

The county's soil sentry is a real down-to-earth type o' guy

By LARRY BALLARD
Courier Staff Writer

On his desk, Marv Haugebak has a green three-ring binder, jammed full of documents and at least six inches thick.

Maybe it's his resume.

The 70-year-old is a Realtor, a lobbyist, a former World War II fighter pilot, a one-time farmer and aspiring state senator, and one of five commissioners of the Black Hawk County Soil and Water Conservation District.

On second thought, he'd probably need two binders.

"I make the time," he says, answering his visitor's obvious question. "I sell a few houses, manage a little land ... I'm really semi-retired."

Somebody should tell Haugebak that retirement means lolling in a hammock, sipping a sweaty glass of

lemonade and fishing with a baitless hook, not flying to Washington, D.C., to bend congressional ears on capital gains taxes.

And retirement sure doesn't have anything to do with that green binder, which contains everything you'd ever want to know about the thousands of dollars in federal and state environmental-protection money pouring into the county.

But then, Marv Haugebak is not someone who thinks or acts the way everyone thinks he should.

Take his views on the environment, for example:

"So many people out there want to ban farm chemicals all together. That's about the dumbest thing I ever heard."

It's not something you expect to hear from your county soil and water conservation commissioner, but

Haugebak admits to having a problem with environmentalists who seek confrontation instead of knowledge.

Scaring people about the environment is easy, he says. Educating them is the hard part. Haugebak prefers to tackle the hard part.

That's no surprise. After growing up on a 160-acre farm in Worth County, Haugebak graduated from Iowa State University just a few months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

"I signed up because I was eager to do something new," he says. "That was a war worth fighting for."

So Haugebak said good-bye — but not for long — to a cute home economics freshman named Dorothy, and headed for the west Pacific. He was a Navy fighter pilot until he "cracked up a few planes and had my wings clipped."

After completing his military stint, he returned to Ames and took advantage of the G.I. Bill to get a master's degree in agronomy.

That's why Haugebak can either baffle you with the intricacies of "ionic exchange" and the "nitrogen cycle" or simply lay it out in a very down-to-earth way:

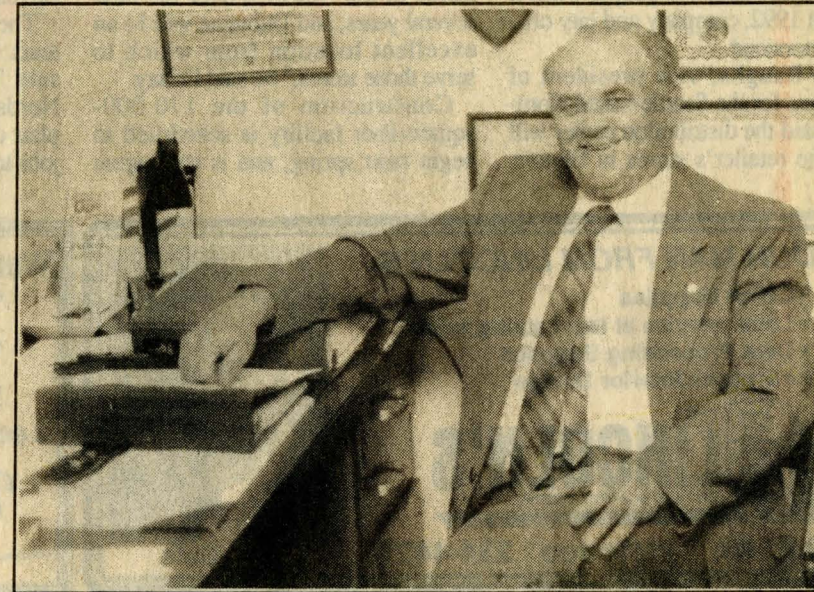
"A plant doesn't feed through its leaves; that's a bunch of baloney. A plant feeds through the soil, so that's where the nutrients have to be put."

He would like to tell that to people like Meryl Streep.

"It would be good if some of the

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Marv Haugebak, county soil and water conservation commissioner, takes a break in his Cedar Falls real estate office.



Courier photo by LARRY BALLARD

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Marv

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most vocal environmentalists would study this," he says.

"I'm concerned that some environmental laws advocated by uninformed movie actors and actresses will sway our national, state and local governments to pass restrictive laws that are unnecessary ..."

Spoken like a true Republican, which is unusual for a true Democrat.

"Marv's got some different ways of looking at things, but he has a good perception of what farmers are feeling," said Roy Campbell, former Black Hawk district conservationist stationed in Indianola.

Campbell says Haugebak's farm-oriented opinions provide much needed balance in a largely urban district.

"He's no dummy. I think Marv sees that some farmers don't need more regulation."

Haugebak doesn't mind going head to head with advocates of corporate farming ("That gets me in trouble sometimes with other Realtors") and he doesn't mince words about fraternity brother and current U.S. Agriculture Secretary Clayton Yeutter ("They ought to kick him out of there").

But his environmental stance is decidedly more conservative.

"I don't want laws passed that negate the progress that has been made in the farming industry in the past 70 years," he says.

"Farmers are not dumb. They will reduce use of nitrogen and farm chemicals on their own initiative to improve the environment without having it shoved down their throats.

"They do not need to be coerced into going back to the 'good old days.'"

And neither does Haugebak.

"We don't need a 1990 Farm Bill geared too much toward environmental issues," he says. "We have to use common sense. Farmers still have to make a profit."