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ANNUAL 2018

REPORT

FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION

Soil Health



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It's all about the soil!

FSWCD conservation award winners Howard Farm, Patricia Smith

By CHRIS DEBACK

cdeback@thefayettecountyunion.com

Soil health is an important component to the success of any farm.

Without at least fair soil, health crops won't grow effectively and yields will suffer, which ultimately leads to a decrease in revenue.

Every year, the Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District recognizes a farmer in Fayette County who has worked hard to preserve the pristine nature of his or her crop ground. The 2018 Conservation District winners were Howard Farms Company, owned and operated by Roger and Mark Howard, and the Patricia Smith Family Trust. They were presented the award in July.

"We are honored that we were even considered, because we have tried really hard over the years to do a lot of different things," said Mark and Roger Howard. "We spent a lot of money changing practices, equipment, and other stuff, but we also know that we have a lot of neighbors and a lot of other people within the county that work every year to do the best they can to incorporate different technology and conservation practices."

For six generations, the Howard family has farmed in Fayette County, always working at least one field within a two-mile radius of Roger's home off Highway 56 in rural Elgin. While growing up, Roger helped his father around the family farm before taking on his own operation in 1959. By 1967, Roger and his wife, Doris, had lived on quite a few farms before purchasing their current homestead and two adjoining farms along with it that year.

Much like Roger, Mark always enjoyed helping his father on the farm. The 1981 Valley graduate attended Iowa State University, where he earned a two-year degree in farm operations. After college, he lived in Omaha for three years while his wife, Brenda, was a nurse

in the Air Force. In 1987, the Howards moved to rural Elgin so Mark could start farming full-time with his father.

While it isn't always easy to work hand-in-hand with family, the Howards have maintained a very healthy relationship over the years, always bouncing ideas off each other on how the operation can be improved. Today, the Howards farm 2,500 acres of land that they either rent or own in Fayette and Clayton counties.

The Howards have employed different conservation practices throughout their farming careers, including contour farming, contour buffer strips, cover crops, and no-tilling.

"Some of the conservation entails changing management and practices and how you do things," Mark noted. "Some of it entails a fair amount of investment in equipment and technology."

For the last seven years, the Howards have been strip-tilling some of their fields. Instead of tilling the entire field, the Howards make one pass with the strip-tilling attachment that tills an eight-inch wide-zone per row, while also laying down fertilizer inside the strip. A month later, the Howards will then plant directly into the eight-inch-wide zone.

"This doesn't break up the whole soil structure of each row, but rather just a small strip in each row for planting," Mark said. "It allows for the soil structure to remain intact, which can help with erosion and runoff. It was a significant investment, as we had to buy a strip-tilling machine and then a tractor large enough to pull the machine. We also had to upgrade our GPS system to make it more accurate, because the planter has to follow the eight-inch-wide line the tillage machine makes. You want that planter to plant right along that eight-inch zone, so it has to be pretty accurate."

Another practice the Howards recently began to implement is cover crops. They'll plant 400



Howard Farms, owned and operated by (l-r) Roger and Mark Howard of rural Elgin, and the Patricia Smith Family Trust were selected as the 2018 Conservation District Award winner for the Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District. Roger and Mark Howard have employed a number of different soil conservation practices on the fields they own or rent over the years, including cover crops, no-till, contour buffer strips, and strip-tilling, among others. Patricia Smith has terraces and sediment ponds on her land, which the Howards rent. (Chris DeBack photo)

acres of cereal rye on soybean fields after this year's harvest at a cost of approximately \$25 to \$30 an acre. The cereal rye will grow throughout the winter, and then they'll use a spray to kill it off before planting directly into the crop. This is the tactic the two have used on Patricia Smith's property, which they rent.

"[The cereal rye] roots go really deep and captures nitrogen," Roger said. "We are early into it, but we are seeing good soil health because it maintains living roots for microbes in the soil, which helps release more nutrients. The rye itself will capture phosphorus, potassium, and nitrogen to hold for the next year, so there is less leaching of those products into the water system. Then we see soil erosion benefits, as you have to hold that soil into the winter months and early spring."

"I don't know if we have been doing it long enough to see an increase in bushels," Mark added. "The few fields we have put it on, we have had good yields there, but I don't know if I can point my finger and say it is because of that. We haven't seen a reduction in yield."

The Howards also partici-

pated in the Otter Creek Flood Reduction Project with the creation of a sediment pond that is used to hold back water during high-flow periods after heavy rain.

The Howards always strive to maintain good working relationships with their landlords through being great stewards of the land they rent. Using good soil health practices is just one way they work on developing those relationships.

Over the years, the Patricia Smith Family Trust has also employed a number of conservation practices on its property, including using terraces and building sediment ponds.

Any farmer will tell you that topsoil is a precious commodity, which is why the Howards' and Patricia Smith's conservation efforts make them the perfect selections for this year's award.



Every year, the Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District recognizes a farmer in Fayette County who has worked hard to preserve the soil health of his or her crop ground. The 2018 Conservation District winners were Howard Farms and the Patricia Smith Family Trust. The group received their award at the 2018 Fayette County Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in August. In attendance for the award ceremony were (l-r) Brenda Howard, Roger Howard, Patricia Smith, Mark Howard, and Doris Howard. (submitted photo)

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New Soil & Water Commissioners



Fayette County Soil and Water District Commissioners are: (front, l-r) Rod Marlatt, Elgin; Mark Howard, Elgin; Nick Benson, Elgin; (standing) Gene Pleggenkuhle, Don Bahe, Stanley; and Tim Bruhler, Hawkeye.

NRCS staff



The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) office staff includes (front, l-r) Aaron Anderson, NRCS district conservationist; Lori Kohlmeier, IDALS conservation assistant; Halley Williams, NRCS soil conservationist; Allie Rath, PF Farm Bill Biologist.

April 1, 2019

Dear Soil & Water Enthusiast:

The Fayette SWCD Foundation volunteers their time and service, and asks for your support in promoting soil and water conservation in Fayette County. Your donated dollars are used for: education field day for third grade students, high school scholarships, conservation awards, providing technical assistance with part-time district employees, supporting the Northeast Iowa (RC & D) Resource Conservation & Development, and public meetings for dispensing information and the discussion of issues.

The Fayette Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Foundation encourages you to join the local conservation effort by becoming a supporter for 2019. In these times of great economic pressure on our natural resources, it is critical that we combine our efforts to protect, conserve, and enhance our environmental resources.

Please complete the donor information below and include it in the envelope provided. Any support is greatly appreciated!

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Thank you for your help and interest in soil and water conservation efforts.

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Jensen and Hoeger retire from FCSWCD

By CHRIS DEBACK

cdeback@thefayettecountyunion.com

Fayette County's soil health, water quality, and conservation in general have always been important to Paul Hoeger of Maynard and Dick Jensen of Elgin.

With a combined 43 years of experience as commissioners on the Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District (FCSWCD) board, the two men have decided to hand over the fight for conservation to the next generation.

On Monday, Dec. 17, FCSWCD presented the two men with plaques as a small token of appreciation for all they had done during their time as Soil and Water commissioners. It was a heartfelt end for the two men who had dedicated their time to conservation in Fayette County. Each man took a moment to speak about his experience on the board and give words of encouragement to the three new board members — Mark Howard and Nick Benson of Elgin and

Gene Pleggenkuhle of Hawkeye — joining FCSWCD on Jan. 1. A third board member, Leon Deutsch of Wadena, retired over the summer.

Dick Jensen

Conservation has certainly changed since Dick Jensen was first elected as a commissioner to the FCSWCD in 1986.

"When I got on the board, the idea was that you judged a farmer on how little residue was left on the ground," he recalled. "The farmers didn't want the land to show any residue from the previous year's crop. It is the opposite today, and we realize that residue on the ground is most beneficial for the health of the soil." Jensen has always had a special connection with his land since he started farming in 1960. It's that connection that led him to run for the FCSWCD board.

"For some reason I have always had a spiritual and emotional connection to the land," Jensen recalled. "It just seemed like I realized I had a relationship with the health of the

land. I continue to believe that we can be helping if the rest of the environment is sick. I didn't need to be trained as it was an instinct."

For 32 years, Jensen has been a strong advocate of various conservation practices and has enjoyed helping farmers realize their ethical responsibility to the earth.

"The opportunity to influence others to realize that not only do they have an ethical obligation to the land but an economic obligation, as well, has been great," he noted. "We have continued to do things cheaper, but not at the expense of the environment."

At 80 years old, Jensen realizes it's time for the next generation to start pushing the conservation advocacy train. What he'll miss most about being a commissioner is working with other like-minded commissioners and office staff at the FCSWCD office.

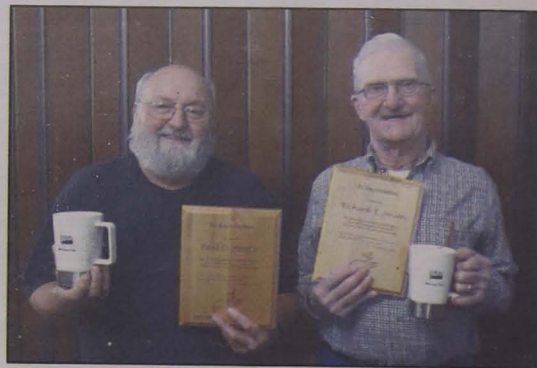
"I don't like the word 'retire,'" he closed. "Imagine how lucky I have been. I live within four miles of where I was born. I call that a blessing. I was able to do what I wanted to do, the way I wanted to do it as long as I wanted to do it. I have been so fortunate that I can get up in the morning and be excited about the day. I have never had to punch the clock, yet I get up at 6 a.m. and go. You can't get much better than that."

While he may not be directly involved in the FCSWCD, you can be sure that he will continue to be one of the stronger advocates for conservation.

Paul Hoeger

Paul Hoeger of Maynard first ran for a commissioner's spot on FCSWCD in 2006 with a little encouragement from Jensen.

"I was always interested in doing as much conservation as I could and, at the time, I felt [becoming a



With 43 years of combined experience as commissioners on the Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District board, Paul Hoeger (left) of Maynard and Dick Jensen of Elgin are retiring. The two men were honored for their dedication to conservation with a plaque and coffee mug on Monday, Dec. 17, at Gus and Tony's Town House Café in West Union. (Chris DeBack photo)

commissioner] was something I could do," Hoeger said. "Soil is the future, and soil is where we get our food. If you don't take care of that, you don't have anything."

For 11 years, the corn and soybean farmer enjoyed working on conservation issues within the county. However, his favorite thing about being a board member was helping with Jensen's Third-Grade Field Day held every year for third graders from schools located in Fayette County.

"That's my proudest accomplishment," he said.

The Maynard man retired from farming this year, and with involvement in Fayette County Emergency Management Services, he felt it was time to step away from the FCSWCD Board. However, he'll still have a small hand in conservation as Maynard's representative on the Tur-

key River Watershed Management Authority (TRWMA).

"I think TRWMA is the future of managing watersheds, especially when it comes to getting money and having all the communities and conservation boards [within the watershed] come together to be aware of what needs to be done to maintain the watershed and improve it," he explained.

While it may be time to retire, it doesn't mean he won't miss the camaraderie the board provided.

"I will miss people like Lori [Kohlmeier] and Aaron [Anderson] and all the other commissioners and staff members at FCSWCD," he closed. "Like Dick [Jensen] said in his speech, it's about working with people who have the same mindset you do. They all work hard in the office. However, it is time for a new generation to start."



The 2018 Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners were (front, l-r) Paul Hoeger and Dick Jensen; (back) Tim Bruhler, Leon Deutsch, and Don Bahe. (Chris DeBack photo)

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The Fayette SWCD Foundation would like to thank all the people of Fayette County and beyond who have made contributions for 2018. Our programs are made possible with your generous support and conservation effort.

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Pheasants Forever habitat report

by Rod Marlatt

The Fayette County Pheasants Forever Chapter has been creating, restoring, and preserving wildlife habitat for over 34 years.

Your Fayette County Chapter documented over \$216,760 in habitat expenditures in 2018, good enough for fourth most in the nation. In addition to acquisitions, woody cover, and food plots, the Chapter created 1,762 acres of nesting cover. This total was also the fourth most in the nation.

At the 2019 State Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever Convention held in January, your chapter was honored as the Outstanding Chapter and presented the Conservation Excellence Award. This award was in celebration of total local habitat expenditures of over \$3 million dollars since the chapter's inception in 1985. This total is the highest ever recorded in the history of Pheasants Forever in Iowa.

These accomplishments could not occur without the support of our members and partners, including the Fayette County Conservation Board, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

The Pheasants Forever model is unique to all other conservation organizations in that all the funds raised, with the exception of memberships, are retained by the chapter to be used for projects in Fayette County.

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New faces in Iowa forestry

Greg Heidebrink, DNR Forester

As many of you are aware, there have been a lot of changes to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Forestry Bureau in the last year and a half. To start with, there is no longer a Forestry Bureau. The district foresters have been moved to the Wildlife Bureau and the state forest staff have been moved to the Parks Bureau. Needless to say this has been a little trying and confusing but we are working our way through these changes. One good thing to come out of this change is that we have had the opportunity to hire some new faces. Last summer we hired Rachel Boucher and Sean Kenan as Forestry Specialists in District 2. It has been a real treat for us to be able to work Rachel and Sean. They bring new energy, new ideas and most importantly for me, advanced technology skills! Yes, I am now officially the "old guy" in the district!

I have asked Rachel and Sean to introduce themselves to you. If you happen to see them out in the field, at the USDA office or at a field day please introduce yourself and welcome them aboard!

Greetings. My name is Rachel Boucher. I have been blessed with the opportunity to join DNR's Forestry staff as a Forestry Specialist, via a partnership with the organization Wildlife Management Institute and NRCS grant funding. My passion for nature started as a child, where I'd spend hours upon hours exploring the woods behind my home in southern Illinois. It thrills me to say that I get to spend my adult life doing the same thing—although these days, I call it "work".

I started my college career at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, and while there I became smitten by the rolling hills, towering bluffs, and diverse forests of the region. Through some trial and error, I discovered that the natural sciences are where I wanted my career to head, and I completed a Bachelor of Science in Forestry in 2015. Then through some serendipitous events, the following semester I ended up right back at SIUC's Forestry Department, where I served as a research assistant and teaching assistant while working on my Master's thesis. I defended my thesis in June 2018, and in August 2018 was awarded a Master of Science in Human Dimensions of Natural Resource Management. The faculty and staff at SIUC Department of Forestry were instrumental in my academic achievements and I am grateful for every minute of my time spent there.

In July 2018, I made the move from southern Illinois to Cresco, Iowa with my husband, Michael, and our dog, Jack, in tow. My job as a forestry specialist is to help our District Foresters provide technical assistance to private forest landowners across 12 counties in north central and northeast Iowa. The majority of this involves inspecting tree plantings, making management recommendations, and writing management plans for forest landowners. We work in conjunction with NRCS in the administration of programs like EQIP and CSP. I have also enjoyed helping with various field days and planting projects, and I am looking forward to hosting a couple events of my own this coming spring. While life in northeast Iowa has been an adjustment, so far this job has been just the right mix of



Rachel Boucher



Sean Kenan

being fun, challenging, and rewarding. I hope to be a positive influence on the relationships between people and nature and to contribute to the overall betterment of Iowa's forests. Many thanks to those within DNR and at Wildlife Management Institute for making this position a reality and for granting me the opportunity to put my education to good use. It's been a great experience working with the folks of Iowa thus far, and I look forward to the challenges that lie ahead.

Hello.

My name is Sean Kenan. In June 2018, I was given the great opportunity to join the Iowa DNR Foresters as a Forestry Specialist through a partnership with the Wildlife Management Institute. I recently graduated from Iowa State University with a bachelor's degree in Animal Ecology and a minor in Forestry. While going through college, I spent my summers gaining a great amount of experience working as a Land Stewardship intern with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and as a seasonal Fisheries Technician with the Iowa DNR.

I grew up in a farming family in Greene County, Iowa where I learned to love working outside and the feeling of accomplishment after a day of hard work. My desire to be in nature started at an early age through my time spent hunting and fishing, which consumes a majority of my free time to this day. Because of my love for working outdoors and my appreciation for wildlife and wildlife habitat, I always knew I wanted to be in a career working with our natural resources. I feel very fortunate to have had my career aspirations become a reality. My seasonal work going through college opened my eyes to the beauty of Northeast Iowa and I quickly fell in love with the area, so my current location near Fayette seems to be the perfect fit.

As a Forestry Specialist, I work closely with the Iowa DNR District Foresters and NRCS staff to provide technical assistance to landowners who want to carry out proper forest management on their properties in North Central and Northeast Iowa. This is done by assisting with CRP planning and maintenance, writing forest stewardship and project plans, and assisting landowners with any other forest health related questions they may have to reach their management goals. Public outreach is another important part of this position so I will also assist with field days, workshops, tree planting events, and youth education days.

In the few short months I have been here, I have had the opportunity to meet and work with some great DNR and NRCS staff and several awesome landowners. I continue to expand my knowledge of forest management every single day, thanks to the talented team I work with. Any time I get to spend working with conservation minded folks who are passionate about managing our natural resources is time I truly treasure. It's a very rewarding feeling to help landowners achieve their land management goals. I look forward to working with many more people and seeing where this position takes me!

Boehm named FCSWCD scholarship recipient

Allison Boehm of Wadena was the recipient of the Class of 2018 Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District Scholarship that was awarded last spring by the Conservation Districts of Iowa.

A 2018 graduate of North Fayette Valley High School, Boehm is currently attending her freshman year at Iowa State University where she is majoring in Environmental Science.

The scholarship is open to students from Iowa schools who plan on pursuing programs of study in any field of conservation or agriculture.

"Soil and water conservation is essential because all life, including crops and animals, depend on healthy soil and water," Boehm stated in her application essay. "Without healthy soil, food would not grow and prosper and animals would not have a source of food."

The daughter of Eric and Cindy Boehm, Allison was very active during her time in high school. She was a two-year letter winner in basketball, softball and Volleyball. During her time at NFV, Boehm was also a member of the North Fayette Valley chorus and Student council as well as a member of the National Honor Society.

In addition to her high school achievements, Boehm has been a member of the Fayette County Pheasants Forever, as well as volunteered her time to the Wadena Public Library.

"My main goals after college is to find a career in conservation and work with landowners in their methods of farming and conservation processes," Boehm stated on the application.

"Working on our family acreage has played the biggest role in my decision to work in conservation," she continued. "We have implemented different conservation practices and have seen the great difference that they have on the health of the land."

Fayette County SWCD is currently considering the applicants for the class of 2018, who submitted their applications in mid-February. Members look forward to selecting a scholarship winner for this year, as well as for future years in an effort to encourage soil and water conservation in future generations.



Allison Boehm



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Summary Conservation Practices	Planned	Applied
Access Control (472) (ac)	669	1,118
Brush Management (314) (ac)	7	
Brush management for improved structure and composition (E314133Z) (ac)	37	
Conservation Cover (327) (ac)	1,954	2,379
Conservation cover to provide food habitat for pollinators and beneficial insects (E327136Z1) (ac)	1	
Conservation Crop Rotation (328) (ac)	1,849	1,795
Contour Farming (330) (ac)	791	714
Cover Crop (340) (ac)	4,132	4,213
Cover crop to minimize soil compaction (E340107Z) (ac)	5	
Cover crop to reduce water erosion (E340101Z) (ac)		122
Critical Area Planting (342) (ac)	853	165
Crop tree management for mast production (E666132Z1) (ac)	172	
Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647) (ac)	597	
Establish Monarch butterfly habitat (E327136Z2) (ac)	7	
FARMSTEAD ENERGY IMPROVEMENT (374) (no)	7	1
Fence (382) (ft)	26,738	35,401
Filter Strip (393) (ac)	295	35
Firebreak (394) (ft)	1,524	31,318
Forage and Biomass Planting (512) (ac)	88	95
Forest Stand Improvement (666) (ac)	77	25
Forest Stand Improvement to rehabilitate degraded hardwood stands (E666133X) (ac)	1	
Grade Stabilization Structure (410) (no)	4	6
Grassed Waterway (412) (ac)	211	33
Harvest of crops (hay or small grains) using measures that allow desired species to flush or escape (E511137Z1) (ac)	347	
Heavy Use Area Protection (561) (sq ft)	1,200	800
Hedgerow Planting (422) (ft)	1,593	
Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315) (ac)	679	1,135
Improving nutrient uptake efficiency and reducing risk of nutrient losses to surface water (E590118Z) (ac)	690	
Integrated Pest Management (IPM) (595) (ac)	11	
Lighting System Improvement (670) (no)	50	13
Livestock Pipeline (516) (ft)	11,888	1,668
Mulching (484) (ac)	1	1
No till to reduce water erosion (E329101Z) (ac)	25	
Prescribed Burning (338) (ac)	74	49
Prescribed Grazing (528) (ac)	168	103
Reduce forest stand density to improve a degraded plant community (E666132Z2) (ac)	28	
Reduce ozone precursor emissions related to pesticides by utilizing IPM PAMS techniques (E595129Z) (ac)	690	
Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till (329) (ac)	224	181
Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (345) (ac)	1,580	1,506
Riparian Forest Buffer (391) (ac)	29	
Stream Crossing (578) (no)		1
Stripcropping (585) (ac)	166	166
Subsurface Drain (606) (ft)	547	547
Switch fuel source for pump motor(s) (E374144Z2) (no)	1	
Terrace (600) (ft)	8,038	6,818
Tree/Shrub Establishment (612) (ac)	60	29
Tree/shrub planting for wildlife cover (E612137Z) (ac)	17	
Tree/shrub planting for wildlife food (E612136Z) (ac)	1	
Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (490) (ac)	13	4
Underground Outlet (620) (ft)	2,308	1,186
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) (ac)	348	267
Water and Sediment Control Basin (638) (no)	1	10
Watering Facility (614) (no)	11	2
Wetland Restoration (657) (ac)	62	
Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment (380) (ft)	380	380

Conservation Systems Plans (no)

Planned	Applied
274	219

Conservation System Acres (ac)

Planned	Applied
10,326	10,621

Performance Summary - Field Measures

Total Progress

0.10 - Conservation plans written (Ac.)	9,646
0.20 - Watershed or area-wide conservation plans developed (No.)	
0.30 - Stewardship plans written (Ac.)	623
1.10 - Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality (Ac.)	9,412
1.11 - Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil health and sustainability (Ac.)	1,674
1.13 - Cropland with an applied Soil Health Management System (SHMS) (Ac.)	714
2.10 - Land with conservation applied to improve water quality (Ac.)	10,515
3.11 - Grazing land with conservation applied to protect and improve the resource base (Ac.)	516
3.12 - Grazing land with a conservation system applied to achieve a sustainable forage-animal balance (Ac.)	64
3.21 - Non-Federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality (Ac.)	2,772
3.23 - Conservation applied on land being actively managed for wildlife habitat (Ac.)	224
3.40 - Forest land with conservation applied to protect and improve vegetative condition (Ac.)	7
6.90 - Conservation Applied to improve Environmental Quality (Ac.)	10,621

Programs

Conservation Reserve Program	
Program Eligibility Determinations (no)	265
Status Reviews Performed (no)	174
Plans Developed for new contracts (no)	24
Plans Developed for expiring contracts (no)	142
Environmental Quality Incentive Program	
Number of Contracts (no)	22
Dollars Obligated	\$361,114
Conservation Stewardship Program	
Number of Contracts (no)	13
Dollars Obligated	\$586,682

State-Water Quality Initiative (WQI)

No-till (ac)	74
Cover Crops (ac)	3,645
Dollars Obligated	\$58,168

State-Publicly Owned Lakes (POL)-Volga Lake Watershed

Cover Crops (ac)	808
Dollars Obligated	\$20,183

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noun: the preservation of soil
against deterioration or erosion;
the maintenance of the fertilizing
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**FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
JULY 1, 2017 through JUNE 30, 2018**

Checking Account

Beginning Balance		\$ 1,603.22
Receipts		
Money Market Transfers	\$ 9,104.67	
SWCD Foundation	4,508.00	
Technical Account	2,986.59	
Total Receipts		\$ 16,599.26
TOTAL		\$ 18,202.48
Expenses		
IM Commissioner	2,573.55	
IM Office	485.33	
Office Supplies	536.65	
PF Agreement	9,400.00	
Postage	58.00	
SWCD Foundation	2,986.59	
Total Expenses		\$ 16,040.12
Ending Balance 6/30/18		\$ 2,162.36

**FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
JULY 1, 2017 through JUNE 30, 2018**

Money Market Account

Beginning Balance		\$ 2,165.83
Receipts		
Farm Bill 13B -IDALS	\$ 1,219.21	
IM Allocation & Supplemental	2,750.00	
Interest	7.94	
PF Biologist - IDALS	6,900.00	
SWCD Foundation	500.00	
Total Receipts		\$ 11,377.15
TOTAL		\$ 13,542.98
Expenses		
Transfers to Checking	\$ 9,104.67	
Total Expenses		\$ 9,104.67
Ending Balance 6/30/18		\$ 4,438.31

**FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
JULY 1, 2017 through JUNE 30, 2018**

Payroll Savings Account

Beginning Balance		\$ 2.77
Receipts		
Interest	\$.15	
Transfer from Technical Account	860.00	
Total Receipts		\$ 860.15
TOTAL		\$ 862.92
Expenses		
Federal Taxes	\$ 75.98	
State Taxes	2.43	
Unemployment Taxes	5.00	
Transfer to Technical Account	776.59	
Total Expenses		\$ 860.00
Ending Balance 6/30/18		\$ 2.92

**FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
JULY 1, 2017 through JUNE 30, 2018**

Technical Account

Beginning Balance		\$ 1,520.72
Receipts		
Farm Bill 13 - CD1	\$ 50.40	
Farm Bill 13B - CD1	1,367.71	
Farm Bill 14 - CD1	2,599.87	
Supervisors	2,000.00	
SWCD Foundation	3,500.00	
Transfer from Payroll Savings	776.59	
Total Receipts		\$ 10,294.57
TOTAL		\$ 11,815.29
Expenses		
Accounting Services	\$ 75.00	
Payroll	355.00	
SWCD Foundation	5,031.17	
Transfer to Payroll Savings	860.00	
Total Expenses		\$ 6,321.17
Ending Balance 6/30/18		\$ 5,494.12

FAYETTE COUNTY
SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT FOUNDATION
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT

	July 2016 / June 2017	July 2017 / June 2018
ACCOUNT BALANCE		
Beginning Balance	\$ 12,269	\$ 41,983
RECEIPTS:		
Transfer from CD #42000		
Transfer from Savings		
Refund of part time help payments		\$ 2,986
Repayment from NRCS advance		\$ 2,045
Refund from the Union on costs		\$ 520
Void check #2176 for printing costs		\$ 125
Trees		
Supporters Club	\$ 15,010	\$ 8,768
Ded Dessel Memorial		\$ 220
Aerial Spraying		
Biannual Report Refund		
Proceeds From Robert Margroff Estate	\$ 51,344	\$ -
Scraper Rental proceeds	\$ 100	\$ 75
TOTAL RECEIPTS	\$ 66,454	\$ 14,739
TOTAL CASH AVAILABLE	\$ 78,723	\$ 56,722
TOTAL EXPENSES:		
CDI Dues	\$ 850	
National Assoc of Conservation Districts	\$ 775	
Retirement Sponsorship	\$ 1,726	\$ 400
Bank Charges & Legal Fees	\$ 24	\$ 60
Purchase of New RTV (Ranger)	\$ 10,887	
Friends of Wapsi Valley FFA	\$ 2,500	
Loan to SWCD Fayette County	\$ 2,045	
SWCD Technical Account Support	\$ 111	\$ 5,508
Aerial Spraying		
RC&D Donations		\$ 2,700
Memorial		
Auction Item for Annual Meeting		
Trees		
Freight		
Houg Farm Land Taxes	\$ 188	\$ 192
Houg Field Day		
Legal Fees for Houg Property		
Field Day Expenses Buses		\$ 552
Field Day Expenses Food		
Office Supplies	\$ 740	
Appreciation Dinner		
Ranger/Repairs	\$ -	
Water Monitoring Expenses		
Field Signage		\$ 65
Office Help	\$ 50	
Adam Grimm	\$ 10,175	
Pheasants Forever Donation	\$ 500	\$ 500
Pheasant Forever Biologist Support		\$ 5,000
Soil and Water Conservation Scholarship	\$ 500	\$ 500
Building Repairs	\$ 350	
Foundation Insurance	\$ 650	\$ 570
Printing of Support Letters	\$ 539	\$ 2,225
Postage for Support Letters	\$ 1,967	\$ 1,719
Web site development		\$ 796
Annual Report	\$ 125	
USPS Mailing Permit	\$ 265	\$ 225
Income Taxes for Foundation / Sales Tax	\$ 1,773	\$ -
TOTAL EXPENSES:	\$ 36,740	\$ 21,012
Period Ending balance per Bank Statement	\$ 41,983	\$ 35,710

Turkey River Watershed Management Authority

By: Rod Marlatt, Chairman TRWMA

So what is the Turkey River Watershed Management Authority?

Due to the historic flooding of 2008, the Iowa Legislature created the ability for entities to enter into official governmental bodies to try to find ways to reduce flooding on a whole watershed basis. The Turkey River Watershed Management Authority, TRWMA, established in 2012, was one of the first to form in the State of Iowa. While the name uses the word Authority, it truly has no official authority. A WMA simply encourages all entities to look at the watershed as a partnership of towns, agricultural and elected officials to come together to collectively enhance the watershed and increase its overall resiliency. These efforts will not only help reduce flooding, but will naturally through defined practices improve water quality.

The Turkey River is a massive Watershed. It contains 1,080,000 acres spanning across parts of 8 counties in Northeast Iowa. In Fayette County alone, the watershed drains 69.11% of the county (323,281 acres) and constitutes 29.84% of the overall watershed. The Turkey River is somewhat unique to other Iowa Watersheds. Its source begins to our North and West in Howard and Chickasaw Counties. These counties are in the Iowa Geologic surface on flat steep. These steep hills and valleys speed the water up exponentially. Thus, when flooding occurs, the Turkey not only challenges us with extraordinary water quantities, it does so at a high rate of speed. These conditions cause massive damage to our soils, landscapes and of course the communities that lie along the river.

We are fortunate that almost all of the legal partners within the watershed are active members. Incredibly, the Authority has 35 active member entities. These include twenty-three communities, five counties, and seven Soil and Water Conservation Districts. We are also fortunate to have our Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development staff hold it together with guidance and impeccable administration.

The vision of the TRWMA is that the Turkey River Watershed will be a high functioning hydrologic system that has increased resiliency in the face of changing precipitation patterns. Increased landscape resiliency will be achieved through the efforts of many partners working independently and collectively to increase the capacity of the watershed to slow and hold water for longer periods of time during heavy precipitation events, and consistently increase groundwater infiltration throughout the watershed to reduce drought during extended periods of rainfall.

Specific details of the Resiliency Plan are contained in our official Watershed Resiliency Plan, a 20 year Strategic Plan to increase the hydrologic function and resiliency of the Turkey River Watershed.

Much has been accomplished since the inception of the TRWMA. Pilot projects on Otter Creek between West Union and Elgin, Iowa have been modeled by the University of Iowa Flood Center. This modeling has shown a nearly 5% reduction in peak flow at its mouth at Elgin, Iowa. Multiple communities within the watershed have implemented resiliency projects such as permeable pavers, rain gardens, and wetlands. Or agricultural producers, through the leadership and guidance of our Soil and Water Conservation Districts have championed cover crops, EQUIP projects, easements, and most notable soil health as likely the most promising plan for the resiliency and quality of a watershed.

I would encourage you to get involved with the WMA through whoever represents you and advocate for its goals. We know how to reduce flooding and subsequently improve water quality, we simply just need to do it.

Mid-Contract Management activities coming Up

(by Jesse Wegner, FSA)

Mid-Contract Management (MCM) is a requirement for CRP. All producers with scheduled MCM practices in 2019 have received a cost-share packet with a high-tilled map from the Fayette County FSA office. Some packets affecting new and re-enrolled CRP contracts will have an FSA-578 acreage certification that will need to be returned to the Fayette County FSA office. Producers, who are participating in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) are reminded to complete required MCM activities as defined in your conservation plan.

There are two windows of opportunity to complete your MCM activity, please make the necessary arrangements to get your practice completed BEFORE May 15 or AFTER August 1. Absolutely no MCM activities are to be completed during the primary nesting season.

NOTE: Spring burning has become a popular MCM choice, but having a "Plan B" lined up for an alternative MCM activity is necessary in case Mother Nature does not allow you to burn, or a contractor cannot get the job completed. Extensions are discouraged and will not be addressed until all planning options have been exhausted. Failure to perform planned MCM activities may lead to PENALTIES and/or the termination of your CRP contract and the refund of all payments received to date.

Once your MCM practice has been completed please contact FSA as soon as possible to finalize certification paperwork and turn in bills, so cost-share payments can be calculated and paid. If you have any questions about your upcoming MCM activity please contact the Fayette County FSA at 563-422-5770 Ext 2 or NRCS at 563-422-3868 Ext. 3

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From the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture

As I travel the state I see Iowans both on the farm and in town who take being good stewards of the land very seriously. Iowans in communities across the state care deeply about protecting our state's natural resources. They want to leave the land better for their children and grandchildren.

I'm proud of the work of our team at the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the many partners across the state committed to soil conservation and improving water quality.

For example, just in the last year we saw:

- 2,800 farmers signed up to invest an estimated \$9 million in funding to match \$5 million in state cost share funds to adopt cover crops, no-till or strip till, or use a nitrification inhibitor when applying fall fertilizer

- 760,000 acres of cover crops in Iowa in 2017, an increase of 22 percent from the year before

- \$420 million in funding for programs with a water quality benefit, a \$32 million increase from the prior year

- 64 demonstration projects located across the state to help implement and demonstrate water quality practices

We are seeing improvements within the small watersheds that have been a focus of our efforts and now moving beyond demonstration projects to focus on implementation efforts within larger targeted watersheds.

We are also looking at new ways to expand adoption of proven practices such as cover crops. Last year we began a three-year demonstration

project that provides a crop insurance premium reduction for farmers who use cover crops. We are pleased by the initial response and are working toward continued expansion of cover crops across in the state.

Thanks to the hard work of the Legislature and Governor Reynolds, we are fortunate to now have long-term water quality funding in place. The legislation that was passed and signed into law commits more than \$280 million to water quality efforts in Iowa over the next 12 years.

The Department will receive \$2 million this year, \$4 million next year and then \$15 million annually through this legislation. We are targeting this new funding toward conservation infrastructure practices such as wetlands, saturated buffers and bioreactors.

We are on the right path but have more work to do. I look forward to continuing to work with our incredible farmers and hundreds of partners throughout Iowa to make even more significant water quality improvements in our state.

--Mike Naig, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture



Since growing up on my parents' farm in the 60s and 70s, I've seen tremendous transformations in agriculture.

I so well recall that moment when Dad drove in the yard with his new John Deere 4020, replacing that old IH 400, and as a young lad thinking, "Boy, we've hit the big time now!" A couple years later, Dad really stepped up when he purchased a cab for that 4020. "You mean we can go out in the field all day and not get beat up by the wind and the cold?" I asked. Life was good.

Countless times I went back and forth across Dad's fields in the Fall, pulling a 4-bottom plow, burying the corn and soybean residue with rich, black loam soil, and enjoying the scene as hundreds of seagulls followed me all day feasting on earthworms. Pulling out of the field at the end of the day, I experienced a warm feeling of pride to see how much of that 80-acre field I was able to turn over in just eight hours. Little did we know then that we were doing exactly the opposite of what Mother Nature intended.

Working today as agricultural outreach coordinator for the Izaak Walton League of America, I can't help but think a lot about those days and continually be amazed at the changes we have witnessed over the years: Some good, some not so good. Increased soil losses, increased flooding, much higher nitrates and other pollutants in our rivers and lakes, loss of wildlife habitat...these are all ag-related challenges I am working to help address.

In spite of these challenges,

The Perspective of Time

By Tim Wagner, Outreach Coordinator
Izaak Walton League

we seek to solve, and it's sweeping across the country. Search the term "soil health symposium" and one quickly gets a sense at the breadth of which the soil health movement is exploding. Soil conferences are occurring all over the world. Close to home, there are many weeks, particularly in winter, when I could easily find a meeting or conference on the topic within a couple hours' drive.

Like most revolutions, it's not coming from policy makers in the state capitol or Washington DC. Rather, it's literally growing from the ground up. It's being led by farmers who have seen firsthand the true costs of large scale monoculture, industrial agriculture, and have figured out that their very survival depends on developing new techniques with which to farm. Farmers are challenging the paradigm of focusing on "yield" rather than profit. These farmers have figured out that "just because my dad farmed this way doesn't mean that it was the absolute right way." Because they have observed precious soil washing down into the ditch, into the creek and the Mississippi River, then on down to the Gulf of Mexico, they figured out that being a good farmer means taking care of the land and soil for that next generation. It also means keeping more of their hard-earned money vs giving it all away to the myriad of industrial players that spend millions hawking their wares at an annual gathering ironically called the "Farm Progress Show."

These farmers seek to build rich soil that hosts a multitude of living organisms, functioning as Mother Nature designed, growing plants both effectively and efficiently, without lots of extra synthetic ingredients.

I have had the opportunity to learn about and meet some of these "revolutionary" farmers like North Dakota's Gabe Brown, Russell Hedrick of North Carolina, Seth Watkins from Taylor County, Iowa, and of course NE Iowa's own Loren Steinlage. I find it fascinating to listen to these folks talk about their love of the land, to hear them discuss their experiments, failures, and their successes. The observable passion from farmers like these is what's driving this revolution.

What is the Izaak Walton League's role? As described in the IWLA pledge to be "Defenders of Soil, Air, Woods, Waters, and



Wildlife," we not only embrace this movement, we see our job as one to help nourish and grow it. My work involves presenting to Izaak Walton League chapters and groups with short talks and slide shows on the benefits of soil health practices and policy changes that encourage it. Our outreach efforts include partnering with groups like the Fayette County SWCD to help put on workshops, like we did in September at Upper Iowa University.

During legislative season, League staff and members work hard in advancing language in state policies that promote soil health and protect our soils and waters while also safeguarding public health. At the federal level, the 2018 Farm Bill included or maintained provisions that came about due to collaborative efforts with the League and many other conservation groups. Those provisions are designed to help farmers, improve the health of their soil and be better stewards of the land. The Izaak Walton League also utilizes numerous media platforms to inform and foster more discussions. "Soil Matters" is our national blog site where anyone can read about some of our ag-related activities, happenings in policy at both the state and federal levels, and opportunities for our members and the public to get engaged. This can be found at <https://www.iwla.org/conservation/soils-agriculture>.

Never has there been such an exciting time as now to work within the realm of agriculture and the wellbeing of what we used to just call "dirt." In reality, more and more farmers are coming to understand that healthy soil is the very foundation of everything we as humans require from this planet. If we treat it right, it will treat us right. That's real "farm progress" from farmers who know.

Tim Wagner works as agriculture outreach coordinator for the Izaak Walton League in Iowa and Illinois. He lives in Decorah with his wife Shawna. He welcomes your thoughts at twagner@iwla.org.



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Northeast Iowa RC&D Working in Fayette County

By Ross Evilsizer, RC & D

Northeast Iowa RC&D is working in Fayette County on a number of exciting projects.

Multi-Cropping: Many corn and soybean producers are struggling today because of volatile commodity markets, weed pressure, production costs, and pressure to reduce natural resource degradation, particularly nutrient and soil loss and soil degradation. Multi-cropping is a regenerative management system of agriculture that build soil health and diversifies opportunities for producers. Relay cropping, double cropping, poly cropping, and inter-cropping are all forms of multi-cropping. RC&D has formed a Multi-Cropping Collaborative uniting producers and partners to implement multi-cropping systems, share learning and data with each other, inform all aspects of the project, and share and expand project learning with other Iowa producers. Producers are implementing multi-cropping systems on their farms to track soil health benefits and economic data of multi-cropping versus a conventional system. Other partners involved include NRCS, Risk Management Agency, Luther College and other public and private partners working together to minimize the risk for adoption of, and maximize the benefits for producers implementing multi-cropping systems. This project will demonstrate and evaluate the potential of multi-cropping systems as an effective and economical method for improving water quality and soil health in Iowa. The goal of this project is to increase awareness and knowledge of multi-cropping systems with producers, the agriculture industry, and conservation professionals. To follow along with the project, follow @multiowa on Twitter and Facebook.

The City of Postville and Northeast Iowa RC&D have teamed up to develop the Regional Urban Stormwater Demonstration Site in Postville where several urban stormwater conservation practices have been installed along with bilingual interpretation of each practice. Practices at the Regional Urban Stormwater Demonstration Site include, rain gardens, bioswales, butterfly garden, community

orchard and a rain harvest system. Community members and school classes from around the region will be invited to visit the demonstration site where they will engage in hands-on learning about the effects stormwater runoff has on water quality and flooding in urban and rural landscapes. Teachers who bring their students to the Stormwater Demonstration Site, will be encouraged to participate in the "Watershed Guardian" program which is a funding opportunity that will enable students to install a conservation practice in their own community. Awards of up to \$500, and awards up to \$5,000 are available to schools who visit the Regional Urban Stormwater Demonstration Site and take part in the Watershed Guardian Program. The Watershed Guardian Program provides the opportunity to not only educate community leaders, but also future community leaders. It provides the platform to educate, empower and inspire students to address environmental issues facing rural towns in Northeast Iowa and strategies that can be incorporated individually or communally. If interested email Tori@northeastiowarc.org.

Northeast Iowa RC&D is also assisting communities in the area with applications to implement stormwater best management practices that help infiltrate runoff and improve water quality in urban areas. RC&D has assisted Monona, Postville, Winthrop, Waukon, Fayette, and most recently, West Union, in applying to the State Revolving Loan Fund Clean Water Sponsored Projects Program. This program is designated for communities applying for loans to complete wastewater projects. Communities that apply are eligible for portion of the interest generated by the loan to be returned to the community to invest in stormwater infrastructure. To date, RC&D has helped communities apply and receive \$3 million in sponsored project funds for urban stormwater improvements. These efforts by Northeast Iowa communities help improve water quality, reduce flooding, and bridge the gap between rural and urban water issues.

USDA obligates more than \$63 million in conservation funding to Iowa farmers

In fiscal year 2018, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) obligated more than \$63 million to Iowa farmers and landowners for conservation practices that will treat natural resource concerns on more than 450,000 acres.

Iowa NRCS financial assistance programs include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

Record-Setting Year for EQIP

Through EQIP, NRCS obligated a record \$30 million through 1,414 contracts, treating 154,191 acres. Nearly one-third of Iowa's EQIP funding went to grassland-based practices such as watering facilities, fence, and pipeline to support livestock grazing systems.

Kurt Simon, State Conservationist for NRCS in Iowa, says his staff obligated 36 percent more EQIP funds than the prior five-year average. "Management practices that improve soil health and water quality, such as cover crops and no-till, are very popular in Iowa," he said. "There is also a lot of interest in our EQIP funding for organic agriculture, monarch butterflies and other pollinators, and on-farm energy improvement."

In July, NRCS announced special EQIP funding to support livestock grazing systems in drought-stricken areas of southeast Iowa. Through the special funding, livestock producers signed 362 EQIP contracts totaling more than \$3.6 million that will treat natural resource concerns on about 38,800 pasture acres.

Simon said the funding came at a crucial time for southern Iowa livestock producers. "Ponds were drying up and grazing conditions were worsening after consecutive years of low rainfall in that part of the state," he said. "We felt if we could provide extra assistance for water well access and rotational grazing, it would help to improve forages and natural resource issues."

RCPP

In fiscal year 2018, Iowa NRCS obligated nearly \$5 million through RCPP to treat natural resource concerns on 33,000 cropland acres. NRCS provided assistance to producers through RCPP partnership agreements and 235 contracts. There are currently 10 RCPP projects in Iowa.

The Midwest Ag Water Quality Project, led by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, is currently Iowa's largest RCPP project covering five major watersheds. Through this project, NRCS obligated \$3.4 million to Iowa farmers through 153 contracts treating about 28,000 cropland acres. Water quality practices such as bioreactors, saturated buffers, cover crops, wetlands and no-till are popular practices funded through this project.

Along with water quality projects, Iowa's RCPP projects are helping to improve monarch butterfly habitat, soil health, and forages for livestock grazing.

CSP

Iowa continues to be one of the nation's leaders in CSP contracts. Iowa NRCS obligated about \$28.5 million through new and renewed CSP contracts during the past year. In fiscal year 2018, 439 Iowa farmers signed new five-year CSP contracts helping to treat 233,522 acres. Another 59 farmers renewed their CSP contracts for five years, which will treat about 30,000 acres.

"CSP is an excellent program for many of our conservation-minded Iowa farmers," said Simon. "CSP rewards these farmers for their historically solid conservation work and encourages them to take additional steps to improve conditions on the land."

Integrated pest management, nutrient management and cover crops were the most popular practices Iowa farmers adopted through CSP, followed by conservation cover, no-till and conservation crop rotations. "It is no coincidence that producers with stewardship program contracts are adopting practices that protect water quality and improve soil health," said Simon. "These are farmers who care about their land and those living and farming downstream."

Cover Crops Most Popular Practice

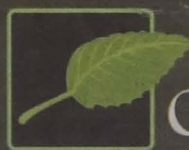
Across the state, cover crops were the most popular practice contracted by Iowa farmers in 2018 through NRCS financial assistance programs, with 314,822 acres scheduled to be planted through contracts that run up to five years.

For individual county results, check out our [Farm Bill Program Maps](http://FarmBillProgramMaps.IowaNRCS.gov). Iowa NRCS program information is available at www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov.

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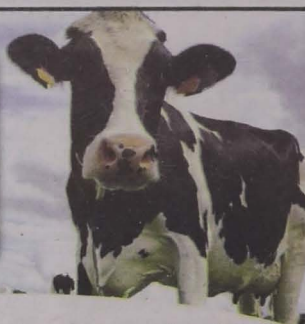
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Conservation work is still being done

When I was a kid growing up on the farm I remember mom and dad used to take us kids for an evening drive around the countryside. At the time I never really understood the purpose, but I enjoyed them none the less. My dad was in his own little world, arm out the window, commenting once in a while how great Jim's beans looked or what a great stand of corn Roy had. Mom even seemed to get a little peace and quiet during these drives as my brothers and I were mesmerized by the cool breeze and the orange glow of the sunset in the horizon. On one of these excursions I remember asking my dad what those grass lines in the field were. "Those are terraces" he replied without hesitation. At the time, his explanation of why they were out there didn't make much sense to a 10-year old, but he was my dad and he knew everything.

Now that I'm older and work in the conservation field I've seen lots of new technologies that make farming and livestock production much more efficient and productive. Technology and research has led to the development of new practices such as bioreactors, saturated buffers and nitrogen mitigating wetlands, but technology and research has also confirmed that many of the practices that farm-

ers and landowners were building back in the early forties are still effective today.

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship has partnered with farmers and landowners for more than four decades to support the adoption of proven conservation practices. Recently, the Department partnered with Iowa State University, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Nutrient Research and Demonstration Council, Iowa Nutrient Research Center, and the National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment to complete a statewide effort to identify and map six types of common conservation practices. The study is the most comprehensive inventory of conservation practices in the nation. An analysis of the results shows the value of this public and private investment in conservation would be 6.2 billion in today's dollars. Additional analysis work is underway to quantify the water quality impacts these practices are having in terms of reduced sediment and phosphorus loads to Iowa's lakes, rivers and streams.

The initial number of practices



Vince Sitzman

es identified throughout the state by the mapping project include:

- 114,400 pond dams
- 327,900 acres of grassed waterways
- 506,100 terraces stretching 88,874 miles
- 246,100 water and sediment basins stretching 12,555 miles
- 557,700 acres of contour buffer strips
- 109,800 acres of strip cropping

These numbers reflect a tremendous amount of conservation work that has been completed on Iowa's productive farm ground. Today, as I'm driving down the highway with my kids, I'm always quick to point out the cover crops and conservation practices I see in the countryside, particularly the newly constructed ones. I'm not sure if I do it to educate my kids about agriculture and conservation or if it's more for my gratification knowing that conservation work is still being done. I suppose it's a little of both.



Cereal rye cover crop growing in Fayette County, Iowa.

Photo by Aaron Anderson.

Cover Crops



Practice Description:

Cover crops are planted in addition to a cash crop in order to gain environmental and economic benefits. In Iowa, cover crops are usually seeded into standing corn or soybeans, or after those cash crops are harvested.

In a typical corn-soybean rotation, there are only living roots in the ground four to five months out of the year. Fall and spring rains often arrive in Iowa when there are no living roots on agricultural fields, leading to nitrate-nitrogen being washed away. Cover crops provide living roots during this time of year. These roots absorb nitrate-nitrogen and prevent it from being lost.

According to Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy, cereal rye and oat cover crops, when included in a corn-soybean rotation, have the potential to reduce nitrate-nitrogen loss by 31% and 28%, respectively. A cereal rye cover crop has the potential to decrease phosphorus loss by 29% according to the same report.

Practice benefits: • Decrease soil erosion • Increase soil microbial activity (soil health) • Decrease nutrient runoff and leaching • Increase soil carbon • Suppress weeds • Improve soil structure (increased infiltration, decreased compaction, increased water holding capacity) • Manage soil moisture • Provide habitat for beneficial insects, pollinators, and wildlife • Provide forage for farm animals • Break disease cycles

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Managing prairie and native CRP with prescribed fire

Allie Rath

arath@pheasantsforever.org

Prescribed fire is a great tool we can utilize to manage native prairies and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) areas. Our native grasses and wildflowers evolved with fire as the Native Americans and storms set patches ablaze in

the mid-west. One of the best ways to manage a native seeding or remnant prairie is to make sure those native plants survive and prosper. A couple of big threats to our prairies and natives are the encroachment of introduced cool-season species (like smooth brome), the encroachment of deciduous

coniferous trees, and buildup of vegetative material (thatch) from years of growth and death/senescence. A prescribed fire can help with all three of these threats.

An appropriately-timed fire will invigorate prairie species and help suppress introduced cool-season grasses and woody vegetation. The preferred time would be in late spring, usually late April through May 14. The formal nesting season is May 15 – August 1 and cannot be disturbed during this time. You will want to see your introduced cool-seasons (i.e. smooth brome) starting to come up, about 6" high, to trigger your time to burn. Burning at this stage will help set back the brome (because its growing point is out of the ground and vulnerable) and stimulate your native warm-season grasses and wildflowers. This would also be the time where some of your encroaching trees may be leafing out and could be hurt by the fire.

While prescribed burning is one of our greatest tools for wildlife and prairie management you need to be very careful and diligent

to be successful. This usually starts with creating a firebreak and making a written plan for how the burn will be conducted.

Preparing your firebreak prior to burning minimizes the potential for escape when the burn is executed. Typically, the firebreak should be 20' to 30' wide around the perimeter. The fall before you intend to burn you should mow the break two to three times starting after the 1st of August. Mowing multiple times allows the firebreak to be mowed short, the dead material to deteriorate, and green-up to occur more quickly in the spring. If needed, the firebreak can also be mowed once or twice in the spring prior to burning. For an additional safety precaution, you can disk or till a strip alongside the area to be burned exposing black soil in the firebreak. You may need to reseed the disked area, depending on what comes back up.

Establishing a green firebreak planted to introduced legumes and non-aggressive introduced grasses is encouraged when establishing a native prairie planting. Species

you could include for grasses: Timothy, Red Top, Perennial Rye Grass, and for legumes: Alfalfa, Ladino Clover, White Clover, Red Clover, Alsike Clover, or Partridge Pea.

If you were unable to establish a green firebreak when the site was seeded, I would still highly encourage mowing a 20' to 30' firebreak as soon as possible if you're scheduled to burn for your CRP plan this year. The best option is if you would have mowed at least once before this winter. However, the next best thing could be getting the firebreak mowed as soon as it's dry enough to do so. Depending on when this transpires, you may be able to do one or two mowings this winter/spring. If you're not able to get it mowed until a month or less before you go to burn you may need to do some raking of the cut thatch. You will want to rake this away from the burn unit, as raking it into the burn unit will only help the fire smolder, after lit, in one area and create a "baby-sitting" nightmare and a spot fire precaution. The cleaner you can get this firebreak the safer your fire will be.

Fire is an important tool used to maintain and invigorate native prairie. But a burn plan of where, what, how, when, and why should be put together a month or more before you plan to burn. A prescribed fire should always be started on the downwind side (i.e. with a NW wind, the ignition point would be the SE corner) and at the top of a slope (fire travels quickly uphill). Allowing the fire to back-



Example of a quality firebreak that has been mowed for two seasons prior to conducting their prescribed burn.



This photo illustrates back burning off of a mowed firebreak. The fire was started in the SE corner and is moving NW against the wind blowing out of that direction.



Native grasses and flowers growing and blooming following a dormant spring burn.

PRESCRIBED FIRE
Cont. on Page 15

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PRESCRIBED FIRE Cont. from Page 14

burn into the wind and downhill will allow for a slower and more controlled burn. In fact, allowing a site to mostly back-burn will provide a hotter and more complete burn that will more effectively suppress the introduced cool-seasons

and woody vegetation. You should always avoid blowing smoke over a main road, into a town, and towards a neighbor with breathing issues or livestock facility. Keep these in mind while preparing for a prescribed fire: inform your

neighbors that you are burning, make sure you have plenty of help, water, wear clothes made of natural fibers, leather boots and gloves, and have the necessary tools to complete the burn. Always contact the county dispatch to let

them know you're intending to start a controlled burn and where the location will be. Additionally, it is recommended to call dispatch back when the burn is completed to let them know it is done. NRCS has a Prescribed Burning job sheet that helps take you through all these important factors. Please stop by your local NRCS office to

grab a copy!

For more information, please contact Allie Rath, Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist with Pheasants Forever at (319) 330-6015 or arath@pheasantsforever.org or contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office for assistance.

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\$11,638 Bank Block Building and Ziegler's Hall
\$8559 Clermont: Burkhard Riegel Blacksmith Shop
\$3505 UIU: Digitization of Student Paper

Native Roadside Vegetation: \$121,571
\$38,000 County Roadside Equipment
\$24,300 Fitz Prairie Seed Bank

Soil Conservation & Water Quality: \$1,209,462
\$359,449 Allocation for Practices
\$209,707 Forest & Native Vegetation
\$44,612 Ensign Hollow II
\$321,874 Glover's Creek
\$175,838 Grannis Creek Watershed
\$54,000 Mink Creek Watershed
\$3418 S. Fork Maquoketa River
\$40,564 Upper Maquoketa

Open Spaces: \$227,798
\$50,764 Local Property Tax
\$107,079 Volga River State Recreation Area: Campground Development

Land Management: \$35,807

Conservation Education: \$14,260

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City Parks: \$150,000
\$150,000 Fayette: Volga River Recreation Trail and Bridge

County Conservation: \$138,339
\$211,694 Per County Allocations
\$161,926 Per Population Allocations
\$100,000 TRRC Trail Expansion, Elgin to Gilbertson Park and the Turkey River

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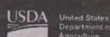
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At-a-Glance

Iowa NRCS • October 2018
State Conservationist Kurt Simon
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FY18 Total Program Accomplishments

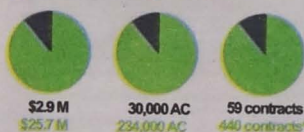


ACEP	\$10.5 M	1,617 AC	23 easements
CSP	\$28.6 M*	264,000 AC	499 contracts
EQIP	\$34.6 M	187,000 AC	1647 contracts
TOTAL	\$73.7 M	452,617 AC	2,169 contracts

*Includes \$5.1M for first year obligations of FY2019 contracts.

CSP-Conservation Stewardship Program

● FY18 Renewal ● New FY18



**Includes one RCPP contract in the "Improving Working Lands for Monarch Butterflies" project.

Ongoing Program Workload Active Contracts, Easements & Acres

● CSP ● EQIP ● Conservation Easements



EQIP-Environmental Quality Incentives Program Obligations by Sub-Accounts

Local Sub Accounts	\$29.6 M	85,500 AC	656 contracts
Total Organic	\$426,300	2,500 AC	21 contracts
Historically Underserved	\$8.7 M	24,900 AC	291 contracts
NWQI	\$865,000	1,600 AC	17 contracts
MRBI	\$411,700	2,500 AC	15 contracts
Wildlife	\$1.56 M	6,600 AC	195 contracts
On Farm Energy	\$2.22 M	7,300 AC	97 contracts
High Tunnel System	\$258,000	29 AC	29 contracts
Emergency Drought Assistance	\$3.7 M	38,800 AC	382 contracts

FY18 RCPP- Resource Conservation Partnership Program

Regional Grassland & Bird Grazing Initiative	\$157,100	370 AC	16 contracts
Middle Cedar Partnership Project	\$86,000	420 AC	3 contracts
IA Targeted Demonstration	\$195,000	180 AC	2 contracts
Fox River Water Quality Project	\$176,000	455 AC	7 contracts
Innovative Conservation Ag	\$250,000	1,050 AC	16 contracts
Upper Cedar Watershed Urban-Rural Partnership	\$695,000	2,300 AC	13 contracts
Midwest Ag Water Quality Project	\$3.4 M	27,900 AC	153 contracts
Improving Working Lands for Monarch Butterflies	\$62,000	126 AC	23 contracts
Totals	\$5 M	33,000 AC	235 contracts

RCPP Projects Selected in FY18

Driftless Area Habitat for the Wild and Rare, Phase 2
NRCS Funds: \$750,000
Smithfield Gro. Sustainable Grain Supply Chain
NRCS Funds: \$602,540

Contract work to begin in FY19.

FY18 Iowa Partners in Conservation Projects

Iowa NRCS provided 43 million to nine partners through ten Iowa Partners in Conservation projects in FY18. These funds will be used to help support Iowa NRCS mission areas and increase partner staff in local field offices. Following are a description of the top five agreements based on funding levels.

Expanding Iowa's Private Lands Forestry Capacity
Partner: Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Project will expand and accelerate delivery of direct technical assistance to landowners. (\$713,907)

Putting It Together: An Innovative Approach to Increasing Iowa's Conservation Infrastructure
Partner: Iowa Learning Farms
Project will result in improved soil health and water quality through conservation implementation. (\$450,000)

Cattfish Creek: Increasing Producer Leadership and Targeting Conservation Practices
Partner: City of Dubuque
Project will increase producer engagement to reduce flooding and improve water quality in the Cattfish Creek Watershed. (\$328,712)

Indian Creek Soil Health Partnership
Partner: Linn County
Project will focus on conservation planning and soil health in the Indian Creek Watershed. (\$308,500)

Technical Forestry Assistance for Private Landowners
Partner: Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Project will accelerate delivery of technical assistance and forest management planning for private forest landowners. (\$257,870)



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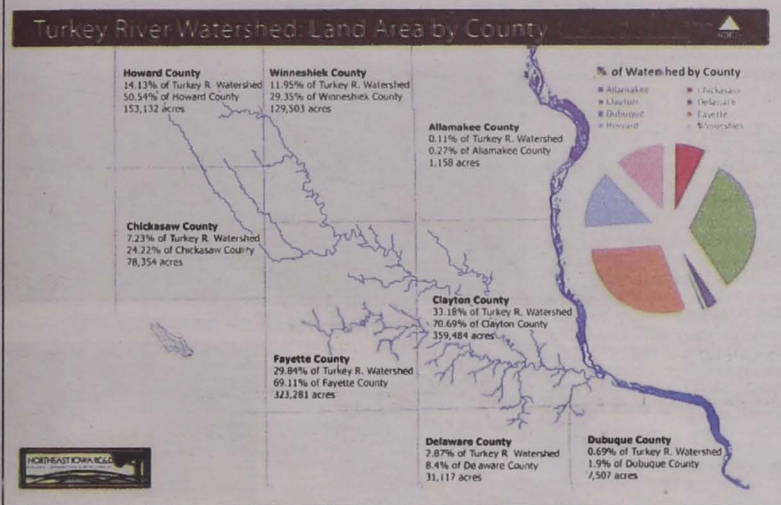
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Another record year for conservation

For the second consecutive year, Iowa farmers and landowners substantially stepped up their commitment to conservation through Farm Bill programs. In fiscal year 2018, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) obligated more than \$63 million to Iowa farmers and landowners, a 35 percent increase from FY 2017.

Last year, Iowa farmers received \$46.4 million in USDA assistance to implement conservation practices on their land through Farm Bill programs administered by NRCS. This was a 20 percent, or \$10 million, increase.

These financial investments help support ag community economies because more dollars are spent at local coops, paid to contractors and invested in fencing, trees and seed. But more importantly it also reflects the growing investment in private lands conservation by Iowa's farmers and landowners.

More than 450,000 acres, an area the size of Webster County, will be treated by Iowa landowners and farmers through FY 2018 Farm Bill contracts. To put this in perspective, these acres are equal to all the cropland acres in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Hampshire combined.

Record-Setting Year for EQIP

Through EQIP, NRCS obligated a record \$30 million through 1,414 contracts. Nearly one-third of Iowa's EQIP funding went to grassland-based practices such as watering facilities, fence, and pipeline to support livestock grazing systems. In July, NRCS announced special EQIP funding to support livestock grazing systems in drought-stricken areas of southeast Iowa. Through the special funding, livestock producers signed 362 EQIP contracts totaling more than \$3.6 million that will treat natural resource concerns on about 38,800 pasture acres.

This funding came at a crucial time for southern Iowa livestock producers. Ponds were drying up and grazing conditions were worsening after consecutive years of low rainfall in that part of the state. We felt if we could provide extra assistance for water well access and rotational grazing, it would help to improve forages and natural resource issues.

Expanding Conservation Assistance

According to the 2017 Ag Census, there are about 88,000 farmers in this state. That is about 300 farmers for each NRCS field office staff person. Even with 100 field offices across the state, and our team of dedicated conservation professionals, we know we can't fully support conservation efforts with NRCS staff alone. To help bridge this gap, Iowa NRCS annually invests in the Iowa Partners for Conservation (IPC) Awards to encourage collaboration in addressing some of Iowa's most pressing natural resource concerns. NRCS identifies potential projects for leveraging NRCS and partner resources to build conservation technical capacity to develop and implement effective project outcomes. This year up to \$5 million will be awarded to conservation partners through IPC. Projects may be farm-based, multicounty, small watershed, or Statewide in scope. Collaborative projects that provide on-the-ground support for Iowa NRCS Field Offices are highly encouraged.

A New Farm Bill

After many months of hard work, Congress passed a new Farm Bill which was signed by President Trump on December 20, 2018. According to USDA Secretary Sonny Purdue, this Farm Bill is "more evolutionary rather than revolutionary." It bolsters farm safety net programs, protects federal crop insurance, and maintains strong rural development and research initiatives.

As with all new Farm Bills, there will be much more info in the weeks and months to come as rules are developed and programs are rolled out. We look forward to working together with Iowa farmers and conservation partners as we strive towards another record breaking year in 2019.



Kurt Simon
Iowa NRCS
State Conservationist

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Project Coordinator
shannon.moeller16@gmail.com

Cover crop use among Iowa's seed corn growers has increased drastically in the past few years. This is largely due to a Water Quality Initiative (WQI) grant through the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), which provides education and cost-share funds exclusively to seed corn growers through the Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crops Initiative. The Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crops Initiative is administered by the Iowa Seed Association and the Agribusiness Association of Iowa, with support from the Iowa Farm Bureau, Iowa Corn Growers Association, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), IDALS, and several seed corn production companies.

Seed corn production acres are a great location for cover crops. These fields are more vulnerable after harvest than commercial corn acres, for a variety of reasons. Removing the tassels from 80% of a field's plants during the month of July leaves less stalk and leaf residue at harvest. Add to that, every 5th row of seed corn is mowed down in July after detasseling, and the way seed corn is picked-which includes husks and cobs-leaves very little residue on the soil after harvest. These fields are left with little to protect them from wind and rain erosion, and that's where cover crops can come into play.

The Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crops Initiative kicked off with a bang in the summer of 2016, with over 175 interested seed corn growers across more than 25 counties. For more than half of these

growers, it was their first-time using cover crops in their farming operation. Interest in cover crops continued to grow in 2017-2018. In 2018, the Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crops Initiative had participation from nearly 200 seed corn growers in 28 counties across Iowa. An estimated 35% of Iowa's total seed corn acres had cover crops in 2018, despite the challenging fall conditions.

The bulk of the project's funding provides cost-share exclusively for seed corn growers to use cover crops in their seed corn rotation. Any grower for participating companies is eligible to enroll up to 100% of their seed corn acres into this cost-share project. 2019 cost-share rates are based on winter-hardiness of the selected cover crops: \$10/ac for winterkill cover crops, and \$15/ac for winter hardy cover crops – with first-time cover crop users receiving an additional \$5/ac incentive.

Seed corn companies including AgReliant Genetics, Bayer, Beck's Hybrids, Corteva, Cornelius Seed, Gro Alliance, Remington Seeds, and Syngenta see the benefits of cover crops and promote this practice with their seed corn growers. Many of these companies now have over 50% cover crop use in their seed corn production fields, compared to 5-10% cover crop usage across the state before this program was established. Another part of the grant is dedicated towards educational resources for seed corn growers and farmers, as well as agribusiness retailers. In 2018, the project partnered on or led 7 field days across the state-reaching nearly 300 total event attendees. So far in 2019, we've had

a cover crops workshop in Ankeny (on the coldest night of the year in January), as well as what turned out to be a 100% indoor field day near Beaman on March 5 (it was still too cold to go outside!).

Fayette County seed corn growers jumped on board with this project from the very beginning. In 2016, almost 2,000 seed corn acres had cover crops. In 2017, interest grew to almost 3,000 acres, and that held steady through 2018 as well. Almost every seed corn grower in Fayette County has cover crops on their seed corn fields, as well as many of their commercial corn & soybean acres as well. The Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crops Initiative has been extended and funded through December 2021. For more information, please visit <https://www.sustainableseedcorn.org/>, and follow us n Twitter @IowaSeedWQI.



Winter wheat, planted 15" spacing, fall 2017, Fayette County (above)

Because seed corn is picked earlier than commercial crops, tillage radishes can often grow to a great size in the fall, helping relieve compaction from summer seed corn operations (Fayette County, 2016) (right)



Cattle and Soil Conservation

Fayette County is home to approximately 30,000 cattle, and each one makes an impact on the soil health in the county.

Cattle manure is rich in nutrients, minerals and organic matter, rejuvenating the soil and helping protect water quality. Manure from cattle barns or feedlots is applied to row-crop and hay fields, to return nutrients to the ground used to raise the cattle feed. In grazed pastures, cattle deposit the manure naturally. Compared to synthetic fertilizers, cattle manure reduces phosphorus loss by 46%.

Around half of the cattle in the area graze perennial pastures. Pasture ground is ideal for hillsides, because the year-round forage holds soil in place and reduces erosion. The root systems created by the forages can decrease soil compaction and increase soil biodiversity, all while providing habitat for many species of wildlife.

Increasing in popularity, cover crops and cattle go hand-in-hand, benefitting soil health and water

quality. Planting cover crops in corn or soybean fields has many of the benefits of perennial pasture, increasing soil health and water quality. They are planted in the fall and return in the spring. These crops act as a living mulch and provide several benefits, one of which is reducing soil erosion. The live crop slows down the flow of water and keeps soil from wearing away.

Adding cattle to the combination makes cover crops even more valuable. Cattle are able to graze the cover crops, giving them value to the farmer as a feed source, in addition to the conservation benefits.

Cattle producers, like other farmers, are incredibly interested in improving soil health. The Iowa Cattlemen's Association offers continuing education for cattle producers, highlights outstanding conservationists, and encourages Iowa's cattle producers to invest in new ways to improve conservation and the cattle industry.

A nation that destroys it's soil destroys itself.

Franklin D. Roosevelt



Soil Conservation is a combination of practices used to protect the soil from degradation. First and foremost, soil conservation involves treating the soil as a living ecosystem.

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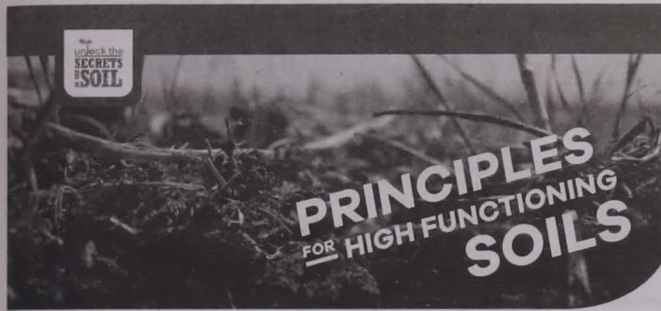
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SOIL HEALTH DEFINED

Soil health is the continued capacity of a soil to function as a vital, living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. Only living things can have "health," so viewing soil as a living, breathing ecosystem reflects a shift in the way we view and manage our nation's soils. Soil isn't an inert growing medium, but rather is the home of billions of bacteria, fungi, and other organisms that together create an intricate symbiotic ecosystem. This ecosystem can be managed to support plants and animals, by cycling nutrients, absorbing, draining and retaining rainwater and snowmelt for use during dry periods, filtering and buffering water to remove potential pollutants, and providing habitat for the soil biological population to flourish and diversify to keep the ecosystem functioning well.

KEY SOIL HEALTH MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

These principles are represented in the circular diagram to the right to emphasize their relationship as a continuum where each complements the others and also depends on the others.

1. Minimize disturbance
2. Maximize soil cover
3. Maximize biodiversity
4. Maximize presence of living roots



PROTECTING THE SOIL HABITAT

The first two principles, shown on the right side of the diagram above focus on protection of the soil habitat: minimize disturbance and maximize soil cover. Practices that use these principles maintain or increase stable soil aggregates and soil organic matter (SOM), and protect the surface of the soil that is most susceptible to the degrading forces of wind and water. Maximizing soil cover also buffers against temperature fluctuations that stress plants and soil organisms, reduces evaporation rates, and increases the amount of water entering the soil profile from precipitation and irrigation.

PRINCIPLES FOR HIGH FUNCTIONING SOILS

SOM is highest at the soil surface and is critical for stabilizing soil aggregates.

Maintaining SOM helps support additional soil functions including water infiltration, drainage and storage, nutrient-holding capacity and release, and habitat for soil biota.

FEEDING THE SOIL ORGANISMS INHABITING SOIL

The second two principles, shown on the left side of the circular diagram, focus on feeding soil organisms. Maximizing the diversity of food (energy and carbon inputs) and aboveground biodiversity increases the diversity of soil animals and microorganisms. Diversity not only refers to food sources, but also aboveground diversification of plants and animals, and microbial diversification underground. Diversification stimulates a host of additional benefits including breaking disease cycles, providing habitat for pollinators, and stimulating plant growth.

Maximizing the presence of living roots in the soil can be accomplished through eliminating fallow, diverse crop rotation, inclusion of cover crops, and/or through dedicated grasslands (native or pasture). Mixing up which plants are grown during the year or over the course of multiple years may help to break disease/pest cycles.

When these two principles are properly applied as part of a soil health management system, soils can maintain or even increase SOM content as well as enhance nutrient cycling.



Worm being born within the pore space of a well-aggregated soil.

HEALTHY, FUNCTIONING SOILS ARE ABLE TO:

- Cycle nutrients effectively
- Store carbon and nutrients in soil organic matter
- Provide good aeration to promote root growth
- Improve farm and ranch resiliency and profitability
- Improve yield stability
- Reduce runoff and erosion
- Improve water storage and plant available water while protecting water quality
- Be resilient to drought, heavy rainfall events, and temperature extremes
- Reduce disease and pest problems

Soil Health Management Systems Principles can be generally used in all production systems to achieve this. However, the specific practices chosen to implement the principles must be adapted to each production system, climate, ecosystem, and soil to effectively build and maintain healthy, functioning soil.



SOIL DISTURBANCES*

Physical disturbances such as tillage or compaction from heavy machinery. Chemical disturbances such as fertilizer and pesticide applications, especially over application or misuse. Biological disturbances, such as over-grazing animals that can lead to compaction and reduction in perennial root systems, introduction of invasive species and/or use of monocultures can cause biological imbalances which all can affect soil functions.

SOIL COVER

consists of two main forms: 1) living plant canopy such as a growing crop, cover crop, or grassland; and 2) mulch, either as dead plant material (e.g. crop residues, prunings from trees and shrubs, thatch in grasslands) or as an amendment (e.g. compost, bark chips).

BIODIVERSITY

is the variation of life forms within a given ecosystem or field. The different life forms include all of the plants, animals and microorganisms, and their secretions. For soil health management systems, biodiversity can be increased through a variety of approaches including: plant diversity through the use of diversified crop rotations, cover crop mixes, diversity through the proper integration of grazing animals (e.g. livestock) into the system and includes animals living within the soils or microbial diversity, as well as direct additions with biological amendments. All four soil health management principles contribute to biodiversity.

www.nrcs.usda.gov

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DIRECTOR'S THOUGHTS

by Susan Kozak

Hello again! This almost year of "acting" Director has moved quite quickly. I have enjoyed getting to know all the IDALS employees and partners that I don't usually interact with in my typical Mines and Minerals world. It has been a busy year of project expansion and I love getting out in the field to see new ideas implemented on the ground. I want to thank all our staff for their hard work and commitment to our conservation ethic.

There have been some big announcements this year, including the new funding for water quality. The Iowa legislature committed more than \$280 million for water quality efforts in Iowa over the next 12 years. Funding to IDALS will ramp up over the next two years, reaching \$15 million annually through 2029. With more than 250 partners already involved, this dedicated, long-term funding will help attract even more partners and outside funding. The Division has been preparing for this new funding by putting some strategic staff in place. We have a new edge of field coordinator and 3 new watershed implementation coordinators ready to expand water quality efforts - primarily targeting the North Raccoon, Middle Cedar and South Skunk watersheds.

We also have some exciting changes revolving around our Field Representatives and delivery of services to field offices. The better part of

this year was spent evaluating how to update the position, including going through a LEAN process improvement event which included many partners for input. As a result, we have hired one new Field Representative and rearranged the response areas. Additionally, IDALS is in the process of hiring 2 financial reviewers to alleviate some of the responsibilities that had been expected of the Field Representatives.

As I write this, I find myself reflecting on the year and how challenging it has felt. Earlier this year, I attended a FarmHER event. One of the takeaways from the conference that has stuck in my head is to "force yourself out of your comfort zone". While that isn't always easy, I think great things come from the challenge. With the water quality initiative expanding dramatically in the next few years, we all need to be open to new ways of doing business. Myself, I will look forward to the challenge and am excited to tackle it with all our great partners.



Finding Ways to Make Crop Rotations Work

by Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist,
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Des Moines

For the past several years the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has promoted the adoption of soil health improving conservation activities. These principles include keeping the soil covered, minimizing soil disturbance, growing plants throughout the year, diversifying with extended crop rotations, and incorporating livestock in the cropping system.

Adding a third or more crop to a rotation to increase plant diversity has been the most difficult principle for most Iowa farmers to adopt. There are many reasons for this, not least of which is finding markets for small grains or other potential crops.

For decades Iowa farmers included alfalfa, oats, wheat, and other small grains in their corn and soybean rotation. By growing a variety of plant species, past generations more sustainably managed their soils.

Extended crop rotations help increase nutrient cycling, better manage weeds, disease and insects, reduce erosion, improve infiltration, and allow more biological activity in the soil.

Can extended crop rotations make a comeback?

An ongoing cropping system research study by Iowa State University indicates that, with the right management, 3- and 4-year rotations can be just as profitable as traditional corn-soybean rotations.

Led by Dr. Matt Liebman, a professor in Iowa State University's Agronomy Department, the study compares a 2-year corn/soybean rotation, a 3-year corn/soybean/oat + red clover rotation, and a 4-year corn/soybean/oat + alfalfa/alfalfa rotation.

Eight years of findings indicate that diversifying the crop system and integrating livestock consistently boost productivity, profitability and environmental health.

ISU research points to the following important observations:

- **Equivalent profits.** Annual net returns did not differ statistically among the cropping systems. Numerically, the 4-year rotation returned \$413/acre, the 3-year rotation returned \$409/acre, and the 2-year rotation returned \$384/acre.

- **Better yields.** Corn yields improved 3 percent in a 3-year rotation and 4 percent in a 4-year rotation compared to a standard corn-soybean rotation. Soybean yields improved 13 percent in a 3-year rotation and about 17 percent in a 4-year rotation.

- **Improved soil health.** Soils in extended rotations tested higher for organic matter and microbial biomass and provide crops higher amounts of usable nitrogen.

- **Reduced erosion potential.** In a 4-year rotation, estimated sheet and rill erosion fell about 35 percent compared to the corn-soybean rotation. In a 3-year rotation, sheet and rill erosion fell about 21 percent compared to a corn-soybean rotation.

- **Reduced herbicide and N fertilizer use.** The 3- and 4-year rotations used 88 percent and 92 percent less nitrogen fertilizer and 96 percent and 97 percent less herbicide. Corn and soybeans in the 3- and 4-year rotations received band applications of post-emergence herbicides and inter-row cultivation. Conventional weed management practices are compatible with extended rotations if careful attention is paid to potential problems with herbicide carryover.

- **Reduced disease susceptibility.** The 3- and 4-year rotations exhibited reductions in the incidence and severity of soybean sudden death syndrome.

Liebman agrees that the lack of steady, readily available markets for any crops besides corn or soybeans impedes the adoption of extended rotations. "I also think the decline of mixed crop-livestock farming and a perceived lack of support of alternative crops by agricultural retailers are factors," he said.

Finding Markets

Groups like Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) are working with farmers and ag businesses to improve the small grain supply chain. Alisha Bower, strategic initiatives manager with PFI, says many current farmers remember their grandparents growing small grains, but they have never grown them themselves. "We do our best to help farmers 'relearn' the skills needed to manage a small grain crop," she said.

Bower says PFI offers specialized small grains conferences, monthly "learning" conference calls, and videos featuring advice from other farmers. "We also offer cost-share to help defray some of the risks as farmers go through the first years of honing management and establishing their market," she said.

PFI received a \$1 million Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) from NRCS, beginning in 2019, to help revitalize feed and seed markets for growing small grains in Corn Belt states. "We will work with animal protein companies to conduct small grains feeding trials and feasibility studies in their supply chain," said Bower, "as a proof of concept and a method of collecting economic outcomes to include small grains in animal rotations."

Bower says small grains for cover crop seed is another market opportunity for growers wanting to extend their rotations. "We can help connect farmers who want to start these businesses with resources on how to do it within the confines of seed laws," she said. "And, we can help them connect with other farmers seeking cover crop seed and seeding services."

Finding a market for small grains continues to be a primary barrier for farmers, says Bower. "We engage in a number of projects to help develop markets for these crops," she said. "We collect production data from farmers who participate in the cost-share program."

She mentioned the Fieldprint Calculator, Cool Farm Tool and the NRCS Resource Stewardship Evaluation Tool (RSET) as tools to help document the environmental impacts of extended rotation systems. "These are valuable tools for companies who have made commitments to reduce the footprints of their supply chains," she said.

Bower says PFI is seeing high demand for their cost-share program. They are offering \$25 per acre on up to 100 acres for diversifying a corn-soybean rotation with a year of small grains and a summer cover crop. "With low market prices on corn and soybeans, farmers are eager for alternatives," she says. "Farmers are looking at lower input crops, like hay and small grains, to lower their production expenses in this tight farm economy."

NRCS can also provide planning and financial assistance for conservation crop rotations. In fiscal year 2019, NRCS is offering payment rates of \$9 to \$11 per acre for up to three consecutive years to extend the crop rotation with small grains.

For more information on extended crop rotations, visit NRCS at your local USDA Service Center.

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Overcoming the Obstacles of Conservation

by Tim Bruihler
Fayette SWCD Commissioner

Growing up on a small farm in Southeast Minnesota, no-till farming wasn't only a means of conserving our soil, it was means of survival and a way of life. It was all I knew. My dad was a first-generation farmer, working for the Postal Service up until I was a junior in high school to make ends meet. Dad would leave before we got up in the morning and would get home around 4pm. His evenings and weekends were spent managing his honeybee business or building his farming operation. At the time, farming was only a hobby. Any extra money was spent on land payments rather than equipment. We didn't own any tillage equipment, and there wasn't time for it. My first memories in elementary school were of a 6-row John Deere 7000 planter pulled by an Oliver 1800 open-station tractor and a 10ft John Deere 750 drill pulled by a John Deere 4240 for soybeans. That drill is the only piece of equipment we've ever purchased new, and we still use it today. When other kids were enjoying sports and video games, my time was spent running (literally) behind the marker arm on the corn planter as I wasn't allowed to ride on the open-station tractor. The purchase of the 4240 was a big deal as it meant I could ride in the cab. Because Dad was working a full-time job, all his free time was spent on the farm, so this is where my nights and weekends were spent too - if I wanted any time with Dad. Growing up, I saw farming as a way of life and no-tilling was all I knew.

After graduating from high school, I attended Iowa State University where I received a degree in Agronomy. Since my Dad had recently retired from the Postal Service and the farm was barely large enough to support my parents at the time, I knew it was going to be a while before I could fulfill my dream of returning to the farm full-time. After graduating from ISU, I received my CCA (certified crop advisor), and was a crop consultant for Servi-Tech. During my time as a consultant, I spent a lot of time in seed corn fields - the ultimatum for poor soil health and conservation. I knew it was only a matter of time before I would be able to return to the farm and seeing these practices in seed fields and other conventional farming systems gave me motivation to continue my father's legacy of soil conservation which I had grown up knowing.

As a Fayette County SWCD Commissioner, I have tried to identify the hurdles of conservation. If we learn how to overcome these three obstacles, we have a greater chance of being successful: being stuck in tradition, being afraid of failure, and overcoming our pride.

Creating our own traditions

Oftentimes, a big reason why farmers don't switch to a true conservation system is because they are stuck in old traditions and old habits. As my wife and I come from different backgrounds, when we got married, we had to learn to create our own traditions. My family always had an apple pie-making day in the winter, sweet corn freezing in the summer, and peach canning in the fall. These are things that were a part of my childhood and will never be for-

gotten. Some have followed, while we have also created some of our own traditions. Farming can be looked at in a similar way. I'll admit, it's easy for me to say this as I grew up knowing a conservation system. That being said, I've seen plenty of evidence that it can be profitable while promoting soil health. Even though we're still following the original traditions that my dad created years ago, we're always learning, and our operation is forever changing and creating new traditions as can be seen by the added cover crops in our operation in recent years. We need to look at our operation and decide why we're doing what we're doing. If the answer is simply "because it's the way I grew up," it's time to consider creating our own traditions.



Fearing failure

Another big obstacle is being afraid to fail. Big change isn't always easy. There can, and will, be failures. Often our biggest learning experiences are from our failures, not our successes. Those who are most successful in this industry, have taken risks along the way. Success doesn't come overnight or by taking the easy road. We need to start looking at failures as learning experiences rather than catastrophes. It's not about how hard you fall, but about how fast you get back up. By trial and error, you will eventually develop a system that works for your operation.

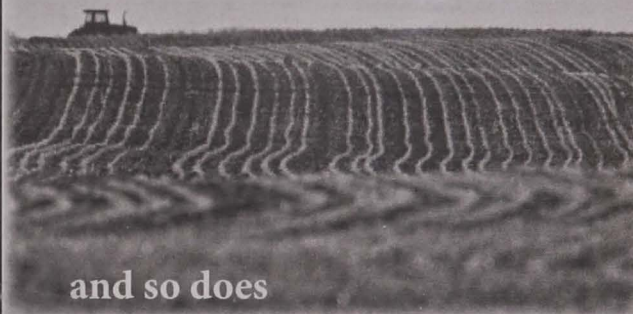
Overcoming pride

A big reason why farmers are reluctant to eliminate tillage is pride, whether or not they are willing to admit it is another story. A Biblical adage is that "Pride comes before the fall." To be successful at anything in life, not just farming, we have to be willing to humble ourselves and swallow our pride. We farm for a profit, not to have the best-looking fields whether or not we're willing to admit it. If you're only interested in having the healthiest looking corn from planting through harvest or raising the biggest yields, no-till probably isn't for you. If you're interested in operating more acres with less equipment, less labor, and less inputs while returning more profit, having a conservation system in place CAN work for you.

It's crucial that we learn to overcome these three obstacles in order to be successful. If we continue on the path that we are currently on, we will have nothing more than the neighbor across the fence. We need to be innovative and experiment with our own ideas. In a world where politics, regulations, and societal changes are having more and more of an impact on farming practices, it is time to get ahead of the game. Conservation is the way of the future, so what better time to start than now?

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IOWA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND STEWARDSHIP

SOIL CONSERVATION COST SHARE

HOW COST SHARE WORKS

- 1 Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship (IDALS) receives appropriation from the Legislature.

Diverse landscapes across Iowa directly affect the cost and type of conservation practice best suited for each field. This impacts the funding a county needs and receives.



2018 Cost Share Paid to Farmers

- 2 Funds are distributed to Iowa's 100 Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) based on land use, soil erodibility and landowner demand.

WHAT'S A Soil and Water Conservation District?

Soil and Water Conservation Districts work with farmers and landowners to promote soil and water conservation work in their county and help administer state and national conservation programs. Each SWCD is led by five locally elected Commissioners.

State staff in most field offices include:

TECHNICIANS:

Work with landowners and contractors. Provide technical support, develop surveys, and layout and design conservation practices.

CONSERVATION ASSISTANTS:

Work with commissioners and landowners. Provide assistance and support for district activities and outreach, and process cost share applications and claims.

Districts and local groups partner to host educational events and field days in their communities throughout the year.

- 3 Farmers and landowners apply for cost share by visiting their local SWCDs.



Applications are accepted year round.

Cost share can be used for both annual management practices and permanent conservation infrastructure practices.

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND STEWARDSHIP

SOIL CONSERVATION COST SHARE

THE IMPACT OF COST SHARE

- 1 Iowa's conservation cost share has **partnered with farmers and landowners for more than four decades** to support the adoption of proven conservation practices. A statewide effort to identify and map six types of common conservation practices has been recently completed and provides the most comprehensive inventory of conservation practices in the nation, including:

114,000 POND DAMS

325,000 ACRES OF GRASSED WATERWAYS

460 million FEET OF TERRACES

240,000 WATER AND SEDIMENT CONTROL BASINS

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- 2 5% of each year's cost-share appropriation goes toward **protecting the water quality of publicly owned lakes** in Iowa.

SWCDs submit applications to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to become a designated lake.

This map shows eligible lakes for SFY2018. Farmers living within the selected lakes' watersheds can apply for up to 75% cost share in order to establish practices to protect water quality.



"Publicly owned lakes funding has provided hundreds of thousands of dollars in cost share for the protection of Lake Icaria, Lake Binder, and the Corning Reservoir. This money, combined with landowners willingness to conserve their farms and protect the watershed, has led to cleaner water and an overall more enjoyable outdoor experience."

- Dan Case, Watershed Project Coordinator

- 3 It's good for Iowa's economy. Money gets reinvested in Iowa's local economies benefiting local communities.

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IOWA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND STEWARDSHIP

SOIL CONSERVATION COST SHARE

COST SHARE IN 2018

State contribution \$7.3 million

Iowa farmer contribution \$9.1 million

Total investment \$16.4 million

1,246 Iowa farmers used cost share to install conservation practices.

Conservation practices included...

TODAY we have 33 Technicians and 89 Conservation Assistants covering 100 offices. Staff cover multiple Districts to support conservation work in all 99 counties.

Who is cost share? They are an effective, long-term conservation practice and help up to 90% of the expense and eliminate risk to a farmer.



819 YOU KNOW? There were 300 miles of terraces installed using state cost share in SFY 2018. As a grower, this is the distance from Sioux City to Dubuque!



"Soil conservation cost share is a great partnership between the state and farmers that gets proven practices on the ground that protect our soils and help improve water quality. We continue to see tremendous interest by farmers who invested \$1.1 million in their own money on these practices last year."

- Mike Hays, State Secretary of Agriculture

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND STEWARDSHIP

SOIL CONSERVATION COST SHARE

- 2 Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners approve applications in their own SWCD.

WHAT'S A Commissioner?

Commissioners elected to promote conservation in their county. Help administer state and federal programs, and direct activities such as field days, water quality projects, educational meetings, seminars and website programs.

"Commissioners work to maintain and foster between us the essential importance of conservation and make sure in implementing that we are more effective in the work structure."

- Christopher Smith, SWCD Commissioner, Johnson County

- 5 Farmers hire a local contractor to do the work. Conservation practice plans are developed by staff working with landowners and local contractors.

Modern survey and design tools help in the design, customizing practices for each field.

- 6 Practices are installed and the soil conservation and water quality benefits begin.

Investing in soil conservation not only improves productivity on the farm by keeping soil in our fields, it also helps keep soil and nutrients out of the water.

PRACTICE EXAMPLES:



TERRACES



GRASSED WATERWAY



WATER & SEDIMENT CONTROL BASIN



GRASS STRIP



GRASS STRIP

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Our technicians and conservation assistants are a part of the 100 Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), which are housed within federal USDA-Natural Resources Conservation (NRCS) Service Centers. They use federal equipment and other resources. Therefore, the **partnership** between IDALS, SWCDs and NRCS is critical.

Other partners working together include the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI), USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA), USDA Rural Development, State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee (SSCWCQ), ISU Cooperative Extension Service, county conservation boards, county board of supervisors, drainage districts, levee districts and other local groups.

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Committed to land and water stewardship

by Jennifer Stoffel, Associate Professor of Biology, Upper Iowa University

I grew up on a family farm in Fayette County. Due to being a "tailender in the family," my role on the farm was a bit different than some of my older siblings (thanks!). But, as the youngest, I was able to explore the "wilds" with my dog, Ted, while not trying to disrupt the adults. My mind blossomed with a billion questions about the patterns I was seeing in our crop fields, creeks, timbers and prairies. My questions only increased as I grew older and spent more time interacting with the land and nature.

Eventually I went off to college and then graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I discovered that my childhood curiosity had evolved into a strong area of interest. I earned a MS and Ph.D. in forestry with a minor in soils. During graduate school, I studied with a lab where the focus was on ecosystem ecology as it related to carbon sequestration. Ecosystem ecology is the science of understanding how living things and nonliving things interact in a natural system; connections and interactions of every part of the system are critical. I was fortunate to have worked and studied in many different ecosystems. I was especially grateful to the people who joined me in exploring the new scientific frontier of soil eco-

systems and the above- and below-ground interactions from the tops of trees to the base of groundwater, which is called the critical zone.

I have been back in Iowa helping to instill a sense of stewardship to ecosystems to Upper Iowa University (UIU) students and my own three children for over a decade. A sense of responsibility to land and water resources and commitment to teach the principles of stewardship drives me to continue learning and communicating with others. Fortunately, I can see that the collective efforts of UIU's equally passionate faculty have helped create a legacy of students and alumni who are committed to land and water stewardship.

Iowa's original native ecosystems was primarily prairie with the far north eastern portion of the state consisting of deciduous forest. Since European settlement, Iowa is now covered in 85% agroecosystems. Our native prairie soils are some of the most fertile in the world due to the native prairie ecosystem that dominates the state. Just like human health, the health of the soil system can change for the positive or negative. Soil degradation occurs when soil health becomes degraded and the productive capacity is diminished, so too is the soils ability to purify water and

hold and retain water. At the current rate of soil degradation, our topsoil could vanish in less than 60 years. This is most problematic because we now have the most fertile soil in history due to centuries of soil formation integrating organic matter in our ground. While this information has been featured in the news (See <http://world.time.com/2012/12/14/what-if-the-worlds-soil-runs-out/> and <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/only-60-years-of-farming-left-if-soil-degradation-continues/>) it is not reaching dinner table conversations, daily news or social media posts. If this continues, our current and future generations will face large challenges even though I'm striving to arm a whole generation of college students to effect communication with other and a positive change.

In order to maintain their productive capacity and ecosystem services such as plant growth (for crops or native vegetation), soil structure, water holding capacity, and water filtration we need to feed our soils and promote a thriving soil biological community. Prairie grasses were excellent habitats for promoting the development of soil organic carbon, which helped soil microorganisms thrive in the rooting zone called the rhizosphere. However, because rhizosphere is shallower in crop fields than in native grasses, and the roots annually turn over in many agricultural crops and vary by season, we are not feeding the soil biological community in the same way. So, we need to think about managing our agricultural soils a bit differently.

Soil microorganisms rely on plants and organic matter to help with their natural processes. When plants die the soil microorganisms help to produce organic matter. Through these conver-

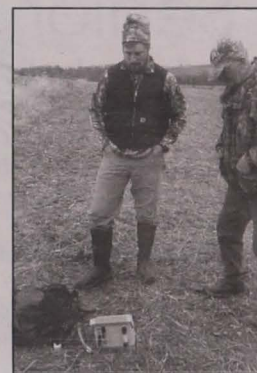


Upper Iowa University conservation management, environmental science and agricultural business students are pictured on a Soil and Water Conservation field trip led by UIU associate professor of biology Dr. Jennifer Stoffel in fall 2018. The field trip was hosted by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, NRCS in West Union (Aaron Anderson and Neil Schaffer) at Dick Jensen's rural Elgin farm. The water column on the right shows soil aggregates rupturing in a process known as slaking. The soil aggregates on the left are more stable under the pressure of water due to the higher amounts of organic matter.

sions, soil microorganisms help produce nutrients for plants. Soil microorganisms also feed on materials excreted through plant roots, called plant root exudates. Our scientific knowledge about plant exudates continues to grow, and we are realizing these exudates can help promote certain soil organisms and even deter others.

Humans have a tremendous capacity to effect change, to all systems, in any biome. However, along with that ability to effect change comes the responsibility to understand and mitigate negative change. A commitment is needed by all of us to continue learning about soil health and investigating what "older" habits we might need to bring back into our lands and where to apply new innovations moving forward. Please consider trying one new soil conservation practice this year on small plots of your land, even if this is just in your small urban backyard.

The soil is the literal foundation of our society and the glue for holding together the outreach-



Recent UIU graduate Derek Grube '19, NRCS soil conservationist, explains to landowner Richard Jensen about the research he was doing in collaboration with Dr. Jennifer Stoffel on soil surface CO₂ movement. Studying soil carbon storage and the movement of CO₂ gas out of the soil is one of the ways to begin assessing soil health.



Upper Iowa University (UIU) alumni, current students, and faculty attending the Iowa Water Conference March 12-13, 2019 in Ames included (l-r) Caleb Waters '09, UIU conservation management and Lake Geode Watershed coordinator; Jennifer Stoffel, UIU faculty member; Dalton Nelson, current UIU conservation management major, with an earth systems science minor; Daniel Isabel '19, UIU conservation management; Hunter Slijka '18, UIU conservation management, with an earth systems science minor, and Tukey River Headwaters Project coordinator; Matthew Meulemans '17, UIU conservation management and environmental science, University of Iowa graduate student; Samuel Franzen '17, UIU conservation management, Yellow River Headwaters Project coordinator. Not pictured is Kate Giannini '06, UIU conservation management, Iowa Watershed Approach Communications Specialist, Iowa Flood Center, University of Iowa.

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Dr. Jennifer Stoffel and UIU field science student volunteers collaborated with alum Justin Nie '14 of Top Notch Forestry to remove willow from a wet prairie on UIU property in September 2018.

ing sectors. However, soil can get tired or degraded. It needs help in sustaining its health and to come back to its former vigor and life-sustaining capacity. It is time to give back to the soil and in return it will help grow food and store and infiltrate water. The time to start learning and sharing your success and failures in soil health with your neighbors is now! Remember, most great things in your life likely started out by being a bit terrifying, but in hindsight wasn't that what made them the most rewarding.

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Dick Jensen demonstrates soil properties with students at SWCD third grade field day.

Halley Williams, NRCS soil conservationist, discusses soil health demonstrations with third graders.



SWCD third grade field day

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