

## Keeping Traditions Alive

### *CREP Helps Farm Family Care for its Land and Water*

RIVERBEND (April 5, 2004) – John Davis remembers when his father tied the tire onto the big elm tree that hangs out over the river. He also remembers the summer many years ago that his father told him he couldn't use it.

“We had a bacteria problem in the river that year,” Davis says as he walks the lane from his farmhouse to the filter strip along the river, growing in hardwood seedlings. “It was the first time anyone really realized how serious the problem was, but my father vowed it would be the last closure if he had anything to do about it.” Davis' father became known throughout the county as a leader and innovator in farmland conservation. And John Davis is now following in his father's footsteps.

Davis was one of the first in the state to enroll his land in the new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). CREP is a \$10 million state-federal-private partnership that makes it cost-effective for farmers like Davis to take streamside land out of production and plant them in what are known as filter strips. Farmers are paid rent on the land for the life of the CREP contract, and are reimbursed for the cost of the trees they plant.

These small plots of land do a lot of work, keeping soil and nutrients on the land, and providing habitat for wildlife. State water quality officials have reported that the river has become cleaner since farmers in the watershed began installing buffers, and the Davis family has noticed more ducks, pheasants, geese and deer in the two years they have been enrolled in CREP. To date they've planted 1,600 trees, plants, and shrubs as heavy cover for the pheasants.

Peggy Brown, president of the board of the county chapter of Conservationists for Conservation – which contributed funding and manpower to the partnership – says CREP has proved to be a win-win program for farmers and the environment. “CREP allows farmers to farm the best land and put marginal land into a higher and better use, while still making money on the land. It helps keep the river clean, and it helps farmers stay in business.”

John Davis agrees. “Farmers take their role as stewards of the land and water very seriously,” he says. “But they have to take their role as businesspeople and providers for their families into account too. CREP helps me do both.”

Using CREP, farmers are conserving land, protecting water supplies, and improving natural habitat, and in John Davis' case, it's helping keep a three-generation tradition alive to a fourth. “The first thing I'm going to do when one of these trees gets big enough,” Davis says, “is put a new tier swing up. I think my dad would have liked that, and I know my grandchildren will.”

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