

Legal SCENE

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Civil asset forfeitures improve public safety

Civil asset forfeitures allow law enforcement to keep the community safe by removing whatever asset is causing the danger. For example, police can take the car from a drunk driver who continues to drive drunk, police can take the proceeds from drug dealers selling drugs to our community, and police can take a vehicle used to flee the police. The civil forfeiture laws promulgated in Minnesota are a powerful deterrent to a wide variety of serious crimes, from drug trafficking to repeat drunk drivers to reducing the human tragedy often caused by prostitution. And the Scott County Attorney's Office has always made public safety its top priority and used the forfeiture law to protect the public.

The funds derived from civil forfeitures in Scott County are also used to protect the public. Our local police departments use civil forfeiture funds as a way to contribute to the local drug task force, to buy necessary computers and equipment for the police departments, and to train officers. The Scott County Attorney's Office uses civil forfeiture funds to employ a law clerk, to help fund "Take it to the Box," to help fund "Choose Not To Use" (an educational foundation for our schools and community), and to pay for required continuing education and law licenses for attorneys in the office. Unfortunately, civil forfeitures were at risk this year with proposed legislation that would dismantle civil asset forfeitures. If that were to happen, all of these costs would then be shifted to the County budget, or be at risk of being cut. The risk of these anti-forfeiture bills is not just in terms of reduced funding, but far more importantly, the increased risk to public safety.

Several bills that were proposed attack civil forfeitures. One bill would prohibit DWI vehicle forfeiture of a repeat drunk driver if the driver enrolled in the ignition interlock program. The Interlock program can reduce recidivism while the driver is on Interlock, but when released from the program, the public is back at risk because the instrumentality has been returned. And recidivism rates rapidly increase. Another bill seeks to eliminate civil forfeitures entirely.

Much of the momentum for this opposition to civil forfeiture comes in the wake of the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Timbs v. Indiana*. In *Timbs*, the U.S. Supreme Court found that the excessive fines prohibition of the federal constitution applies to the states. But this is something Minnesota already did, so *Timbs* should have very little impact on Minnesota cases.

Civil asset forfeitures help keep the public safe. Please contact your legislators and urge them to allow police and prosecutors to keep this important crime-fighting tool.

Master Gardeners to host Evenings in the Garden

Evenings in the Garden takes place every second and fourth Tuesday during June and July, and the second Tuesday in August. Bring a chair, relax, and find new ways to enjoy the garden. There will also be activities available for children at each event. Classes are held from 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. (with the exception of the June 11 class) at the Scott County Fairgrounds Teaching Gardens, 7151 190th Street W., Jordan. All classes are *free* to the public.

Summer Garden Festival

Tuesday, June 11, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. *Rain or shine!*

The evening includes:

- **Foraging or wild crafting:** Learn about foraging and wild crafting in your yard or area. We will talk about safe identification and harvesting from the wild. Edible flowers, plants, and roots will be discussed.
 - **Unusual plants for containers:** Examples of interesting and unusual plants to enhance the beauty of your containers will be demonstrated. Learn from an award-winning container gardener.
 - **Spa gardening:** Beyond the kitchen... Using herbs is an eco-friendly way to make your own cleaning supplies, beauty boosters, vinegar scrubs, and aromatherapy.
- Tours will be given of the gardens.*

Art from the Garden, Tuesday, June 25: Oh, the creations that are inspired by the garden are many. Join us for an opportunity to learn about ways to bring the garden into your handiworks.

We will do a "make and take" to create something to bring home with you using objects from the garden.



Make fun items for fairy gardens.

Join us for miniature gardening with fairies and gnomes. Make fun items to add to a fairy or gnome garden and learn how to create your own container garden in miniature. Bring a child, grandchild, or just yourself. Check out the gnome-themed Teaching Garden too.

Tai Chi or Qigong, Tuesday, July 23: Join us as we enjoy the beauty of the garden through movement. Have you ever seen people exercising in the garden where it didn't involve planting, weeding, or harvesting? This class will expand how we can enjoy nature in a different way, with healthy exercise that can be adapted to any fitness level.

Garden Tea Party, Tuesday, Aug. 13: Make "teas" and infusions from herbs. Get into the spirit of the evening by wearing a floppy hat or whatever catches your fancy. Enjoy both the beauty of the herbs along with the aromas and flavors. Learn which parts of the plants to use to enjoy the flavors of fresh herbs.

Cover crops help local farmer care for his soil

When it comes to conservation, Joe Hentges was willing to give it a try and see how he could make it work for him. Joe grew up on a family farm near Jordan; he and his parents, Bill and Gloria, now farm over 1000 acres in central Scott County. As a multi-generation farm, they understand the importance of taking care of the land for future generations.

Incorporating cover crops into their farming operation had been on Joe's mind for a number of years. He knew cover crops were an effective conservation practice that could potentially improve his soil while minimizing runoff pollution. Yet like with any business, trying something new involves a steep learning curve and taking some financial risk. It's especially true on a farm where profit margins and room for error are very small.

It was no different for Joe. Did it make sense to purchase cover crop seed and spend time and resources putting the seed into the ground, not knowing for sure what the benefit would be to the land, environment, or his bottom line? In addition to farming, Joe is involved with his family's milk and grain hauling business, sells seed as a dealer, and is an active member of the Prior Lake Spring Lake Watershed District's Farmer Led Council. He has a lot to juggle, but was willing to take time to try something new when the opportunity is right.

Joe got the opportunity he needed to give cover crops a try in 2017. That year, the Farmer Led Council had a reverse auction where farmers could submit bids for payment in return for planting cover crops in certain areas. His bid was accepted, and so in early fall he seeded a cover crop mix of radishes, spring wheat, winter peas, canola, clover, and oats by helicopter on 60 acres of soybeans. But winter came early in 2017, and although it germinated, the cover crop did not have much time to get well established. The limited growth still provided some cover that helped keep the soil from eroding during snowmelt and spring rains, but the benefit to improving his soil's health could have been better. Joe was able to take what he learned from the experience and tweak it for the next year. He decided to continue using cover crops because he knew with time they are "building soil health and healthy soil will lead to a better yield."



Local farmers and SWCD staff toured a field where Joe Hentges established a cover crop to improve soil health and prevent erosion.

While the 60 acres of cover crops that Joe seeded in 2017 was a good place to start, it is a small fraction of the 1,000-plus acres he and his parents farm altogether. With a year of experience under his belt, Joe was intent on trying more. The following year, Joe more than *tripled* his cover crop acreage, and used different mixes and seeding methods. (When it comes to cover crops, there is no one "right way" to do it. Ask any farmer who uses cover crops and they will tell you the right way it is whatever works for you.) As the Hentges grow cash crops of corn, soybeans, and wheat, they decided in 2018 to try cover crops on a portion of each crop.

Wheat provides a great opportunity for cover crops. Because it is harvested much earlier than corn or soybeans, it gives the cover crop a longer growing window before the fall freeze. Joe harvested the wheat in late summer, then broadcast seeded a diverse cover crop mix over 150 acres of wheat stubble. By September, the cover crops fields were carpeted with green, while

land surrounding them was beginning to turn brown. The cover crop mix in these fields consisted of species that cannot survive through winter temperatures, and is generally used when options for terminating the cover crop in spring are limited. Joe's goals for the cover crops in these fields were to reduce erosion, build organic matter, and build nitrogen in the soil for this spring's corn.

In addition to planting cover crops in the wheat fields, Joe also aerial-seeded a cover crop onto 30 acres of soybeans and seven acres of corn later that fall. This cover crop mix consisted of species that survive the winter and green up in the spring. Cover crops that overwinter have greater benefits than those that do not: They create year-round living cover which greatly reduces erosion. They also extract excess moisture from the soil, thus improving conditions for spring planting. Overwintering cover crops can, however, be challenging. If growth is not effectively terminated, a cover crop will compete for nutrients and moisture, which can result in taking a hit on the cash crop yield. Joe tried a variety of methods to overcome this. His main method was terminating the cover crop first, then planting a cash crop after. He also experimented with no-till straight into a living cover crop and then terminating the cover crop with herbicide. You can be sure the Joe is keeping a close eye on how each of the trials performs so he can take what he learns this year and continue building soil health for the future. "I want to be able to hand this land down in better shape than it is now. Your land is your legacy," he said.

The Hentges family farms land within both the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District (PLSLWD) and the Scott Watershed Management Organization (SWMO). For the fields in PLSLWD, the Farmer Led Council offers funding, and the SWMO offers an incentive payment to plant cover crops on the fields in the WMO. With the help of these funding sources, Joe is able to experiment on more acres of cover crops without increasing financial risk. If you are interested in planting cover crops anywhere in Scott County, call the Scott SWCD at (952) 492-5425 and they can work with you to figure out how cover crops can fit into your operation, help you create a cover crop plan, and help you apply for financial assistance.