



Brian Hicks Tracy, Minn. Nettiewyynnt Farm Limited Partnership Products Raised or Grown: Corn, soybeans and hay Size of Operation: 2,500 acres In Business Since: 1992 Farm Credit Partner: United FCS Working with Farm Credit Since: 1997



In recent years, the news has been filled with stories

about significant droughts across much of the U.S., which reduced yields, leading to higher prices for consumers. A different challenge that doesn't receive as much attention is too much rain – or at least, too much rain at the wrong time.

"In the spring, excess water makes it difficult for us to accomplish field operations like tilling and planting," says Brian Hicks, who farms 2,500 acres of corn, soybeans and hay in Minnesota. The solution is a tile drainage system, which consists of a network of pipes buried under the crop land. The pipes are semi-permeable, letting water seep in, and then depositing it in drainage ditches or streams.

Unfortunately, later on in the year, more water is needed than is falling from the sky. "Come late June or July, we start having a deficit of moisture to keep our crop growing," says Brian. One solution he's put in place, with financing from United FCS, is a controlled drainage system – instead of taking all the water out of the soil, he monitors the moisture level in the top three feet of soil, which is where critical root growth is taking place, and turns the system on or off as needed to keep the optimal amount of moisture in the soil.

Admittedly, there are some environmental concerns about nutrient-rich water runoff into streams, whether that water comes from crop fields or backyards. Reducing the amount of runoff through a controlled drainage system is a first step to solving the environmental problem. It also supports the business side of farming. "Farmers have spent a lot of money on that fertilizer, so it's much better for us to keep it where it is, helping our crops to grow," says Brian. "I've spent over \$700 per acre in inputs to grow corn. There's no other industry that would put that kind of money at risk and not have a way to manage it."

The next stage of development, addressing both environmental and farming concerns, is a system that will remove water from the fields in April and hold it in a reservoir to be pumped back into the irrigation systems in July. In cooperation with the University of Minnesota, Brian is testing such a system on 12 acres of his land.

Despite the challenges of farming, Brian wouldn't have it any other way. "I think it's the best job in the world," he says. "I get to work with three generations – my Dad, me and my kids. I'm just really thankful I have the opportunity to do what I do."