July 2012

Berres Brothers – Rain Garden

Berres Brothers Coffee Roasters is a family business originally started as a coffee, soda and snack vending business in 1970. In 1992, it officially went specialized in roasting coffee. Berres Brothers has its roasting facility, café and retail hall in Watertown, Wisconsin. They roast their coffee daily and offer over 100 varieties of specialty coffees. They distribute their coffee mainly through retailers in the Midwest, but they also do mail orders and wholesale.

Challenge

Berres Brothers is devoted to continually improve their sustainability effort and seeks to be the leader in their community to do the right thing. During the aspect identification process for the Environmental Management System in October 2011, they discovered they could do more on the water aspect. After some deeper examination, they decided to tackle the stormwater issue.

Stormwater is a significant source of non-point source pollution as it carries with it contaminations off the road and the parking lot into the watershed. Stormwater runoff is also a factor contributed to flooding. As a result, many municipalities are required to impose a stormwater impact fee to commercial entities to manage this damage. It can amount to a significant charge for businesses.

By choosing to focus on reducing stormwater runoff, Berres Brothers aims to improve their water budget, protect the watershed, and cut their stormwater impact fee.

Strategy

In the planning process to tackle this stormwater runoff problem, Berres Brothers consulted an engineer, who recommended them to create a rain garden behind their parking lot and building. A rain garden would catch the runoff and treat the stormwater from the pollutants carried with it before it infiltrates to the ground. They finally decided to build two rain gardens in order to maximize the runoff retention.

With the site determined, the project was put together and executed quickly. In October 2011, they hired a contractor to excavate the plots and native plants were obtained for the rain garden. The Sustainability Team of the company, which consists of Pete Berres, the owner of Berres Brothers, and several other managers oversaw the project. The two rain gardens, totaling almost 3,000 square feet, were installed in three day's time. Afterward, nature does its work in containing and purifying the stormwater.

The two rain gardens are currently maintained by the Green Team, which takes 3-5 days per year and several hours at a time. Employees at the company are also encouraged to help maintain the gardens during their free time. The plants in the rain gardens are mostly deep-rooted native species that would recover the hydrology of the land.

Green Tier Program
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
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Results

The rain gardens capture 100% of the stormwater runoff from Berres Brothers' property. They also retain and keep about 98% of total suspended solids in the water from entering the Rock River Basin. Given that one pound of suspended solid can induce about 500 pounds of algae growth, the rain gardens work to minimize Berres Brothers' impact to the basin. They petitioned to the City of Watertown to reduce their stormwater impact fee. The city listened to their petition and amended the ordinance so it would accommodate situations like this when a business is willing to contribute to reduce their environmental impact to the water basin. Benefited from this amendment, Berres Brothers was able to cut their stormwater impact fee down by 75%, to about $50/month on average. The construction costs for the rain gardens were roughly $1,800, with all the plants donated and maintenance done voluntarily by the employees. Berres Brothers is expecting to recover the costs in 1.2 years.

At the end of the day, Berres Brothers gets reduced stormwater impact fee, two gardens on their property and a respected position for taking initiative to protect the environment; the Rock River Basin gets a more steady replenishment of purified water from around Berres Brothers' land while the region's storm sewer infrastructure also faces less pressure during storm seasons.

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