

## Ohio News Watch

# Meet the 2013 Master Farmers



By TIM WHITE

It is with great pride and a sense of honor that the *Ohio Farmer* recognizes three of our state's great agriculturalists with the Ohio Master Farmer award this month. Jim and Nancy Patterson from Chesterland, Jim and Brenda VanTilburg from Celina, and Joe Celuch and Brenda Butler from Frazesburg are truly great representatives of farming, family and community excellence.

This award was first presented to a group of 20 Ohio farmers in 1926. Ray Kelsey, associate editor of the *Ohio Farmer* at that time, described the men as "masters of the science of practical agriculture

## Key Points

- The Master Farmer award was first presented in 1926.
- We salute the Pattersons, VanTilburgs, and Brenda Butler and Joe Celuch.
- *Ohio Farmer* has honored 84 Ohio farms with Master Farmer awards.

who can produce outstanding crop yields, who know the art of breeding livestock, who can build up the fertility of their acres and not ruin them for future generations, who can literally make two blades of grass grow where only one grew before. They are leaders of their community, their county,

their schools and churches, and their state. They are good parents, neighbors and friends, and can be counted on in the front rank when any question arises pertaining to the rural life of their community or state."

The program made a good start, with 65 Ohio farmers recognized as Master Farmers from 1926 to 1930. Then the Depression took hold, and the awards were discontinued. In 1995, we rekindled the Master Farmer flame by presenting awards to three honorees during the Ohio Department of Agriculture's Ag Day celebration. The program continued through 1998, and 13 Master Farmer degrees were awarded. The program was again discon-

tinued in 1999 because of staff cuts. Last year, we got back in the groove by honoring William J. Richards from Circleville, Brian H. Watkins from Worthington and the late Terry Lee Swaisgood from Polk.

Over the years, numerous farmers have proudly shown me the golden medallions that were presented to their fathers or grandfathers for being Master Farmers. There is a reverence and awe that always accompanies these moments. Being a Master Farmer has always been considered the highest honor a farmer can receive. It is humbling to be able to present the cherished awards again to a class of truly deserving Ohio farmers. Congratulations to this year's honorees.

## Celuch and Butler: Centered on conservation

JOE Celuch and Brenda Butler are proof that a couple can get started in farming today. Following a rotational-grazing system for beef production, the twosome has earned high recognition for their conservation-based operation near Frazesburg.

The farm received the Conservation Farm Family Award in 2012. In 2011, Celuch and Butler were named Cooperators of the Year by the Muskingum Soil and Water Conservation District. They have also been recognized for their commitment to the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Conservation Stewardship Program.

Celuch and Butler farm about 400 acres, raising alfalfa and select blends for hay. They also have an 85-cow cow-calf herd that is managed with rotational grazing. The farm includes land they own and land they lease from 16 landowners. They arrange lease agreements for at least five to seven years, which allows them time to recoup initial costs for fencing, fertilizer, conservation practices and other improvements, Celuch explains.

"You can't do it year by year and invest what you need to make it work," he says. For instance, they've invested up to \$600 an acre upfront to improve nutrient-depleted soil to make it productive as hay ground.

Planning and recordkeeping may be the strongest points of the operation, says Jeanette Weinberg, with the Muskingum

SWCD. "This is all done to help build for the future. Learning from both mistakes and improvements cannot be validated without records. Numbers generally do not lie. Future equipment purchases, operations changes and the like are contemplated and then tracking records developed, which allow decisions to be made without significant influence of emotions."

The couple also has improved their farm by building access roads using recycled concrete pavement and reclaimed asphalt pavement. They began using recycled road materials in 2000, when they began building their operation. Then in 2009, they worked with engineers from NRCS and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Soil and Water Resources to change the state construction specifications to allow the use of reclaimed asphalt pavement for cost-share projects such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Reclaimed asphalt pavement, also called asphalt millings, is an underused resource that could benefit more farmers, says Celuch, who recently retired from off-farm work in heavy highway construction. When road construction companies remove old asphalt, they can recycle about 45% of it in the new asphalt, but the other



**BUSINESS OFFICE:** Brenda Butler and Joe Celuch are proof to other beginning farmers that by taking advantage of the information available, there are opportunities in production agriculture.

55% must find another home. Much of it is simply being stockpiled, he says. Road construction companies don't have the time or equipment to deliver small quantities of the material to farmers as they need it, so farmers must be willing to purchase and take delivery of very heavy truckloads to a reasonably level and very solid location as it becomes available, and store it until they need it, Celuch adds. "There's a little work involved with it."

Another innovative idea Celuch and Butler have implemented is a combination stream crossing and watering troughs. The concrete structures include an integrally designed, stream-fed drinking pool that is cast in place on the upstream side of a thick concrete stream floor crossing. Sloped concrete approach ramps are poured on each side of the stream. During normal flow

conditions, the concrete pavement will carry cattle and equipment traffic. Three 6-inch overflow pipes in the trough carry water under the concrete floor to the opposite side. During periods of high flow, water travels over the top of the bridge structure. The crossing and watering structures give cattle access to the stream water for drinking, but keeps them from standing in the water or trampling the banks.

Celuch and Butler recently finished fencing cattle out of all the creeks in their pastures, and the benefits have been even greater than they expected, Celuch says. For instance, the cattle had trampled some stream banks into bare ravines, but once they were fenced out, those areas quickly reverted to stable banks with natural vegetation. "Within six months, it healed itself right up," Celuch notes.