

For Immediate Release

Cover Crop Grant To Help Keep Rivers Clean and Farming Profitable

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Photo Included: Clean River Partners Staff, Rice SWCD Staff, Compeer Financial Staff
Photo Credit: Teresa DeMars – Rice SWCD. Taken at “Farmers Protecting the Cannon River Watershed” informational meeting held March 15, 2022 in Faribault, MN

Photo Caption: **Front Row From left: Dane McKittrick, Alan Kraus – Clean River Partners; Mark Purfeerst – Compeer; Steve Pahs – Rice SWCD; Melanie Olson, Clarice DeGroot – Compeer.**

Minnesota farmers are being challenged to make a profit growing soybeans and corn while simultaneously, making our rivers and lakes cleaner. This is a tall order for any business, especially one that has to deal with 100-year rainstorms or mid-summer droughts.

To help area farmers with this daunting challenge, Compeer Financial recently joined other partners in providing financial support to the Northfield, MN based non-profit watershed protection organization Clean River Partners, to expand cover crop planting on Rice County farmland west of Dundas, MN. Cover crops such as winter rye, turnip, radish, kale, clovers or oats planted sometime during or after the growing season of soybeans and corn, keep the soil covered between fall harvest and spring planting, capturing excess fertilizers and reducing erosion. These crops also increase water infiltration into the soil and improve soil biology

Now in year four, the five-year project seeks to maintain cover crop planting on about one-third of the farmland in the watershed of Rice County’s only trout stream, Rice Creek, and increase cover crop planting in the two adjacent watersheds of Wolf Creek and Heath Creek. As part of this project, water testing over the past three years has revealed that cover crops reduce nitrate concentration in tile drainage by 30 percent, and as a result, the three-year average (2018-2021) nitrate concentration in Rice Creek is 53 percent less compared to 2013.

Farmers are seeing benefits as well. Soybeans yields from fields with cover crops averaged 7.5 percent higher compared to fields without cover crops. John Becker, one of the farmers participating in this project said that he is excited about this project because cover crops protect the soil *and* prevent erosion. “Once the soil gets amended, the soil grows better crops. This is good for the soil, good for the crops and good for the stream,” said Becker.

Tim Little also farms land in the area and is participating in the project. Tim says that his work with cover crops and no-till planting of corn and soybeans has virtually eliminated soil erosion on his fields. He is seeing better weed suppression, better water infiltration and better usage of applied nitrogen. According to Tim, “Probably the biggest change for me, is that my growing

season starts in September rather than April – trying to keep something growing all the time which promotes soil health. Healthier soil, healthier critters, healthier us!”

Partners in this project include Bridgewater Township, Fishers and Farmers Partnership, Rice Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), St. Olaf College, Minnesota DNR, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the farmers and landowners in the Rice Creek, Wolf Creek and Heath Creek Watersheds.

The Compeer Financial Fund for Rural America, the corporate giving program of Compeer Financial, has awarded 49 grants for the organization’s General Use Grant Program, totaling \$268,101 this year. General Use Grants fund initiatives and organizations whose work enriches agriculture and rural America, which is Compeer Financial’s mission.

“These organizations give back to the communities in Compeer Financial’s territory every day, supporting agriculture, technology, education and the environment,” said John Monson, chair of Compeer Financial’s Fund for Rural America. “We are proud to continue our commitment to agriculture and rural America in the second year of our General Use Grant Program.”



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