Cameron Lake AgNPS SALT Final Report

The phrase often used when describing an Agricultural Nonpoint Source (AgNPS) Special Area Land Treatment (SALT) program is, “local people solving local problems”. Over nine years ago, the people of Clinton and DeKalb counties came together with an idea to make a better tomorrow. They took action to conserve and protect a resource of high importance and concern.

This resource is their drinking water and their concern was focused on the level of an agricultural crop chemical called Atrazine that entered the drinking water reservoirs through runoff waters. The idea of this project was to periodically measure levels in the reservoirs when Atrazine application rates were lowered or eliminated from weed control programs. This presented increased cost to producers because Atrazine is a low cost chemical that is widely used as a selective herbicide in production of crops like corn. In order to encourage participation and continue good weed management, an incentive payment became available to offset the difference in the cost of production.

Small efforts really can make a difference in the big picture. In 1996, the water works system for the city of Cameron was servicing approximately 2,214 residential and commercial customers within the city limits, as well as the Western Missouri Correction Center (WMCC) and Public Water Supply District No. 3 (PWSD No. 3), Clinton County. Currently, the city has exceeded expected growth rates by 33 percent based on the 2000 census. This means that there are nearly twice as many customers in Cameron, along with the additional usage by WMCC and PWSD No. 3 that are benefiting from the goals of the local people who took action.

Although the goal of this project was focused on lowering the Atrazine concentration in the reservoirs, they also considered a second factor; not solve one problem by creating another. By reducing the use of Atrazine, farmers would now be using something else to control the weeds. With the use of different chemical applications, producers were encouraged to adapt new methods to their operation, such as split application and other conservation practices. Split application not only requires less chemical to be used, but it also decreases the amount with potential to runoff into the water system per rain fall event.

Looking back over the project goals and what we have learned, it can be said that it has been a success. When you equalize the many variable factors involved with the program, such as rainfall events and crop rotations, the reservoirs have not contained excessive amounts of Atrazine. This is attributed to the fact that use of Atrazine has decreased and what is used is better managed with the additional help of conservation practices, such as no-till and terrace systems.

We can make a difference when we are motivated to reach a goal. This project was driven by concern for quality drinking water. Our natural resources affect our everyday lives and have an impact on our health. Clean water is often taken for granted until it is no longer suitable for consumption. From this project we have learned that it is better to prevent and protect before there is a potential problem. Sometimes the best approach to a solving a problem is eliminating it. Remember that having clean water is our responsibility. It is all about local people working together to solve local problems.