

Heidensheep Acres receives Conservation Award

Each year the Turtle Mountain Conservation District (TMCD) nominates a farm family, individual or organization that has demonstrated sound conservation practices and environmental stewardship on their farm and/or organization. Heidensheep Acres is the 2017 recipient of the TMCD Conservation Award. This award was presented to Matthew and Heather Heide on December 12th at the Manitoba Conservation District Association Conference held in Brandon, MB. The following is the presentation from the evenings event.

Heidensheep Acres is located east of Whitewater Lake, 5 miles west of Boissevain, Manitoba. Matthew Heide and his wife Heather live on the 10 acre farm site with their two children: Natasha (15) and Andrew (12).

Heidensheep Acres consists of 305 acres of rented land of which 140 acres is native prairie and own their 10 acre farm site. They have a mixed farm operation that consists of 160 ewes, 3 rams, 3 pigs, 1 donkey, a guard dog and 450-500 rooster chickens. Land they rent is for pasture and hay. When the Heide's acquired the farm site, it hadn't had livestock on the property for nearly 40 years and only the original house and hip roof barn were still present. Corals and fencing were all put in place by Matthew and other loose housing were moved onto the property. No drainage or land clearing was needed on the property due to the way they farm. "Since, the land we have is all pastureland, there has been no reason to move water off and for the sheep you need trees and brush to provide some shade," Matthew commented.

Matthew and Heather started to farm sheep in 2000 with 40 ewes. In 2005, they took a break from farming to manage Camp Koinonia, a Camps with Meaning summer program along Lake Max in the Turtle Mountain Provincial Park. The Heide's returned to sheep farming in 2010, acquiring 60 Polypay ewes and have since added Suffolk ewes to the herd. Rooster chickens are sold direct each year at 8-10 lbs as well as eggs. Lambs are sold directly to a feed lot buyer or to ethnic groups whom require different butchering practices

The Heide family is very community oriented. Matthew and Heather volunteer with the Church and have leadership roles, they volunteer at Camp Koinonia and are members of the Small Farmers of Manitoba. Matthew has been the President of Boundary Co-op for 9 years and coaches Little League. Heather has volunteered with Boissevain Festival of the Arts for 13 years, the local food pantry and has been on the Farmer's Market board for 9 years. Both Matthew and Heather work off the farm as well. They work at Killarney Auction once a week and Fraser Auction seasonally. Heather is a substitute teacher's assistant and Matthew does freelance work such as combine operator, custom haying and constructing approximately 2 pole sheds each year.

Heidensheep Acres are not afraid to try new things on the farm such as lambing 3 times in 2 years, fall lambing and winter lambing. Currently, lambing periods are spread out to reduce work intensity and to allow for better use of their barn space. Both children are involved on the farm daily. Natasha and Andrew have daily chores to check lambs before and after school and with the sheep being a smaller animal they can handle the animals easily.

Heidensheep Acres have participated in many Conservation Programs such as implementing a remote watering system, portable windbreaks, abandoned well sealing and riparian fencing. They

completed their Environmental Farm Plan and were approved for Growing Forward funding for a watering system and cross fencing to improve pasture management. Future projects on the farm include implementing more cross fencing and planting shelterbelts to provide shade for his flock as well as for wildlife benefits.

“If it’s not fun, why do it!”