

## **Paul & Vickie Heers Named 2009 Outstanding Conservation Farmers by Freeborn County SWCD. . . .**

Paul Heers Jr. and his wife Vickie from rural Oakland were recently selected to receive the 2009 “Outstanding Conservation Farmer Award” from the Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District. According to Don Flatness, SWCD Manager the Heers Family was selected to call attention to their effort to improve their beef cow/calf operation and pasture system. Soil erosion reduction and water quality benefits were also realized as a result of the pasture management practices they adopted.

Paul and wife operate an 1100 acre cash/grain farm plus maintain a 100 head beef cow/calf herd in the Oakland area. Their herd consists of “Registered” Main/Anjou, Simmental and Angus Breeds located in several different pastures in the summer months. In 2007 and again in 2008, Paul entered into two separate Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) contracts to improve his pasture and beef cattle production. Pasture Management Practices in these contracts include: Pasture any Hayland Planting: Prescribed Grazing, Fencing, Pipeline & Hydrants; Well and Pumping Plant; Heavy Use Area Protection and Watering Facilities. He’s installed a new well operated by a solar panel, over 7,000 ft. of pipeline, 11 – watering facilities, over 4300 ft. of new fence and planted a number of acres to a new grass and legume mix designed to improve the quantity and quality of the pasture forage.

All of this is part of a “grazing system” that makes better use of the pastureland resource by planting new grass & legume mixes and managing the grazing time on a particular paddock of pasture area. Paul says this new system has allowed him to nearly double the animal capacity of a given pasture.

Paul has also been involved in other conservation practice installations on lands he farms in recent years. They include grass waterways, filter strips and side inlet pipes designed to eliminate gullies along the banks of drainage ditches. He says he credits his father, Paul Sr. for instilling the conservation ethic in him. I watched him try to improve and protect the land over the years and I feel compelled to continue that effort.



Paul & Vickie in front of their home.



Paul at new well & solar panel site