

Stowe says ag to blame for Iowa water issues

The DM Water Works chief wants to change the state's farming to fit his priorities.

STORY ON PAGE 3

Crop reporters see planting wrapping up

Despite rain and chilly weather Iowa farmers are finding spots to finish corn and soybean planting.

STORY ON PAGE 4



Lake City cleans up after May 10 tornado

The morning after the storm, the small Calhoun County town was on the way to recovery.

STORY ON PAGE 5

More reading labels; buying on price, taste

Iowa Farm Bureau's Food and Farm Index also shows that farmers are seen as a trusted source for food safety info.

STORY ON PAGE 8

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Shane Wulf, left, coordinator for the Miller Creek Water Quality Improvement Project, looks over a buffer strip with Henry Shepard on Shepard's farm near La Porte City. Miller Creek is one of 16 targeted demonstration projects designed to help farmers see and learn about practices to improve water quality. PHOTO/GARY FANDEL

Farmers eager to learn from conservation demonstrations

BY DIRCK STEIMEL

Iowa farmers are more interested than ever in implementing practices to help them protect the state's water quality and conserve

precious topsoil.

The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy contains a number of well-researched and effective conservation practices. But finding the one that fits best on each farm's landscape and meshes with

existing practices takes more than reading a pamphlet or watching an online video, according to Matt Lechtenberg, water quality coordinator at the Iowa Department

►► WATERSHED PAGE 2

WATERSHED

►► FROM PAGE 1

of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS). Farmers, he knows, want to see the conservation practices first-hand, in action, before making decisions on which programs fit best on their landscapes and in their operations.

"It's really important to showcase these practices, so farmers can see them and feel more comfortable with them," Lechtenberg said.

That's the premise behind Iowa's 16 targeted demonstration projects, which have been established in nine watersheds around the state that have been designated as a priority by the Iowa Water Resources Coordinating Council.

Working with farmers

Demonstration project coordinators work with cooperating farmers to implement a number of practices, such as cover crops, bioreactors or saturated buffer strips, outlined in the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

That gives farmers in the area an opportunity to learn about the

practices first-hand, see how they work in actual field conditions and talk to people who already tried them, said Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey. That experience and knowledge will help expand use of the practices and help the state meet its goals of reducing nutrient loss under the water quality initiative launched in 2013, he said.

"We want to use these as incubators that let us scale up to move these practices where they fit all over the state," Northey said.

The concept of on-farm demonstrations is not new, Lechtenberg said. "It's really a tried and true method of delivering information to farmers," he said recently.

What is new, Lechtenberg said, is that each of the 16 demonstration projects around the state are locally designed, developed and led, with cooperation and investment from a wide range of sources. Each project has a different group of cooperators, which include local co-ops, farm equipment dealers, seed genetics companies, area colleges, local offices of government agencies and farm groups, including some county Farm Bureaus.



Farmers watch a conservation tillage demonstration arranged by the West Branch of Floyd River Water Quality Initiative. The northwest Iowa initiative is one of 16 targeted demonstration projects around Iowa and concentrates on practices that fit well with livestock farms. SUBMITTED PHOTO

Under the program, the leaders of proposed projects apply to IDALS for state matching funds. After a review by IDALS, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the state's three Regent universities, demonstration projects are chosen based on their impact to local water quality needs.

Since the first targeted demonstration projects were funded in early 2014, the state has allocated just over \$7.5 million in funding for the program and has leveraged more than \$10 million in additional funding supplied from partners and landowners.

Focus on local issues

With local leadership in place, the demonstration projects address that area's needs and take advantage of local opportunities and resources to show off prac-

tices to improve water quality, Lechtenberg said.

In northeast Iowa, for example, the Central Turkey River Nutrient Reduction Project has worked on demonstrating how cover crops fit well after harvesting corn silage, a common practice in that region, said Michelle Elliott, the project's coordinator. "It's sort of a no-brainer to work in cover crops because silage comes off early," she said.

The northeast Iowa project, which is headquartered in Calmar, has also been able to work with Northeast Iowa Community College, one of the partners, Elliott said. The college serves as a centralized hub and educational center for the project, she said.

Across the state in northwest Iowa, where livestock production is the primary economic driver,

the West Branch of Floyd River Water Quality Initiative works on water quality improvement practices for livestock intensive farms, said coordinator Becca Meerdink. That includes working with manure-incorporating equipment to help reduce nutrient loss and other practices for livestock farms, she said.

Other demonstration projects around the state work to spread knowledge and experience with edge of field practices, such as buffer strips and bioreactors, wetlands and saturated buffers. One demonstration project in Tama and Benton counties is looking at water quality practices that can be used in seed corn production.

Drawing attention

Area farmers have been very interested in both participating in the water quality demonstration projects on their own fields, and in learning from them, coordinators said.

"I'm really getting very good cooperation," said Shane Wulf, coordinator for the Miller Creek Water Quality Improvement Project, near Waterloo in the Middle Cedar River watershed. "Farmers don't want to lose any of their expensive inputs and are really interested in learning more about the practices that are out there that can preserve them."

Meerdink in the Floyd River Project agreed. "Conservation and water quality are very much on farmers' minds now," she said. "They want to know about how effective all the different practices are and what it costs to put them in."

A list of all 16 targeted water quality demonstration projects can be found at <http://www.cleanwater-iowa.org/demonstration-projects.aspx>.

State offers more funds for conservation cost share

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship announced last week that funds are available to help farmers install nutrient reduction practices.

Practices eligible for this funding are cover crops, no-till or strip till or using a nitrification inhibitor when applying fertilizer.

The cost-share rate for first-time users of cover crops is \$25 per acre, no-till or strip till are eligible for \$10 per acre and farmers using a nitrification inhibitor when applying fall fertilizer can receive \$3 per acre.

Any farmer not already utilizing these practices will receive priority consideration for this assistance. Farmers who have used cover crops in the past may be eligible for \$15 per acre for cover crops.

"We continue to hear from

farmers interested in doing even more to limit nutrient loss and better protect water quality, and these funds will help them try new voluntary, science-based conservation practices on their farm," Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey said.

Farmers are eligible for cost share on up to 160 acres. The funds will be made available in July, but farmers can immediately start submitting applications through their local Soil and Water Conservation District office.

In the last two years this program has been available, over 1,400 farmers put in new nutrient reduction practices on over 144,000 acres. The state provided about \$3.4 million in cost-share funding to help farmers try a water quality practice for the first time, and Iowa farmers provided at least another \$3.4 million to support these water quality practices.

HOG PLANT

►► FROM PAGE 1

accommodate larger hog numbers and heavier slaughter weights in the short term by running longer hours or working on Saturdays, said Steve Meyer, president of Paragon Economics. However, capacity could be challenged in the fall of 2016 if rapid expansion of the U.S. hog herd continues, he said.

of the Sioux Gateway Airport along the Missouri River.

Company leaders said Sioux City was selected because of the existence of a shovel-ready industrial site location, transportation infrastructure, availability of market hogs in the region and the pro-business environment city and state leaders demonstrated throughout the site selection process.

Strong business climate

munity."

The new pork processing facility will include a modern architecture design, customized landscaping for beautification and buffering from neighbors and modern odor abatement technologies, as well as other environmentally friendly design features, officials said.

The plant will produce a full line of fresh pork products for international, retail, food service and further processing markets.