

Conservation Stewardship Program

Producer Spotlight



Mike Ruby

Greene, Iowa



Operation size:
1,000 acres



Crops:
Corn, soybeans,
small grains, hay



Livestock:
50 cow-calf pairs



Years in CSP:
15 years

Conservation Stewardship Program at-a-glance

Administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides financial and technical assistance to producers seeking a holistic approach to conservation, while maintaining production on their farms or ranches.

The five-year contracts require producers to expand on their existing conservation efforts through practice enhancements that help them implement methods of farming and ranching. These provide an even greater benefit to natural resources, including air, water, and soil.

Conservation practices

Through his enrollment in CSP, Mike has implemented multiple practices that add value and longevity to his farm. His whole-farm approach to conservation has led to a diversified operation where row crops, livestock, and native plants and animals are all considered and cared for through conservation practices. These include:



Cover crops

Producers control erosion and build soil health by planting a small grain, legume, brassica, or similar plant in the off-season, maintaining a living root in the soil for a larger portion of the year.



Forage testing

Producers test livestock feed sources for crude protein and other nutrients that better inform feed management decisions throughout the year.



Food plots for wildlife

Producers plant vegetation that provides a year-round food source and cover for local wildlife.

“ There are a ton of practices to choose from that can help your farming operation. You just need to keep an open mind.

–Mike Ruby ”



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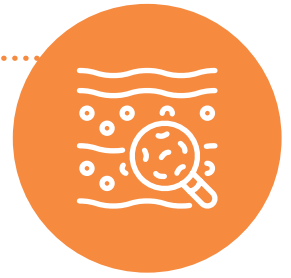
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Positive impacts

Encourages continued conservation and innovation

Mike began planting cover crops during his first CSP contract and has continued implementing the practice because of the positive impact on his fields. In addition to erosion control, he now uses his cover crop as a high-quality feed source for livestock, doubling the benefit of his investment.



Increased stability of operation

Since his enrollment in CSP, Mike has felt more confident in his farm's ability to withstand weather events such as drought. The increased organic matter and water-holding capacity of his soil allows Mike to produce a crop even when rainfall is a limiting factor. Financial assistance offered through the program also creates a source of cash flow that can be invested back into the operation.



“ I believe in cover crops. I really think the practice has proven itself the past two years when we've had minimal rainfalls. By having the cover crop, I've really built organic matter and water-holding capacity. ”

—Mike Ruby

Improved livestock nutrition

Through the gestation period, breeding livestock require different levels of nutrients, including crude protein and calcium. With assistance from CSP, Mike tested the nutrient levels of his hay and rylage. This data allows him to save higher quality feed for late in the gestation period when his cows are preparing to calve and producing milk.



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