Conservation Stewardship Program
Farmer Profile: Jerry and Deb Heinz

An irony of growing up on the family farm, according to Jerry Heinz of Tolono, Illinois, was seeing his father take out brushy fence rows and grass fields back in the 1960s and then in the early 1990s they were putting them back in. They recognized the decline in wildlife and have seen a turn around since implementing conservation practices on the farm. Since then Jerry and his wife, Deb, are dedicated to conserving both the soil and wildlife.

Conservation is not a new thing to the Heinz family. Jerry took over the management decisions on the family farm in 1984 and now farms more than 1,140 tillable acres along with more than 100 acres of grasses and wildlife plots. In 2009 they went to all strip-till on the farm and do no-till on their beans. They have participated in the IL Department of Agriculture’s Save Our IL Soils (SOILS) and saw increase in yields and helped reduce fertilizer costs. When they raised cattle, they practiced sound nutrient management practices, and continue to use their pastures for their daughter’s horses. Solar chargers are used for the electric fencing. They have 60 acres enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Program located at a farm they own in Southern Illinois. All of this work helped the Heinz family earn the title of Wildlife Landowners of the Year in 1996, as recognized by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.
About the program:

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), administered by USDA NRCS, is a voluntary conservation program designed to encourage agricultural and forestry producers to adopt additional conservation practices and improve, maintain and manage existing ones. Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, prairie, improved pastureland, rangeland, non-industrial private forestland, and agricultural land.

CSP is available statewide through continuous enrollment with announced cut-off application dates for ranking periods. To learn if CSP is right for your operation, visit [http://www.il.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/index](http://www.il.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/index), or contact your local NRCS office.

In February 2010, Jerry and Deb enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) when they learned about it during their regular efforts to keep up-to-date on agricultural issues and policies. Their home county of Champaign County at one time ranked higher than any other county in the nation for filter strips, so the conservation ethic is shared by their neighbors. Their sign up went smoothly and they have recommended CSP to others.

Jerry has a long history of activism in the conservation arena--as a member of Pheasants Forever, he has seen habitat restoration have a great impact in Champaign, Ford and Iroquois counties. The Heinz's have been to Washington, D.C. lobbying on agriculture conservation policy on behalf of Pheasants Forever and Sierra Club. They are members of their county farm bureau, Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl and Deb served on the local soil and water conservation district board. Jerry has served on his local grain elevator board. During the 1990s Jerry represented Pheasants Forever in the IL Department of Natural Resources Conservation Congress and served as state chairman for Pheasants Forever and also served more than 10 years on the appropriation committee of the State Habitat stamp.

Deb also owns a commercial landscaping business, Prairie Restorations, Inc., in addition to her interest in the farming operation. Since 1995 that business has focused on erosion control, reintroduction of native species and reforestation. This work has included local farms, residential yards, parks and even landfills across the state.