 2006 for the second wildlife habitat, which will include the trees and a pond in a fenced area.

The trees have been planted and the area fenced, and a dam has been built on the south end, but the liner still needs to be put in. The pond has an island with trees.

The Snethens say they have lived in Sherman County all their lives and want to do what is best for the environment here, but they didn't expect to win an award for it.

"I was surprised we were even considered," Mr. Snethen said. "We were just doing what we thought should be done."

Both graduated from Goodland High School, he in 1980 and she in '81, and he lives a quarter

mile south of where he grew up. He said he has lived on their farm four and a half miles west and five miles north of Goodland since 1985 and bought it in 1992.

Between them, they have five children and four grandchildren: the late Marshall Snethen, Whitney (Drew) Miller and Mark (Laurie) Carmichael, all of Goodland, Matt (Megan) Carmichael of Castle Rock, Colo., and Todd Snethen, 12, a sixth grader at North Elementary.

The grandchildren are Brei Carmichael and Aiden Miller, both of Goodland and Alexa and McKenzie Carmichael of Castle Rock.

The Snethens say they have a diversified operation. They grow corn, wheat, alfalfa, oats for cattle feed and hay, and he does some custom farming as well. They run cattle, and he has a shop where he fixes everything he can, and they sell NC+ seed corn. She is a receptionist one day a week for Dr. Kenneth Austin and Tom Hellerud.

He graduated from the auto body department at the Northwest Kansas Area Vocational Technical School and said he usually works on a project in the winter, frequently painting tractors



Keith and Gina Snethen and their granddaughter Brei Carmichael checked out the snow gathered around the trees they planted on their farm.

Photos by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

See CONSERVATION, Page 3

Sherman County Conservation District • Program 2008

INVOCATION Fred Wedel
Meal furnished by the Sherman County Conservation District, BANKWEST, First National Bank, Western State Bank, Peoples State Bank and Farm Credit Services of Western Kansas PCA-FLCA

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Fred Wedel District Conservationist
Dan Farmer Conservation Technician



CONSERVATION, from Page 2



for his neighbors.

They have been using no-till practices for three to four years on the irrigated crops and about five years on the dry-land fields. They farm about 600 acres and have 160 acres in the Conservation Reserve Program and rent 200 acres of grassland.

Mr. Snethen said they have participated in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program four years and go on-line to get an irrigation water schedule from the program. They also have drop nozzles on the center pivots, he said, to conserve water, and they have several miles of terraces.

But they're not just interested in water for their crops — he has built several "wildlife guzzlers" in the neighborhood to make sure area animals have some to quench their thirst.

The "guzzlers," sloped "roofs" with a tub at the end of the slope, collect dew and precipitation to give animals a place to drink. Mr. Snethen built the "roof" on his CRP land, using scraps of sheet metal to cover it, and has built "guzzlers" for some of his neighbors as well.

He said he enjoys seeing the pheasants and deer around. Mrs. Snethen said she has enjoyed seeing their efforts for the animals pay off.

"We had the animals in mind," she said. "We wanted them to have food and water.

"We've been seeing a lot more pheasants this year, lots of babies. They have been so far behind — it's been nice seeing their numbers up."



Keith and Gina Snethen are building a wildlife preserve in their pasture, which will include a pond around an island with trees. East of the pond (to the right of the background of the picture), they recently planted pine trees.

Keith Snethen pulled tumbleweeds out from under the wildlife guzzler he built on his Conservation Reserve Program land. Dew and precipitation drain off the "roof" and collect in the tub below, giving wildlife a place to drink.

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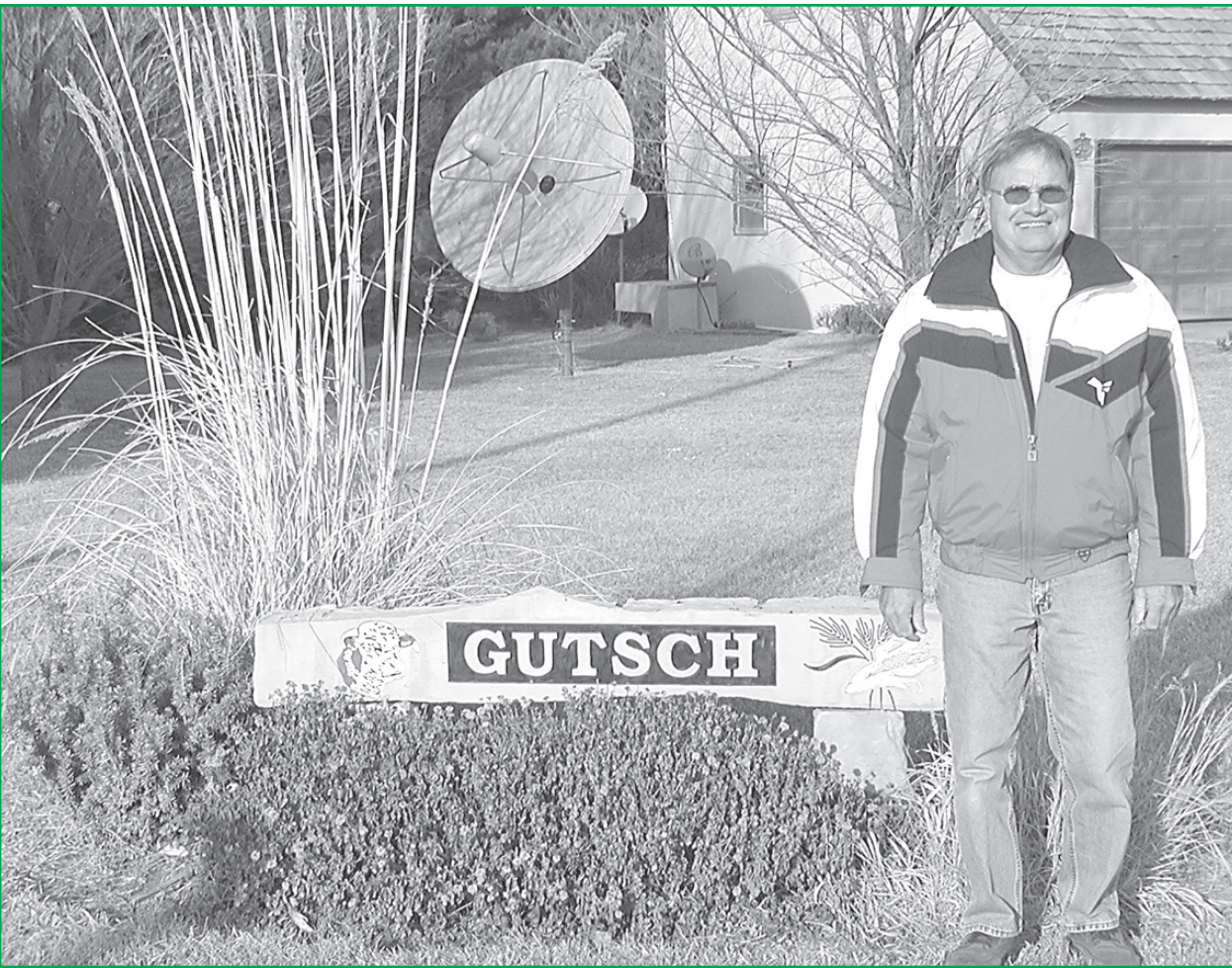
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Larry Gutsch lives on a farm that has been in his family for three generations and farms land that was homesteaded by his grandmother's grandfather. A sign with the family name stands at the corner of county roads 19 and 68.

Photos by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

Third generation farmer living life-long dream

By Sharon Corcoran
scorcoran@nwkansas.com

A Goodland man is living his life-long dream and has even received an award for it.

Larry Gutsch, the third generation of his family on the farm he grew up on, four miles north and one west of Goodland, is the winner of the Banker's Award.

Gutsch graduated from Sherman Community High School in 1966 and studied agriculture mechanization at Kansas State University, graduating in 1971.

"Farming is all I ever wanted to do since I was a young boy," he said.

His grandmother's grandfather, Dr. J.L. Gandy, was a homesteader on land that is still in the family and was the reason his grandparents moved to Sherman County. They arrived just in time to experience

the "Dirty Thirties" but stuck out the tough times.

"I don't know how anyone survived that," Gutsch said, adding that his grandmother told him they hung wet sheets over the doors and windows to keep the dirt out.

It's one thing to have the drought now, he said, and another to go through what they did. The conservation practices used now were not in place in the thirties, he added.

A lot has changed over the years in farming, Gutsch said, the biggest being the change in equipment and practices.

It used to take five times the labor it does now to plant and irrigate an acre of corn, he said; between the increase in varieties to give an increase in yield and the decrease

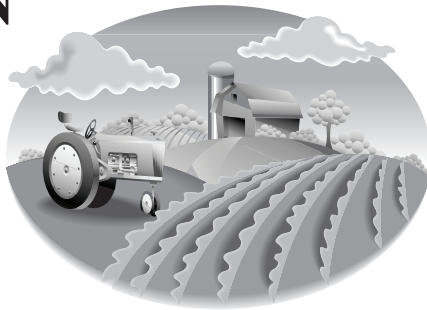
See FARMER, Page 5

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BANKER'S AWARD:
 LARRY GUTSCH

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Larry Gutsch has a picture of his father, the late Joe Gutsch, with an old irrigation pump that predates laying pipes for irrigation. It pumped water into channels that were dug by hand. Gutsch said he appreciates how much easier modern equipment, such as center pivots, make farming today than in generations past.

FARMER, from Page 4

in manpower through the increased efficiency of equipment, farming has become easier.

Nonetheless, with the recent drought, farmers have been struggling and fewer young people have wanted to return to the county after college, Gutsch said, but that may change.

The last few years during the drought, it has been hard to attract young people to the area, he said, but that will change if the grain prices stay strong. They would have an economic incentive to stay, he added.

"This past year has been as good as it has been in a long time," he said, "as far as getting crops and good prices."

Gutsch credits ethanol production with a lot of the boost to agriculture and said it has dictated

what his biggest crop will be. He said corn's his biggest crop, and he also grows wheat and sunflowers and in the past has planted pinto beans and soybeans.

"I go with what's profitable," he said. "The ethanol industry has really boosted corn prices. Corn has become more profitable than sunflowers and other crops."

But the prices of other crops have come up as well, he said; they have had to come up to compete. The crops compete for the same acres, he said, and if the prices of other grains didn't come up, no one would plant them.

Wheat prices have come up due to dwindling world supplies, Gutsch said, and higher demand. The \$10 per bushel wheat is amazing, he said.

See FARMER, Page 7



Larry Gutsch has a picture of the original house on his farm, along with cars from the 1930s, when his grandparents first moved to the area. His grandmother's grandfather, Dr. J. L. Gandy, talked them into farming his homestead near the town of Gandy, the first town in the county.

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are always open; looking for new ideas and tools that can make his business a little more efficient; a little more productive. He listens hard when other people talk farming. But mainly, he takes a long look at his own program and decides things for himself.

Throwing out what didn't work and sticking with the things that did. Upgrading his system until his goals are reached and then upgrading some more. He's hard to please, but he's fair. A good farmer, in short, is one of America's greatest natural resources.

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FARMER, from Page 5

but what's even more amazing is that farmers have some to sell at that price.

Gutsch is a proponent of ethanol for what is doing for agriculture and for reducing the country's dependence on petroleum.

"We're now producing for a viable market," he said of farmers, adding, "We've fought in a lot of wars defending our petroleum — the less we have to import, the better off we are."

Ten percent ethanol fuel burns cleaner than regular unleaded gasoline, he said — it increases the octane level; it's a good additive. It can be used in all cars, he said, while 85 percent ethanol can only be used in newer cars.

Gutsch said he believes in the ethanol industry and has even invested in a couple of ethanol plants.

But farming is still his love, and he has spent his life looking for ways to take care of the land and to get the most from it.

He started using "ridge till" on his land 10 years ago, building a ridge and planting on top of it. You keep the same ridge the next year, he said, and plant on the same ridge. With ridge till, he said, you can still do emergency tilling to reduce weeds.

Gutsch said he has switched mostly to "strip till," tilling a little strip in the fall and putting on fertilizer, then planting on that strip in the spring. You don't plant on the same strip each year, he said, but you rely on chemicals for weed control.

Other practices he uses include summer fallow and minimum till, spraying the wheat stubble instead of working it.

"I farm a lot of the same ground we've farmed for years," Gutsch said, "a lot that was homesteaded and has been in the same family since."

He said his sister and brother-in-law, Carol and Robin Deeds, also farm land from the original homestead.

He has also planted a lot of trees around the house and said Perry Lohr, who received the Windbreak Award, is his cousin, who has also lived in the county his whole life.

Gutsch's mother, Mildred Gutsch, lives in Goodland, but his father, Joe, was killed in a farming accident in 1977.

"He was a good role model as well as a good businessman," Gutsch said of his father. "His influence is still around."

He said his older brother Steve used to farm but decided in the 1980s he wanted to do something

else; he sells insurance in Denver. His younger brother Jim is an engineer for Seaboard Farms, based in Kansas City. They have a lot of hog farms in Kansas, Gutsch said, but it's an international company — he travels a lot.

Gutsch said his three kids are part of his corporation, Gutsch Farms, and come out periodically and stay in touch with what's going on. They are Lance (Annie) Gutsch, a real estate developer; Laura (Chris) Firman, a homemaker whose husband is a real estate developer; and Leah (Mike) Lehrburger, a music teacher whose husband is a civil engineer.

Lance and Annie have two children, Gatsby and Georgia, and Laura and Chris have a daughter, Ella. All of them live in the Denver area.

Gutsch also has a corporation with Dave Dorn, L&D Farms.

"He works for me as well as having a corporation together," Gutsch said. "He's basically a partner — he's the one who makes the operation work."

Gutsch said between the entities, he farms about 3,800 acres, some south of Goodland, some north, even some in Cheyenne County. Most is irrigated, he said, about 85 percent.

Silly Tilly

**There once was a farm girl named Tilly,
Who thought planting windbreaks was silly.
So there were no trees
to catch the breeze,
and it blew all her topsoil to Philly!**

Dani Mangus won an Honorable Mention at the state Conservation District Convention for her Silly Tilly limerick.

Farmer Bob

**Farmer Bob liked to rotate his crops.
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Cory Sampson won an Honorable Mention at the state Conservation District Convention for his Farmer Bob limerick.

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Banquet great way to reward students, farmers

By Fred Wedel
District Conservationist

The annual meeting of the Sherman County Conservation District will be Monday, Feb. 11. The annual meeting is always great, thanks to District Manager Sandy Rodgers and the Sherman County Conservation District Board of Supervisors.

Students and producers are given recognition for a job well done. The annual meeting completes the year just ended and opens the door for another year of resource management on the farms and ranches of Sherman County.

Year 2007 was a busy year for conservation practice implementation in Sherman County. Eleven new EQIP contracts were obligated. These contracts included rotational grazing systems, retirement of several irrigation wells for four years and reduced tillage on cropland. Several Continuous CRP contracts were approved to preserve and restore seasonal wetlands. Livestock wells, pipelines and tanks are rangeland practices that continue to be implemented using

the Kansas "State Water Resources" funding program.

Numerous CRP contracts were seeded to the "Rare and Declining Habitat" native seed mixes in the spring of 2007. A large part of the work at the "Conservation Office" is the day to day assistance given to Sherman County Producers. CTA (Conservation Technical Assistance) is provided to whoever asks. The assistance can involve a cost share program application or contract, a tree planting, a cropland or rangeland management question, wildlife habitat or many other questions about managing the natural resources of Sherman County.

In the past two weeks I attended two No-Till workshops. The first was the "Cover Your Acres Winter Conference" in Oberlin, Kan. The second was the "No-Till on the Plains Winter Conference" in Salina, Kan. Each time I attend one of the workshops, I gain new insight into cropping systems, grazing systems, and soil health. Soil health is so critical for a healthy and productive environment.

In past Conservation Editions I

have talked about "No-Till" farming practices as the wave of the future. Another term commonly used for "No-Till" is "Direct Seeding." I continue to believe "No-Till" to be the wave of the future and I challenge everyone involved in agriculture to ask me why I believe this way. No-Till farming promotes soil quality and soil health in ways that intensive tillage systems never can. Soil quality always precedes water quality and air quality. The terms "soil quality" and "soil health" are used interchangeably. Soil Quality is defined as the ability of soil to:

Absorb and store water;
Support plant and animal life; and
Act as an environmental buffer.

Healthy soil holds more water and has much better soil structure, including improved chemical and biological properties. Healthy soil is more productive and results in improved water and air quality giving us a healthy environment.

In the semi-arid climate of Sherman County, moisture is always the limiting factor in crop and range production. Conservation practices that capture and maintain soil moisture are critical to successful production. Tillage always dries and bakes

topsoil, destroys soil structure and reduces moisture infiltration rates. Crop residue always increases organic matter, reduces wind speed at the soil surface, reduces moisture evaporation, minimizes runoff, reduces soil erosion and more importantly is food for the soil micro-organisms. The soil is really a living breathing ecosystem that stores, transforms, and cycles nutrients through the soil.

Remember this, take the first step.

By eliminating all unnecessary tillage on your farm, huge improvements in soil health, organic matter and moisture stored for crop production will be achieved.

I welcome the opportunity to visit with you about conservation on your farm or ranch. Please contact me at the conservation office on 210 West 10th St in Goodland, Kan. 785-899-3070 ext 39. For more information go to: <http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/>



Wedel

How to decide when to irrigate

Irrigation scheduling is the determination of when and how much water needs to be applied to a crop to maintain healthy growth and maximum yield.

Irrigation scheduling using ET (evapotranspiration) information is a check book approach that uses real time crop and weather data to calculate daily crop use. ET is the amount of water the crop withdraws and irrigation scheduling balances this amount against the amount deposited by deposit of rainfall and irrigation water.

Staying within the limits of crop stress without over watering is the goal of the irrigator.

There are several programs to help the producer keep track of ET and water applications. KANSCHED is one that has been developed by Kansas State University and is free to the public. It is very user friendly and just a few minutes of inputting data is all that is required.

Using a program to assist in tracking can save by not over watering and have confidence there is sufficient water for the crop.

For more information, please contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office located at the Sherman County Farm Service Center or Sunflower District extension office.

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