

## **Floyd Farmer Hates Erosion**

By Dick Tremain

Floyd County farmer Jon Gisleson says tilling the earth black doesn't make sense. "There is no reason to till the soil black when the long-term benefits of no-till and strip-till are huge. Conservation tillage is just good business sense. Everyone needs to be on-board," he said.

Gisleson is an Iowa Learning Farm (ILF) conservationist and chair of the Floyd County Soil and Water Conservation District. He works closely with Dennis Sande, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) district conservationist for Floyd County.

"Jon is a farmer who is passionate about conservation. He uses a complete package of conservation practices on his farms and enjoys talking to small groups about his experiences as an ILF conservationist. He hates erosion and his farms prove it," said Sande. "If there were such a thing as a 'Jewel of Conservation Farm,' one of Jon Gisleson's farms would have that award."

Gisleson says his conservation practices also help him make money. "Strip-tilling in the fall allows me to place nutrients right where the plants can use it. In the spring, I plant the corn seed into the warmth of the black soil strip knowing I'm protecting the soil from erosion. The seeds germinate; I spray for weeds and side dress with nitrogen. I save fuel, reduce my time in the field and save on input costs. I find my yields are the same, costs are less and profits higher than if I tilled the soil black," he said. "In fact, I don't know why anyone would not use either no-till or strip-till. They are profitable practices and they save your biggest investment—the soil."

The 52-year-old Gisleson rents five farms totaling 800 acres near Charles City. He farms and sells seed full-time. Four of his five farms he rents from individuals and the fifth farm from a 1,800-member Catholic church. Sande says Gisleson may joke about keeping 1,804 landlords happy, but he says he is serious about using conservation practices on their land. "Jon uses conservation as a huge plus in cementing excellent tenant/owner relationships," said Sande.

"My landlords need to understand the concepts I use on their farms," said Gisleson. "I want them to know what I'm doing on their land and why. I show them how I use conservation practices to protect their soil. I even urge them to add lease language requiring the use of strip-till going into corn and no-till going into soybeans. That way, if I'm not farming their land, the soil will still be protected."

Sande says Floyd County land is gently rolling with long slopes and occasionally dotted with sinkholes. He notes that much of the county's soil has a high clay content requiring pattern tiling to drain water away from fields to increase yields. "One of the benefits of pattern tiling in our county is the reduction in soil erosion. Water going into the soil profile and safely out a tile line reduces the amount of water flowing over fields. Reducing the amount of over-the-surface runoff reduces soil loss, too," said Sande. "That's good for the land and everyone else downstream."

Strip-till and no-till are two of the conservation tools Gisleson uses on land he farms. According to Sande, Gisleson also uses a complete conservation plan on each rental property to address resource concerns. Sande says if the plan call for a practice, Gisleson works with the landlord and the NRCS office to get it installed.

Practices he and his landlords have installed include terraces and grassed waterways to slow water and soil erosion, filter strips and riparian buffers to keep silt out of streams and planting native grass mixtures on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) ground for habitat and soil protection.

Sande says Gisleson's farms are environmentally sound. "Gisleson does not like erosion. He does not like gullies. He knows which method is the best for him and he has Iowa State University Extension, NRCS, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation (IDALS-DSC) experts to talk to and other research to help him," said Sande.