Drainage Water Management Stacks Up

April showers are beautiful when they bring out the tulips and daffodils, but unchecked, drainage water from heavy rainfall isn’t pretty. Implementing a drainage water management system can pay for itself with higher retained moisture and nutrient levels, resulting in improved yield.

According to the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy plan, drainage water management can reduce nitrate-nitrogen loss through the tile lines by an average of 33 percent. Drainage water management systems:

• Help to control the amount and timing of water leaving agricultural fields through the tile lines
• Decrease soil leaching
• Increase soil carbon through reduced oxidation of soil organic matter
• Increase yield by an estimated 50 to 70 bushels per acre of corn and 20 to 25 bushels per acre of soybeans

Connecting a water level control structure to your drainage water outlet makes it possible to raise or lower the water table level in your field by adding riser boards to stem the flow of drainage water and reserve it for use by the growing crop. You decide the elevation of your water table dependent upon your crops’ needs. Prior to planting or harvesting, riser boards can be removed to ensure the soil is dry enough to run farm equipment in the field. After harvest, riser boards can be added to retain water and slow water runoff. The act of slowing the movement of water across your acres also helps prevent the displacement of soil, minerals, nutrients, and inputs that occurs with fast-moving runoff.

Drainage water management systems work most efficiently on crop ground with less than five percent slope and on fields that have been pattern-tiled rather than randomly tiled.

According to National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) estimates, the cost to install a drainage water management system runs $40 to $110 per acre; assuming that the crop ground is flat enough for one structure to control 20 acres. Funding programs, such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), are available through the NRCS and other entities.

Consult Sunderman Farm Management to determine which resources might be available for your crop acres and how managing drainage water could help retain soil, nutrients, and moisture for increased yield.

Photo and illustration provided by the Soil and Water Conservation Society. Visit www.swcs.org for more information.
March 10, 1969, was quite a day for Brian Larson. It was the day that started him on the incredible path to where he is today, the day that Roger Sunderman hired him as a farm manager.

Brian grew up on a farm, participated in 4-H for 10 years, and was an active FFA member in high school. He graduated from high school in 1957 and attended Fort Dodge Junior College for one year.

In 1961, he began a job as a technician with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), now known as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This job taught him many things and most importantly introduced him to many people. While working for the SCS, Brian worked on many of Roger Sunderman’s properties, and soon the two men became good friends.

In February of 1969, he received a phone call from a man in Fort Dodge who ran a job placement business. This man had heard of Brian and wanted to offer him a new job, but Brian was unsure of the situation and needed some advice. So, Brian called Roger Sunderman to seek his guidance. Roger’s advice was simple, “Why don’t you try farm management?”

Brian was surprised by the comment and asked where he could possibly find a job in farm management. It just so happened that Roger was looking for another farm manager and thought he would be a great fit. Brian had an interview for the position the next night, and on March 10th he was employed at Sunderman Farm Management Company.

After 19 years, Roger was ready to sell his business, and he knew exactly who he would like to carry on his legacy. Brian saw Roger and his wife, Lyda, as parents, and they treated him as if he was family. He was honored to carry on their family business and bought the business from Roger and Lyda Sunderman in 1988.

The first year Brian owned Sunderman Farm Management Company it was just him and a part-time secretary. The next year he hired Mark Thompson, who has been an employee of Sunderman Farm Management Company for 30 years. Brian’s son, Brent Larson, has been a full-time part of the management team for 13 years. Jon Larson, Brian’s brother, is also on the Sunderman team part-time helping with real estate sales and valuations. Jenene Friedrichs became the office manager in 2015 and keeps the business running smoothly as an integral part of the team.

Brian attributes his 50 years of success as a farm manager to God, his family, and the amazing people he has worked with and now calls friends. He loves the land and everything that goes with it. “I’m grateful for our owners and operators because they’re the heart and soul of our business.” He is thankful for the amazing opportunity that he was presented with all those years ago. “(My) whole career has been outstanding and delightful, and I give all the Glory to God!”

Brian Larson, President of Sunderman Farm Management Company, was meant to be a farm manager, whether he knew it or not.
John Daniel II didn’t grow up on a farm, but he has ties to farming through his parents. After he inherited some land, he continued to grow the family farm. Farming wasn’t what John initially intended to do with his land. It was an investment and a way of carrying on a family legacy. John’s dream was to open his own pharmacy.

He fulfilled this dream in 1963 when he opened his own pharmacy and drug store, Daniel Pharmacy, on Central Avenue in Fort Dodge, Iowa. His Pharmacy provides superior products and service to a community that has come to know and trust him.

John and his wife, Margo, have three children: John III, Mary Kay, and Mark. They keep the store running with the help of an excellent staff that includes several family members. Margo and John III both work in the pharmacy. Mary Kay helps with healthcare product sales and also has a home decor business that is accessible through the pharmacy. Mark lives with his family in the Des Moines area but is able to get back home frequently.

In a small town, the community is a family in its own way, and it’s easy to get to know many of your fellow residents. John has always been quick to turn clients into friends. When he met Roger Sunderman, a local farm manager, the seeds of a longstanding land management partnership were sown.

John knew Roger ran a farm management company and was curious if that could benefit his family’s land investment. He soon found that he enjoyed learning more about farmland and the opportunities it offered. It occurred to him that the more time he spent with the Sunderman team, the more he learned about his farmland.

In 1987, a business relationship was formed between the Daniel family and Sunderman Farm Management Company. “It has been a great friendship and business relationship. We’ve been able to expand the farming operation through working with [Sunderman Farm Management],” John says. Both Roger Sunderman and Brian Larson would attend land auctions with John to consider new pieces of land he was interested in purchasing. He appreciated the teamwork because they helped him evaluate the ground from a different perspective, and they helped him decide if it was a good investment.

John explains that he enjoys working with Sunderman Farm Management because they are always looking to the future of farming. “They’re progressive, knowledgeable, and —most of all— honest and fair,” John explains. Together as a team, the Daniel family and Sunderman Farm Management continue to maintain and improve the farms by implementing conservation land improvements, installing drainage solutions, and being good stewards of the land. 🌿