

Soil commissioners seek rule changes

By Dale Johnson

Soil conservation measures and grade stabilization structures have become extremely costly. Iowa's soil and water conservation district commissioners want state rules changed to aid farmers in installing environmental tools.

The commissioners last week voted to ask the Iowa Legislature to change state rules so that federal conservation funds can be combined with state cost-share funds as well as other public funds. Currently, state law prohibits mingling state cost-share funds with other public funds to provide more than 50 percent cost-share for permanent practices.

Commissioners from Woodbury and Harrison County in western Iowa sought the changes. Both districts lie in a part of Iowa where soil erosion prevention is expensive and can reach the \$20,000 to \$30,000 total quickly making the project too expensive for farmers.

"A combination of federal and state cost-share plus local landowner contribution would make the cost of the protective structures more affordable for all parties involved," said commissioners from Woodbury county.

Art Ralston, a commissioner and farmer from Moville, said making the change is needed. "In the Little Sioux Watershed, this

program would be beneficial," he said.

Flooding was a serious problem in Western Iowa this year. Commissioners from Harrison County said a majority of land is protected with terraces, no-till farming and crop rotations. But grade stabilization structures are now needed to complete watershed treatment.

In other action, commissioners rejected a resolution to give commissioners authority to set soil erosion rates above 5 tons per acre on some land. The policy change was sought by the Johnson County Soil and Water Conservation District where commissioner Mary Somerville of Oxford said, "The issue we face is land changing to housing developments."

She said farmers are being penalized for poorly-placed housing developments in wooded terrain. Natural erosion exceeds the allowable loss of 5 tons per acre per year, she said.

Commissioners also voted to seek changes in grazing rules for conservation reserve program land to allow grazing with a partial waiver of the CRP payment.

Commissioners also approved seeking tax law changes to make permanent conservation practices built by farmers who cash rent deductible on federal tax returns.