

those fields that are farther away from the pits and the manure has to be tank transported. This means another tillage pass for the Gourleys with a disk ripper to break up some of the compaction from the heavy tanks. Manure actually helped them raise organic matter levels, which helped them out with SCI. Most of their fields already had some wildlife habitat or wetlands. In fields without these, all they had to do was put in some buffers in or leave a few rows of corn standing for deer food.”

The Gourleys were notified that they did not qualify for CSP payment in Tier II.

“We’ve heard that anyone applying hog manure isn’t making it in the program because of the tillage aspect of injecting manure. Where we are confused is that in our Manure Management Plan, we are told that we are supposed to inject manure. But in CSP, we didn’t qualify for payment because it’s a tillage activity,” Gerry Gourley says. “As livestock producers, we’re stuck. Being in compliance with one program means we’re out of compliance with the other, and vice versa. Clearly, in order for these programs to be accepted by farmers and to be successful in the long run, they need to be coordinated.”

Rick and Grant Kimberley | Polk County

Rick and Grant Kimberley operate three separate farming entities in central Iowa. All three are essentially the same from the perspectives of management practices and soil types, but the landforms differ slightly, with one farm having more sloping land than the others.

The Kimberleys applied for CSP under each entity, but only one came close to the Tier III threshold. Another qualified at Tier II, and the third for Tier I, with a significant number of acres not eligible for CSP at all.

The farm that nearly qualified for Tier III had wildlife habitat already in place. A lack of habitat was one of the factors that kept the Tier II operation from qualifying at Tier III.

Rick Kimberley relates that the SCI scoring (see article, “Qualifying



Rick Kimberley, Polk County

for CSP” pages 5 and 6) was the determining factor in limiting the third entity to Tier I status. “That farm landed in Tier I because not all of the fields there had a positive SCI, and that was enough to keep it from qualifying for CSP,” he says.

“Two things primarily kept those fields below zero or very low in SCI. The farm is steeper, with some ‘D’ slopes, but it is terraced. For Tier III, CSP doesn’t want to see tillage on ‘D’ slopes, even with terraces in place. It was difficult for us to accept that, because we only use minimum tillage on those fields where we have terraces. However, the RUSLE2 program (Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation, version two, which is the basis for the SCI) gives only minimal credit to terraces in stopping sheet and rill erosion,” he says.

Kimberley adds that the second uncertainty about relying on SCI is that it uses the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide yields to determine soil loss. “The yields in those guides are outdated in terms of the varieties of corn available today. As a result, the yield baseline we started with was significantly lower than our proven yields. We have invested in technology that allows us to prove yields. In the end, the problem is that the reduced yield values from the technical guide limit the amount of organic matter build-up in the soil that the RUSLE2 program

allows. If we could have used proven yields, the resulting higher organic matter prediction would have significantly improved the SCI value for that particular field.”

Grant Kimberley says that the concept of CSP is very positive for farmers and the environment, but it needs to be tweaked to really accomplish its stated mission. “From our experience, we see our operation as environmentally-oriented. We try to do the right thing, but once you go through the specifics of the program application, it seems arbitrary and sometimes impractical,” he says.

“For example, if you don’t own all of the land you farm, it becomes difficult to go to a landowner and ask them for major wildlife habitat investments. Landlords usually want that land in production. Farmers who rent a lot of land can get stuck at lower levels or bumped completely out of CSP because of that.

“The other thing is the amount of time you can be bogged down in Tier I,” he continues. “One of our farm business entities qualified at the lowest Tier I category. Now we are stuck that way for eight years – it’s difficult to imagine trying something different until the next sign up.”

Because the Kimberleys qualified at Tier II, they did not receive CSP funding. Grant Kimberley says that the experience was frustrating. “The CSP motto, ‘Reward the best – motivate the rest’ rings hollow for us at the end of the process. Farmers just aren’t going to be motivated if they can’t get in at Tier II, and then have to wait eight years or more to make changes in their operation to qualify for the program,” he insists.

“We were willing to try different things and make management changes to get into CSP. We perceived definite value inside the program, especially with the enhancements that are available. The investments in technology and management change, and the possible variance in yield could have been counterbalanced by the incentives offered. But you have to qualify in the first place to get those enhancements

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