

WOOD COUNTY SWCD / AG ED / FFA 1962-2020 [I HAVE MANY PHOTOS]

MY 58 YEARS OF WOOD COUNTY CONSERVATION/EDUCATION PARTICIPATION

PRE-WOOD COUNTY – By Bernie Scott

My “Boots on the Ground” [SOIL CONSERVATION] started at the very young age of 11 or 12 in Muskingum Township in Muskingum County in about 1948-1949. I was already a member of Richvale Boys 4-H Club when a neighboring farmer invited us to join a newly organized specialized county-wide Soil Conservation 4-H Club. Our main activity was usually shadowing adult farmers by going to evening on-farm conservation demonstrations on area farms and watch a new tillage tool or practice. Mr. Eldon Sauerbrey, a farmer, was the 4-H Advisor and our parents took my brother and I to his farm where we rode to events in his Willys Ag Jeep that was always a thrill for pre-teen boys. One particular visit was to see a new rotary hoe demonstrated. Remember this was before hydraulic lifts and farms all had property line fences good enough to turn cattle. [Fence law: face your neighbor, build and maintain 50% to the right.] Mending fences was a constant chore. The farmer demonstrating the rotary hoe related an earlier experience of pulling out of field and driving the hoe into a grown-up grass fence row and in so doing drove over the top of an abandoned piece of woven wire fence and spent hours cutting it out of the tangled rotary hoe. I recently visited the Muskingum SWCD Office and OSU Extension Office and they had no record of the somewhat experimental 4-H Club. At least one year the club spent hours setting up a model farmstead at the county fair showing contour strip tillage and grassed waterways. Most of Muskingum County is hilly but has two large very productive river bottoms of the Muskingum and Licking Rivers. The two rivers merge at the “Y Bridge” in downtown Zanesville. The only bridge where you go to the middle of the river and turn right or left!

Some important memories as I conclude my 21st year on the Wood SWCD Board of Supervisors. Perhaps my first encounter with the District was in the Fall of 1962 where the District staff conducted and/or judged the annual county FFA soil judging contest. It was my first try preparing a team to compete in the rural soils contest following my first classroom lesson plan in the study of soils. Many years later a second “urban” soils use contest started. In 1965 a Mr. Pete Patrick, SWCD, suggested that all county FFA Chapters help install a wind break on the school campuses, most with fairly new campuses and buildings. The plans were made and specific trees were ordered. They arrived in early April and were planted by students. Otsego even ordered a then popular load of The Andersons Corn Cob Mulch. By June or July most of the Otsego trees appeared to be dying. Mr. Patrick, recognized and researched the problem. It was discovered that the trees had been delivered by commercial motor freight to the school/District and had traveled in the closed semi-trailer next to bags of granular weed killer with the residual fumes doing the kill. In 1966 they were all replanted.

I thrived on preparing teams to compete in soil judging contests my entire 37-year career. In 1984 while attending the Annual SWCD Banquet Meeting at Togany Legion Hall where the District awarded winning teams, the program speaker, Mr. Ed Johnson, of Agri-Country TV Show presented me with a coupon to go to Rod’s Weston Palace in Columbus and get a free Stetson Western Hat. I still cherish the white cowboy hat and even wore it to a Western Dress Square Dance a decade ago.

In the early 1990's the FFA Chapter took their parking lot skills to a SWCD District Con-Till Club Field Day at the [Dave Petteys] Farm near North and East of Route 25. The following year the Con-Till Club Research Plots and Field Days got invited and moved to the newly 1988 acquired 30 acres of Otsego School Campus / FFA Land Lab. Early on the District arranged for me to learn and to use their Land Leveler on the research plots. These were exciting and beneficial days for Otsego FFA that lasted several years until the school started utilizing the land for needed facilities expansion. These plots were actually adjacent to the 1965-66 wind breaks.

It was recently Nobel and Honorable of the School Superintendent to seek my meek permission to remove the few remaining wind break trees to allow for more development of the most intense student used land area on the entire campus.

Today about 70% of the former plots consist of a new bus garage, a lawn/campus maintenance barn, the 2018-19 FFA storage barn, two bus fuel stations, one 2019 four acre solar field, one softball field/stadium, two soccer fields and one football practice field. The former Con-Till Field Day display / parking / meeting tent area is still intact as perfectly maintained multi-use lawn.

I greatly enjoyed the experience of partnering with the District /Con-Till Club. There was some challenging moments but otherwise great and almost historic happenings. Once I was instructed to sow weed seeds on at least one particular plot in early Spring. I was given an old 3 pt hitch grass seeder and some seeds loaded with weed seeds. At 4:30 in the morning I drove the FFA's MF 135 tractor and spread the weed seeds before day break and any wind. Another time I was instructed to apply one plot with pig manure from a local farm on top of snow that looked to have a cover crop. Everything went well towing the spreader until I pulled onto the plot and lost traction with the lightweight, no weights, MF-135 tractor. I had thought I could do the quick application during a free class period. I walked back to Ag Classroom and waited for the next class to appear. Once the class arrived and I told them of my being stuck in field plot, one handy student volunteered his four-wheel drive pickup truck to tow me through the plot completing the task. Many times, in the Spring and Fall I took the Ag Class in a school bus and they assisted in the operations.

In about 1993-94, the District / Con-Till Club expanded and rented about an acre North of Scott Road and just North of the research plots. This special plot was to demonstrate the first ever planting of Roundup Ready Soybeans in Wood County or possibly in Northwest Ohio. A PhD. From Monsanto Co. and his summer female intern drove a truck and trailer hauling a tractor and 4 row planter from his home in Canal Winchester near Columbus in early June to plant the plot. It was interesting that he had to get a special permit from Ohio ODA to transport the very new and mystery seeds on the highway and not allowed to be raised except by permit. The plot area was dry and hard. I had to go to the Ag shop and school weight room to get weights for top of seed boxes to make the planter penetrate the soil. Everything worked out well and a great field day occurred attended by huge crowds. While the crop was growing the travel ban on seed transportation was lifted. According to the growing permit the Roundup Ready Soybeans had to be mowed down long before maturity. One afternoon after given instructions by District / Con-Till Club I took the FFA's MF 135 and mower and mowed the beans down. I consider it an historic moment in Wood County Agriculture. Later in the Fall after entire field were harvested, we

hosted the Area One District FFA Soils Judging contest on and near the same site. Interesting side note to that contest is we also hosted the District FFA Agronomy Contest in the same field inside a former school bus that had all the seats removed allowing tables set up for the contest. The same bus was used several times hauling chairs and tables to the Con-Till Club Field Days. In 2020 the former roundup ready soybeans plots are now laid out in housing lots with one home already built on exact spot of historic soybean plot.

A rather new and exciting contest sponsored by Conservation Districts was the Envirothon. Otsego FFA started participating in the area contest in about 1996-97. In 1999 Otsego won the right to attend the Ohio Envirothon at OSU /ATI in Wooster Ohio. I had just retired and my replacement teacher advised the team at the contest. I was invited to attend the award dinner as a guest. In August I was invited to run for the SWCD board position during the Wood County Fair. I was elected in September and took position in January 2000. In 2001 Nicki Kale invited me to serve as a local supervisor on the Ohio Envirothon Advisory Committee. For 17 years I attended planning meetings, site visits, and volunteered at 14 of 17 Ohio Contests. Nicki left the Ohio Advisory Committee in 2018 and I joined her in stepping down. My wife joined me in volunteering at nearly all the Ohio Contests. It was an amazing and unique conservation educational experience helping host 20 teams of 5 very intelligent students. It was so unique that I got to experience being on both sides of the contest, once with a competing team and again on the running of the contest.

In 2006 I volunteered to go to the National FFA Conventions in Louisville and later Indianapolis to judge the top four FFA Finalist in Environmental Science and Natural Resources Proficiency Award Area. I plan to continue to judge the award area going into the future. I just got asked to judge this area again on September 21-25. This award area recognizes students doing or working in conservation activities. I have attended every National FFA Convention since 1973.

I was elected to the Wood SWCD Board of Supervisors in September 1999 at the 50th Anniversary of the District. It was a grand event held at Nazareth Hall. Nearly all former supervisors were invited to the celebration.

Almost simultaneously after getting sworn into the SWCD Board in 2000, I volunteered to somewhat lead a movement to establish a long sought "Wood County Center for Agriculture", one building on one site composed of NRCS, Wood SWCD, OSU Extension, OSU ABE Center, Ag Credit Office, and The USDA Farm Service Agency Office. The Wood County Commissioners were the main driving force to establish the one stop center for Wood County Agriculture. I had a great experience representing The Agricultural Incubator Foundation as a neutral third party to be the go between to broker an understanding to unite in one center for the good of all related to agriculture in Wood County. There was two of the three years movement that was intense. I met with several Ag Agencies, and at least two architectural firms, and the county commissioners monthly and sometimes weekly. I sought and visited other agriculture centers in Ohio and other states to help plan and design a concept for the Wood County Center. With the aid of the county economic development officer, and the county commissioners and at least one architectural firm I got invited to appear at a so-called Northwest Ohio White Paper Meeting in downtown Toledo. What was to be a 15 minute presentation to the 20 member hearing group quickly turned to 5 minutes

to present the concept to them. What I realized later was this group heard need and narrowed what projects the region should lobby for inclusions in the State of Ohio Budget. With a very good visual aid the task was done quickly. A few months later our Ag Center Project earned one million dollars in the state budget.

With one million dollars to start the project and all the needed space needs determined, along with all onboard unity by agencies and even with a very high-profile location, plus a professional floor plan and building /campus this concept was finally completed. To me personally, it was a really good plan and a beautiful looking proposed building on a stand-alone campus. The professionally determined estimate for the project came in at 5.5 million dollars. To me that was a lot of money in the year 2002. In 2020, almost 20 years later my guess the cost would now exceed 10 million dollars.

The Commissioners office quickly sought a funding route for the rather large new countywide project. They contracted with a professional funding firm to measure possible private and public sources for financial support. I got to meet and work with the professional survey firm and along with additional commissioners' funding to find public answers and support for the project. I still have the public survey findings report. It revealed great support for Wood County Agriculture and some funding sources. The final big look described that private financial support for public office buildings is not a reality like supporting libraries and churches. Hence the project came to an end after a 3-4 year effort. The good news that came out of this effort is that \$300,000 of the one million allocated in the state budget was redirected to remodel / establish the OSU Extension Service Complex.

For two years in a row my wife and I picked up District sponsored 4th grade trees at Elmwood FFA and delivered the trees to every 4th grader in every public and private elementary school in Wood County. It took two days in the district van. It was an interesting opportunity as substitutes finding a high number of school building and an even bigger challenge finding which entrance with a button or intercom!

In 2009 I was assigned to represent the SWCD on The Erie Basin Resource, Conservation and Development Council (RC&D). The council represents 10 counties in North Central Ohio and meets quarterly. It is one of three remaining in Ohio and one of the strongest councils in the nation. Years ago, some correct thinking people established a revolving loan fund to assist in development. We hosted the council meeting twice at the Agricultural Incubator Foundation. There have been several Wood County business(s) benefit from these loans. For the last 9 of 11 years I have been the only attendee from Wood County. Usually there is one county commissioner and one economic development officer. Wood County has received at least 3 or 4 mini grants of \$250 ranging from the District's Ag Venture Tour to Otsego/ Eastwood FFA Safety Day Camps.

For many years now my wife Jean and I go back to Muskingum County for a family reunion near the middle of July. For several years we registered to go on the Muskingum County Conservation District's ATV Conservation Tour on Saturday before our reunion on Sunday. We usually arrived in time for the noon ATV luncheon and sometimes followed the ATV's to a couple of stops....in our car.... which was permitted. Often this tour deliberately went in areas only designed for ATV's! I brought the idea back to our Board and processed adopting a Wood County version. Our ATV tours were always successful, but

never caught on like Muskingum's tours. They max out the units at 120 and send them out in groups of 40 and stagger the stops three times. I must mention that we had a niece working in the Muskingum County Soil and Water District and had started the tours. In 2019 I bought my first and a used ATV / Side by side. I am ready for more ATV tours!

In 2009 our SWCD District Celebrated our 60th year and to mark that milestone, the District had my son-in-law Craig Brown make laser-cut desk top steel American Flags with SWCD logo and markings as banquet table favors. I personally will miss my usual requested tradition of giving the invocation at many annual meeting banquets. I look forward in December 2020 making my final motion at my final board meeting. It will remind me of my first motion in 2000 to add a cab to the new Deere tractor being purchased to install the vast number of buffer / filter strips in Wood County. I plan to remain active, just not as active as in 2018 when I went zip lining with grandkids at Hocking Hills Canopy Tours where I might have inflamed my Rotator Cuffs after possibly landing 60 feet high in tree lofts doing 8 cable bridges and 10 zip lines! I will soon turn 83 and have realized for several months that more youthful agricultural related persons need to continue the strong and challenging activities of the Wood Soil and Water Conservation District.

My most lasting educational activity might have been serving on the steering and design committee creating the first specialized Agricultural Education Program in the first ever in Ohio the Penta JVS School. In 1982 I had the wonderful opportunity to construct and introduce to Ohio and the world the first public use grain rescue tube. I got to donate the first and retired grain tube to the Ohio State Farm Science Review Museum in 2010 ! I retired from being a volunteer fire fighter in 2015 after 51 years of service.