

Ag secretary speaks in Fort Dodge

By ROY R. RIDGE
Messenger staff writer

The Webster County Soil and Water Conservation District

celebrated its 50th Anniversary at the Colonial Inn Friday night. Dale Cochran, Secretary of Agriculture, Iowa Department of Agriculture Land Stewardship was the keynote speaker for the event.

Cochran, one-time farm editor for The Messenger, has thirty years of farming and public service experience. He currently is serving his ninth year as Iowa Secretary of Agriculture.

Cochran told the crowd of about 140 people it was like old-home week for him. He said, "Most of my



Dale Cochran

life has been spent in Webster County." He added, "My great-grandparents, my grandparents, and my parents all farmed here."

Cochran said, "Soil is like black gold, when it stays in place and we support the economy with it. But when it begins to erode and get into our streams and waterways, and when it fills the ditches and the roadside fences, then it becomes a problem and a nuisance. And that's when we want to begin to want to look things over and see what we can do."

He said Webster County has been working very hard to control the soil for many, many years. The Webster County Soil Conservation District was organized in 1944.

Cochran echoed the words of the first chief U.S. Soil Conservation Service, Dr. Hugh Bennett, when he said, "Probably never before in the history of this or any other country, has there existed such a large and active body of unpaid volunteer

agricultural leaders — as in the soil conservation district commissioners, directors and other district officials."

Cochran listed the highlights of soil conservation in Iowa. He said, "In 1931, the first major soil conservation project was established in Iowa." But he said by 1936 one-fourth of the original soil in Iowa had already been lost.

In 1939, he continued, the state planning board reported to the Iowa Governor Wilson on state conservation law. The law was passed by the Iowa legislature.

In 1940, he said, three townships in Marion County organized into Iowa's first soil conservation district. In 1941, Governor Wilson proclaimed Iowa Soil Conservation Week.

Cochran said in 1945 the first of the annual short-course programs was held at Iowa State University. He said many in the audience had attended those programs over the years. And, in 1946 the Iowa

Association of Conservation District Commissioners was formed and incorporated.

Cochran said, "In 1947, the first annual conference for Iowa soil commissioners was held." He added that in 1988 people got together and decided water was precious and we didn't want to pollute it. They decided we wanted to keep it clean, and in that year — 1988 — the Iowa legislature added the word "water" to the title of the Iowa Association of Soil and Water Conservation.

Cochran said in 1952 the Howard Soil Conservation District was organized. And that was the last district in the state of Iowa to be formed.

Cochran said, "These are just a few of the landmarks of the history of how we started back in the 1930s up until the present time."

Cochran told the audience there are financial problems in agriculture. And, he explained, "We're working hard to establish a market for our value-added products."