

FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION ANNUAL REPORT 2016

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Siebrecht recognized for conservation practices

By Brian Smith
Contributing Writer

The idea of giving something back is a core belief of those who believe strongly in soil and water conservation. It is something that Jed Siebrecht learned from his father, Bud, as well as many others connected with soil and water conservation in Fayette County. Siebrecht is now doing his best to put his knowledge of soil and water conservation into practice on his 243-acre farm located northeast of Clermont.

"I also learned a great deal by reading articles in several different publications. After reading them, I would run some of the ideas I learned by my dad. I also got to meet a lot of the guys he worked with and learned a lot from them, as well," said Jed, whose father worked for several years in manure management and designing terraces.

Establishing a good rapport with those in the know about soil and water conservation in northeast Iowa has served Jed well over the years. He has certainly done his part to help control erosion and hold the land in place on his farm. No-till, contouring, waterways, terraces, and putting land into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) have all been a part of Siebrecht's efforts to conserve northeast Iowa's precious resources of land and water.

"Currently I have approximately 42 acres in CRP to help protect water quality and wildlife habitats. I have also been able to incorporate buffer strips, terraces, and grass waterways on the farm," explained Siebrecht.

A large focus on native grasses and flowers along field edges has also been a part of his conservation practices. In addition to this, he has also taken part in forest stand improvement work on 30 percent of his woodland acres through preparing the site with natural regeneration, crop tree release, and weed tree removal.

Jed is especially interested in employing no-till practices on his farm. He has 54 acres devoted to a no-till corn-corn-bean rotation and 10 more acres used in a rotation involving corn, oats, and meadow.

"I try to do as much no-till as I can and not plow up everything. Waterways are important, too, along with doing the rotations on more fragile ground," added the environmentally conscious farmer.

It is no wonder that Jed's



Jed Siebrecht has a passion for conservation and has implemented several soil and water conservation strategies on his farm northeast of Clermont. The trees to his right were planted with soil conservation in mind; the rotation of crops grown on the land behind him is also part of Jed's conservation practices.

"I try to do as much no-till as I can and not plow up everything. Waterways are important, too, along with doing the rotations on more fragile ground," - Jed Siebrecht

knowledge and implementation of soil and water conservation has earned him some recognition. He was named Conservation Farmer of the Year by the Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District at an annual Farm Bureau meeting held in August 2016.

While Siebrecht has already done a great deal to conserve soil and water on his farm, he is making plans to do even more. Cover crops and water sediment control basins are part of the plan for the future on Jed's farm.

"I would like to get more involved in planting cover crops like rye, and that is something I am hoping to do very soon. The basins to help control water sediment are also in the works and something

I hope to be implementing on my farm in the future," noted Siebrecht.

Jed Siebrecht has taken an active approach to not only identify the needs on his farm in regard to soil and water conservation, but to implement strategies to address those needs as well. Putting into place an array of conservation practices to remediate existing issues on his farm has led to a more efficient and responsible use of the land on Siebrecht's farm.

As he continues to use soil and water conservation practices on his own farm, he hopes that other farmers will be doing the same, giving something back and leaving something valuable behind for future generations of farmers.



Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District's Conservation Farmer of the Year for 2016 was Jed Siebrecht. The award was given at Farm Bureau's annual meeting held in August at Upper Iowa University with (l-r) Richard Jensen, Lori Siebrecht, Jed Siebrecht, and then county Farm Bureau president Joe Bahe on hand for the presentation.



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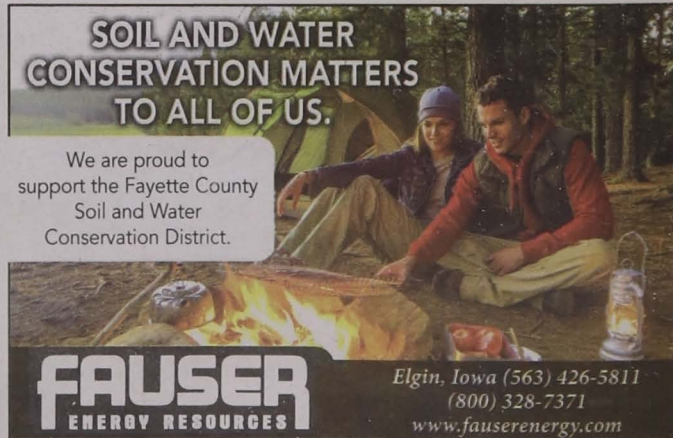
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Cover it up!

Farmers have been using COVERS for years in many different ways for all the same reasons. Most of these COVERS are so common they are never debated nor argued as the value or benefit to the operation or to the operator. A modern cab today might be described as a COVER for the comfort and safety of the operator. Another COVER that all farmers are proud of is that bright, shiny paint job on all that pricy steel. The sheds, shops and storage buildings are the COVERS for all those implements, machines and tools that get the crops in and out.

The bins or grain storage facilities are COVERS to protect grain from spillage and other damage. Barns and confinement buildings COVER the livestock for better health, better feed efficiency and lower labor expenses. Warranties and guarantees COVER the unexpected or unacceptable service, workmanship, durability or satisfaction of your purchase. Contracts COVER nearly every business transaction, giving protection to all parties.

Monitors are wired to every rotating shaft and chain with flashing lights, beepers and horns to COVER all things seldom seen nor understood but calling for attention immediately. Security cameras COVER almost everything that needs protection while the owner sleeps or is away. How can we forget our lender and his staff who finds a way to COVER our "insufficient funds" checks in hopes that no one is COVERING something up? In addition to all this protection, good managers COVER the entire farm with insurance on everything.

One more COVER that soil-minded farmers are using to nurse

mutilated soil back to health is a COVER of green growing plants and soil nourishing roots. Unlike today's annual cereal crops our soils were created with perennials and their year-round root systems. Since the beginning of time, plants have evolved with the ability to engineer a healthy solid environment. The typical current cropping system deprives the soil from these deep rooted plants that pump life into anemic, constipated soil.

Proof of this COVER questions

agriculture's conventional wisdom that the land is simply a plant stand for the next crop. I hope you will consider COVER crops as an important soil and water conservation practice on your farm. You might just DISCOVER that the "habitat" you plant into needs a little "physical therapy" to restore your soil's health. Stop into our office or give us a call for a free consultation with one of our dirt doctors. The number to call is (562) 422-3868.

~ Richard E. Jensen

USDA Offering Assistance for Wildlife Habitat Conservation Practices

DES MOINES, IOWA—Financial and conservation planning assistance are available through local USDA Service Centers for Iowa farmers and landowners interested in adding wildlife habitat on their land.

Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers conservation planning assistance and guidance for utilizing financial assistance programs to implement conservation practices that provide wildlife habitat. NRCS is offering eligible practices to Iowa landowners at the highest payment rate available.

The eligible list includes practices that enhance existing forestland or grassland habitat, improve aquatic habitat, and establish or enhance woody or wetland habitats. Example practices include: brush management, conservation cover, upland wildlife habitat management, stream-bank protection, and wetland restoration.

Paul Goldsmith, EQIP coordinator for NRCS in Iowa, says many of the practices offered provide compatible uses. "EQIP helps farmers promote production and environmental quality as compatible goals," he said. "For example, a livestock producer may want to adopt brush management to remove unwanted woody species to improve forage production and native prairie production for wildlife."

NRCS works collaboratively with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to implement many of the EQIP wildlife habitat applications, by providing planning assistance. Aaron Lumley with the Iowa DNR says, "EQIP is helping many Iowa landowners improve the health of their woodlands, which is increasing their future income as well as improving wildlife benefits."

For more information about conservation planning and programs to help you achieve your ag production goals, visit your local USDA Service Center or go online to www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov.

Conservation and Your Operation in a Watershed

Everyone lives and works in a watershed and everyone has a responsibility to take care of the resources in that watershed. I am going to give you some simple tips on how you can assess and get help treating the resources in your watershed.

The first thing you need to do is a visual assessment of the land you own and/or operate and see if there are some issues or problems (i.e. erosion, gulley's, flooding, water quality, poor seeding) that need addressed. After identifying the problem, can you determine what is causing the problem? What should or can I do to help solve the problem or do I need some technical assistance?

If you need help with these situations, there are resources available at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Soil and Water Conservation District, ISU Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa Learning Farms and other conservation service providers. You may have other landowners and farmers in your area that host field days and do demonstrations that may help you understand what can be done. It does not make any difference if you live in town or in the country, there is great technical assistance available and there may be some financial assistance as well.

A good conservation plan with scientific technical assistance can get you started down the road to protecting your resources and concerns. If we work together on the issues in our watersheds, we will not only protect and improve our land and water but make sure that we are preventing any impacts on resources around us.

Iowa has always been a leader in conservation of our natural resources and watershed protection.

Thank you for what you do, do not ever hesitate to ask for assistance and always be looking for opportunities to make improvements because we have some of the best natural resources in the world and we need to take care of them.



Jim Gillespie

MISSION STATEMENT FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Provide technical, financial, and educational assistance for natural resource conservation to our landusers to ecologically enhance, promote and perpetuate conservation of our landscape within the community.

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Help! My Trees Are Dying

The vast majority of the phone calls District Foresters Jason Walker and Greg Heidebrink field in their Charles City office begin with the voice on the other end of the line stating, "Help! My trees are dying!" That statement immediately kicks Greg or I into detective mode and although we can't physically see the troubled tree, a series of simple questions will nearly always lead us to a diagnosis. The primary question to be asked will be of which species is the tree of concern. Nearly all insects and diseases that affect trees are very species specific. Excellent examples of this are the emerald ash borer (EAB) or Dutch elm disease (DED). EAB will not attack any species but ash and DED will not attack any species but elm. Knowing which species of tree is in question is the most critical part of the process in diagnosing the cause of the problems and whether any feasible options exist in fixing the problems. Additional questions to be asked will include what signs or symptoms you see, site conditions such as soil types or planting location and whether the tree is newly planted or established and mature. A couple of the most common call generating tree problems we see affects bur oak, Colorado blue spruce and Black Hills spruce.

Bur Oak Blight -

As mentioned, it is critical to determine which species of tree is incurring the problems before you can accurately diagnose the cause. Commonly individuals call the foresters office suspecting that oak wilt is killing their oak trees. Oak wilt for years has been a commonly known killer of oak trees but what is not commonly known is that it primarily attacks the red oak family of oak trees, which in northern Iowa includes red oak, black oak and pin oak. The white oak family of oak trees (white oak, bur oak and swamp white oak) is occasionally impacted by oak wilt but with significantly less frequency than the red oak family. By far the most frequently occurring insect or disease affecting our oak trees in northern Iowa is Bur Oak Blight (BOB). Just as its name states, BOB will only affect bur oak trees.

BOB is leaf blight disease that was first discovered in Iowa as recently as the mid 2000's. A fungus of the species *Tubakia* is known to be the cause. As with most species of fungus, the level of its occurrence can often times be linked to the weather patterns for a particular year. Warm springs with early rain events provide extra opportunities for BOB to grow and infect bur oak trees. Symptoms most notably begin to appear in late July and early August and primarily consist of infected leaves prematurely dying. BOB killed leaves often times will remain on the tree during the winter whereas healthy bur oak trees will shed their leaves in the fall.

The impact of BOB is not often immediately fatal for the tree. Commonly the same tree will be infected

for several consecutive years. The stress of the tree losing its leaves so prematurely in the growing season several years in a row combined with the many other stresses our northern Iowa bur oak trees face (general old age, climate, planting location, etc) is however proving to be fatal to many of our bur oaks.

An accurate diagnosis always leads to the question of what can be done to save the infected tree. Very few insect or disease problems in trees have a feasible option to save the infected trees. BOB happens to be one of the few that research has shown have a treatment option that is reasonably effective and feasible to implement. Studies are beginning to show that a late May or early June fungicide injection may have value when in managing high value landscape trees. Initial treatments can be quite expensive as they require specialized injection equipment but it is thought that the treatments will remain effective for as many as four to five years. The cost to benefit of these treatments will need to be weighed on a case by case basis.

Colorado Blue Spruce/Black Hills Spruce -

The most common conifer related sick tree call received at the District Foresters office continues to involve Colorado blue spruce, or Black Hills spruce. An easy way to identify these species is by their short, poky needles. If examined closely, you will find that individual needles grow out of the branch on the spruce trees, whereas bundles of needles grow out of the branch on pine trees. In many cases the blue spruce will have a very distinctive blue tint to the needles, but not always. These have been two very popular trees the last twenty years, especially in wind breaks.

The underlying problem with these species is that they are not native to Iowa. These species prefer a much cooler and drier climate. The hot and humid summers found in the Midwest provide a climate in which several tree fungal diseases can thrive. Non native trees typically have no natural resistance to these diseases because they often don't exist in the trees native climate.

The most common problem associated with these species of spruce in NE Iowa is a fungal disease called Rhizosphaera needle cast. It typically infects the needles on the lower portions of the tree, causing the tree to shed the needles. Often only the tips of the needles will stay green while the rest of it has turned brown. After repeated infections of the same branch, it is likely the branch will die. Spruce trees that are seen to be dying from the bottom up are likely infected with the needle cast fungus. High moisture levels and poor air circulation favor the spread of the disease. Unfortunately this is the exact effect you desire from a wind break planting. Having been extremely popular wind

break species for the last 15-20 years, substantial amounts of needle cast are showing up in NE Iowa.

Treatment requires the use of a preventative fungicide called chlorothalonil. It is sold over the counter under such names as Multipurpose Fungicide, Daconil, Fertilome Fungicide or others. It should be applied when the new needles are half elongated, and two or three times later at 3 to 4 week intervals. It is important to note that if you choose to treat the trees, you can expect to do so for as long as you care to keep the tree alive. It is likely that as soon as you cease treating the trees, they will again become infected. The costs associated with long term treatments of these trees are often seen as a non-feasible solution for most landowners. Foresters will often highly recommend replacing the trees with a more disease resistant variety, instead of chemical treatment.

Summary -

Occasionally a follow up email with pictures or even a sample submitted to the plant diagnostic clinic at ISU may be needed to confirm the suspicions of the district forester but in the majority of cases a thorough



investigation over the phone will yield an accurate diagnosis. Covering an eleven county district which spans from as far west as Winnebago and Hancock counties to as far east as Winneshiek and Fayette counties makes it impossible for Greg or I to conduct a site visit for each sick tree call that comes in to the office. We understand that watching a highly valued tree struggle with sickness or disease can be a distressing time but

rest assured that if a feasible solution exists to restore your trees health, we are here to help you make an informed and educated decision. For all of your tree related questions, sick or healthy, give DNR District Foresters Jason Walker and Greg Heidebrink a call at 641-228-6611.

Jason Walker
District Forester
Charles City, IA

A personal relationship with the Turkey River . . .

One day, a long time ago, my dad told me I didn't have to go to school. That day he wanted me to stay home and after-drag the corn as he planted it. It was a beautiful Spring day, probably late May, and I thought I was really a big dog staying home from school to plant corn. He instructed me very carefully what to do and what not to do. I was to drive two horses pulling the drag. Stella was the name of one of the horses, and Stella knew much more about our purpose that day than I did. She was part of a team of bay mares and they often had a colt at their side.

My directions were to walk behind the drag and drive the two horses back and forth perpendicular to the direction my dad was planting. The goal was to cover the kernels of corn that were laying on top of the ground with dirt stirred up by the drag. This beats going to school!

My last and most important instruction was, don't drive over the wire. Oh, the wire! You see my dad had a wire stretched across the field and it was called the check row wire. It had a little knot or ball or entanglement of wire that was picked up by the planter and tripped the planter mechanism to drop 2 or 3 kernels of corn at 42" intervals. Me and Stella and the other horse were to remember - don't drive over the wire.

Well wouldn't you know it, during one pass Stella didn't turn around soon enough and the drag got caught in the wire. I saw my dad waving his arms and shouting something but I didn't understand. We didn't turn around soon enough and the drag hooked onto the wire, pulled it across the field and snapped it. About that time, I wished I was in school!

My name is Mike Finnegan. I was born in 1930, farmed all my life except for two years in the military during the Korean Conflict. We moved to town in 1986 and I try to walk to the Turkey River every day except when it's too cold or icy. It's two miles, round trip.

I have developed a personal relationship with the Turkey River. Some days it speaks to me with smiles and sounds content, calm and happy. Its color speaks of which personality it has on any given day. On a good day, it is green - blue and clean. On a bad day, it is deep brown - wild - homely - noisy - laden with trash - trees, brush, old tires, etc. and smells foul.

You might ask, "how can a wild stream have so many personalities?" Well, you see man has an impact on his surroundings. Where he lives, how he lives, what he lives, and the respect he has for his habitat leaves a personal mark, a

scar, or a wound (if you will) on the Turkey River.

With a little research, I discovered that the Turkey River Watershed totals approximately 1,080,000 acres. The specialists in the field claim that it is a given that five tons per acre soil loss is an acceptable figure to expect in a year. I don't want to accept that volume of top soil loss per acre per year, but if we visualize that much loss as acceptable, and we well know that figure can be many times greater than five tons per acre, I can't even take a guess at what our soil loss per acre was in 2016. The Turkey River ran wild, viciously wild, three times in 2016. Probably with a five-ton loss per acre you would hardly notice the river rise. I have read that it takes 1000 years to build an inch of top soil.

For no particular reason nor due to any action on our part, we moved into the state of Iowa without fanfare. We were blessed to be living in the state of the Union that had beautiful fertile top soil inches deep impeded, protected for years and years from the wicked hands and tools of man. There is a story told that impacts that European farmers used to plow a few furrows at the bottom of the hill and haul the soil back up to the top of the hill. I don't know if it's true or not but at least they did acknowledge their loss and problem.

How do we measure the value of top soil?? Priceless! It helps with flood reduction - water holding capacity, ecosystem service. It is hard to quantify, hard to value, it is irreplaceable in our lifetimes. Do we take it for granted?

There are measures and practices that we have available, within our means and knowledge to install upon our precious fields. I need not list them. They are common knowledge in today's world. We need to have them made known and available to anyone that wants to pursue and install them on their acres.

It is necessary that some people must have an empty belly to be made aware of the dire need to put every conservation practice available into force??

I invite you to observe any stream of water near you and cautiously measure the message that stream is sending to all of humanity that can observe the day-to-day life of the streams as they meander through the valleys of this land. We can tell the tale of the care that is taken or not taken with the soils in the northern states all the way to the Dead Zone in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

— Mike Finnegan

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Have we been ignoring Water Quality in Iowa?

Over the past couple of years we have heard a lot about water quality in Iowa. Even more so now than I can ever remember in my 18 year career with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. And rightly so. Water quality is and should be important to Iowans, all Iowans. But just because we never used to talk about water quality doesn't mean we've been ignoring it.

In 1971, Iowa legislature passed the sediment control law that establishes soil loss limits for every soil type in the state, making it the first of its kind in the nation. In 1973, Iowa was the first state to appropriate state cost share funds to work with landowners to address soil erosion. In 2013, Iowa was the second state in the Mississippi River Basin to develop a nutrient reduction strategy for the entire state. Not once in the three examples listed above was the word water quality mentioned, however all of these programs have had a major impact on the Iowa's water quality.

So what's the relationship between reducing soil erosion and protecting water quality? Every ton of soil we keep in the field helps keep it out of the stream. Sediment is also a major transporter of phosphorus. If you stop the sediment you stop much of the phosphorus too. Keep in mind that reducing soil loss doesn't solve all our water quality concerns we have in the state, but it's a great start, particularly in fields that have highly erodible soils. We need to continue looking for more and better ways to address both phosphorus and nitrogen losses from our fields, but solving these issues requires multiple approaches. Some areas of the state are very susceptible to nitrogen losses while others phosphorus. Addressing water quality issues across the state will require a diverse use of management practices such as no-till and cover crops, structural practices such as terraces and waterways, and edge of field practices such as bioreactors and saturated buffers. New and emerging technologies that have yet to be refined will also be a key if we are to continue making improvements.

So have we been ignoring water quality in Iowa? No, water quality just wasn't the buzz word at the time, soil erosion was. The real question is can we do more? I believe the answer to that question will be coming soon. The governor's office, legislature, ag groups, and others have gone on record in support of additional funding for water quality.

What that level of support ends up being has yet to be determined. As a lifelong Iowan, I'm looking forward to being part of the future efforts to protect our soils and continue to improve water quality in Iowa.



Vince Sitzmann

Meet commissioner Don Bahe

By Zakary Kriener
Contributing Writer

Across the state of Iowa, five commissioners represent each county's Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). These elected individuals are responsible for promoting conservation within their county; helping administer state and federal programs; and directing activities, such as field days, educational meetings, contests, and award programs.

Joining the force of Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners is Don Bahe of rural Oelwein.

"It is a real privilege to be elected for this responsibility," noted Bahe, who owns approximately 1,350 acres of Fayette County farmland. "My goal is to facilitate conservation practices and do my best to provide local representation for the residents of our county."

Bahe grows corn and soybeans on his land, which is part of Scott Township. While all of his fields have been converted to no-till land, he admitted that it wasn't until the late '90s that he first took up an interest in conservation practices.

"1999 was a turning point in the way I conducted my farming practices," said Bahe. "We had some tremendous flooding that year, which led to erosion. I figured there had to be another avenue that I could take."

Bahe started a no-till approach to many of his fields in the

first year. In year number two of his conversion, he began strip tilling and later explored the benefits of cover crops.

"It was a very experimental process for me," stated the local farmer. "The amount of information on soil health has exploded in more recent years. Compared to when I first began to introduce conservation practices on my land, there is a tremendous amount of information on land, which is beneficial for helping protect one of Iowa's greatest natural resources, top soil."

In his term as commissioner, Bahe admitted that he wants to inform Fayette County residents about the conservation practices and programs that are available to them, but he emphasizes that he does not want to be "pushy."

"I am not going to tell people



Don Bahe

that they need to look into the many great programs offered by the Soil and Water Conservation District," closed Bahe. "I do want to tell them to at least consider it. The programs can greatly benefit both them and the land. I understand that change can be a big risk and something that scares people, but sometimes you just have to dive in and try something to be able to see the benefits of it."

SWCD seeking nominations . . .

Your SWCD Commissioners are seeking help in selecting a family or individual that has vigorously demonstrated a conservation ethic of land use in Fayette County. Anyone who believes that conservation is a state of harmony between the land and those who use it would be a worthy candidate.

No exclusions, nor limitations on eligibilities.

If you appreciate the efforts of someone who promotes respectful land use, please nominate them to be recognized later this year.

Richard E. Jensen.

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Collaboration is key for meeting Iowa's water quality challenges



Kurt Simon,
Iowa NRCS State
Conservationist

I just completed my first year as State Conservationist this past October. During that year I crisscrossed the state at least a dozen times, meeting with nearly every Natural Resources Conservation Service staff member and partner employee. I've also met nearly half of Iowa's 500 soil and water conservation district commissioners.

I've formed relationships with members of the Iowa conservation community including farmers, state agencies, commodity groups and other non-profits. My goal was to listen and learn so that I can make informed decisions about NRCS policies, programs, funding and staff.

Despite the different backgrounds, professions, ages, and opinions of the people I met, there is one powerful common characteristic shared by nearly every person: We all care about Iowa farmers and the future of Iowa agriculture.

I've worked for NRCS for more than 30 years. And I don't recall a time when the conservation community has been involved in such an important wide-scale public debate. Water quality is a complicated issue, with many stakeholders with opposing positions on the best solutions for Iowa's water quality concerns.

Although this is a challenging time for conservation farmers and professionals, from my perspective, it's also one of the most rewarding. The impact of our work has never been greater, the conservation focus has never been stronger and our decisions have never been more significant.

So, as I move forward in my second year here in Iowa, I am optimistic that members of the conservation community will choose to focus on what we have in common and not our differences.

At NRCS, our work is guided by the nine steps of conservation planning: a conversation-driven, decision-making process. Simply put, it's a professional conservationist talking with a farmer about his or her concerns for their land and economic sustainability.

During that process, the NRCS conservation planner and the farmer work towards the best solution for each of the concerns. Ultimately, by focusing on shared goals, we move forward. Decisions are implemented which improve, protect and conserve natural resources.

If you are a farmer with water quality, soil health or erosion concerns come see us. We want to collaborate with you to plan a workable solution. And, when we can, provide financial assistance to help you apply more conservation to your farm.

EDUCATION FIELD DAY



Tree Station: Bill Bennett explaining how to plant and care for trees.



Wildlife station: Student from Upper Iowa University explaining food webs before a short hike to identify animals along the trail.

Responsible farming is in our hands...

...practicing soil and water conservation today will greatly benefit our future generations.

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Fayette Soil and Water District is in good hands

I believe the Fayette Soil and Water District is in very good hands. The three newly elected commissioners are well qualified to continue to protect the natural resources of the district. I want to thank all the people who have worked to provide an environment in which our future and that of future generations looks much better. Because, we know that without clean air, water and healthy, productive soil, the world will not need anything else because there will be no life on earth.

With the cooperation of many individuals and organizations, we were able to construct 25 structures in the Otter Creek Watershed, they include ponds, a wetland, grade stabilization structures, and on road structures, which along with 4 constructed last year kept the creek within its banks down stream from West Union. It was unfortunate that we were not able to get structures built up stream from West Union and the town had some flood damage, but hopefully this will encourage people up stream from West Union to do something and save the heart ache and cost of flood damage.

The many acres of cover crop planted this year is helping to keep soil in place, improve soil health, maintain nutrients, and improve farmers income. The combine yield monitor at our farm showed that cover crop and no till, not only lowered input cost but increased yields. I believe 280+ bushels per acre with 95 day corn is a good yield.

Many things have change over the years, when my father (Cleve Bennett) was a commissioner the only thing they did at their meetings was approve cooperator agreement and to start with they were not on the election ballot with other state, local and federal officials. When I started as a commissioner, we had a state cost share program that was the best in nation but no federal cost share though the ASCS office had some programs. We had twice as many federal staff and twice as many state staff and no district employees. Also the state and feds furnished all the equipment used for the work. Now the district furnishes an employee and several pieces of equipment. The state cost share is less but we have more federal programs to work on with the reduced work force.

Another change that has come about is with our state and federal elected officials, when I first served as a commissioner and went to Des Moines or Washington to talk to them about conservation issues, you could work with both parties and they would try to do what was best for the country or state. Now the only thing they do is what their party tells them to do and they try to make other party look bad, which actually makes both parties look bad and harms everyone. To bad they don't seem to know working together is how to get things done.

I want to thank all people and organizations we have worked with over last 32 years. Without working together very little can be done but with cooperation we can do most anything and everything. I want to give a special thank you all local, state, and national staff and officials of conservation districts across the state and nation. they are all people you can know and work with because they truly care. I believe that the Fayette SWCD has the best staff and commissioners any where, they are like family to me. The biggest thank you goes to my wife, Judy and our children (including ones that are not blood relatives) without their support I could not have given this many years of service. I will miss the near daily contact with the people working to put conservation on the ground but will continue to support you any way I can. You are the greatest. Thank you.

Bill Bennett, former Fayette SWCD Commissioner

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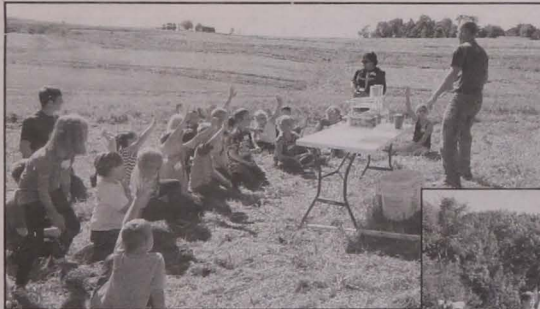


The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) office staff includes (front, l-r) Devin Brincks, NRCS federal technician; Lori Kohlmeier, IDALS conservation assistant; Halley Williams, NRCS soil conservationist; and Aaron Anderson, NRCS district conservationist; (back) Alisha Vander Woude, NRCS Pathways intern; and Adam Grim District watershed coordinator (Chris DeBack photo)



Fayette County Soil and Water District Commissioners are as follows: (front, l-r) Don Bahe, Stanley; Richard Jensen, Elgin; Paul Hoeger, Maynard; and Tim Bruhler, Hawkeye; (back) Eric Boehm, Wadena; Leon Deutsch, Wadena; and Rod Marlatt, Elgin. Not pictured are William Bennet, Rozann Dallenbach, Dave Drilling, Commissioners; Judy Bennett, Dorothy Jensen, William Dallenbach, and Rhonda Drilling, Assistant Commissioners (Chris DeBack photo)

EDUCATION FIELD DAY



Soil Health Station: Aaron Anderson, DC, demonstrates a table top rain fall simulator showing how different land uses and management style influence how much rain fall move in the form of surface runoff or infiltrates into the soil.



More education
field day
photos on
Page 12

Recycle Station:
Michelle Kelly explains
where and how to
recycle with an activity
sorting out plastic, paper,
and cardboard.

Don't forget to visit NRCS when transferring land or changing ownership

When working with your local Farm Service Agency office to transfer land ownership, change operators or your corporation, LLC or partnership, don't forget to stop by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office, or your contract payments may be in jeopardy. "Any time there is a change in the control of the land under contract, the contract holder must complete paperwork at the NRCS office to transfer control to the new owner or operator," said Jon Hubbert, assistant state conservationist for programs.

Landowners must complete

Form NRCS-CPA-152 Conservation Program Contract Transfer Agreement within 60 days of the ownership change or land transfer. If not, NRCS will not be able to make contract payments and the contract holder may be liable for financial damages and improper payments, he said.

"Most land transfers are completed by March 1, so this paperwork needs to be completed at the NRCS office by May 1 or earlier," he said. If you have concerns about your contracts, call or visit your local USDA Service Center.

2016 Iowa Conservation Accomplishments

Iowa farmers will install conservation practices on 458,000 acres with USDA-NRCS assistance

DES MOINES, IOWA, Dec. 9, 2016 — Iowa farmers signed up to add new conservation practices that protect more than 458,000 acres with planning and financial assistance through USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2016.

Through two of USDA's most popular conservation programs — the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) — Iowa farmers will install best management practices such as terraces, grassed waterways, no-till, animal waste facilities, rotational grazing systems, cover crops, and nutrient and pest management to their farms. These practices can help reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, enhance soil health and productivity, and provide wildlife habitat.

Rural landowners are also permanently conserving agricultural working lands by restoring and protecting agricultural lands and wetlands through enrollment in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). In 2016, NRCS obligated \$12.5 million in ACEP funding through 22 permanent agricultural and wetland easements that cover 2,893 acres.

Overall, Iowa farmers received \$36.5 million in conservation funding in fiscal year 2016 through EQIP, CSP and ACEP. Historically underserved farmers, such as beginning farmers, limited resource producers and veterans, received \$6 million in conservation practice financial assistance through 189 contracts, covering 15,000 acres.

EQIP Overview

Iowa NRCS obligated more

than \$17.6 million to Iowa farmers through 758 contracts covering 80,798 acres through EQIP — a voluntary conservation program that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality. Through EQIP, farmers can choose from a conservation practice list developed at the county level to treat local resource concerns.

County EQIP leaders by the numbers:

4,409 — Acres treated with conservation practices in East Pottawattamie County.

\$1.26 million — EQIP funding for Carroll County.

22 — EQIP contracts in Allamakee County.

CSP Overview

In 2016, Iowa NRCS obligated \$6.3 million through 628 new and renewed CSP contracts covering 374,000 acres. CSP is a voluntary conservation program that encourages producers to comprehensively address resource concerns by undertaking additional conservation activities while improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities. CSP pays participants for conservation performance — the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

County leaders in acres treated, funding and contracts through CSP:

23,046 — Acres treated in Keokuk County through CSP.

\$639,448 — Amount Keokuk County landowners received in CSP funding.

45 — CSP funded contracts in Howard County.

For county-specific program information, visit <http://bit.ly/2g5MVWX> or contact your local NRCS office.

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Conservation Systems Plans (no)

Planned	Applied
165	353

Conservation System Acres (ac)

Planned	Applied
9,070	12,469

Performance Summary-Field Measures

Conservation Plans Written (ac)	9,070 ac
Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality (ac)	8,285 ac
Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil health and sustainability (ac)	3,177 ac
Cropland with an applied Soil Health Management System (SHMS) (ac)	1,148 ac
Land with conservation applied to improve water quality (ac)	10,888 ac
CNMP written (no)	1 no
Grazing land with a conservation applied to protect and improve the resource base (ac)	57 ac
Grazing land with a conservation system applied to achieve a sustainable forage-animal balance (ac)	57 ac
Non-Federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality (ac)	4,884 ac
Conservation applied on land being actively managed for wildlife habitat (ac)	96 ac
Wetlands created, restored, or enhanced (ac)	55 ac
Forest land with conservation applied to protect and improve vegetative condition (ac)	650 ac
Conservation Applied to improve Environmental Quality (ac)	12,160 ac

FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
 JULY 1, 2015 through JUNE 30, 2016

Watershed Account	
Beginning Balance	\$ 2,484.99
Receipts	
Postage Reimbursement	\$ 100.00
Total Receipts	\$ 100.00
TOTAL	\$ 2,584.99
Expenses	
Information & Education	621.66
Office Supplies	125.44
Transfer to Checking	100.00
Total Expenses	\$ 847.10
Ending Balance 6/30/16	\$ 1,737.89

Summary Conservation Practices

	Planned	Applied
Access Control (472) (ac)	2,078	3,280
Brush Management (314) (ac)	14	
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan - Written (102) (no)		2
Conservation Cover (327) (ac)	1,495	1,829
Conservation Crop Rotation (328) (ac)	6,420	3,431
Contour Buffer Strips (332) (ac)	92	158
Contour Farming (330) (ac)	1,787	1,232
Cover Crop (340) (ac)	1,193	1,478
Critical Area Planting (342) (ac)	41	28
Development/Management (647) (ac)		107
Farmstead Energy Improvement (374) (no)		8
Fence (382) (ft)	27,780	
Field Border (386) (ac)	17	13
Filter Strip (393) (ac)	97	66
Firebreak (394) (ft)	1,540	
Forage and Biomass Planting (512) (ac)	168	
Forest Management Plan - Written (106) (no)		1
Forest Stand Improvement (666) (ac)	15	40
Grade Stabilization Structure (410) (no)	5	3
Grassed Waterway (412) (ac)	42	53
Herbaceous Weed Control (315) (ac)	2,099	3,232
Integrated Pest Management (IPM) (595) (ac)		3
Lighting System Improvement (670) (no)		2
Nutrient Management (590) (ac)		86
Prescribed Grazing (528) (ac)	168	81
Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till (329) (ac)	129	412
Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (345) (ac)	5,635	2,651
Riparian Forest Buffer (391) (ac)		4
Seasonal High Tunnel System for Crops (798) (sq ft)		2,180
Stream Crossing (578) (no)	1	
Subsurface Drain (606) (ft)		8,996
Terrace (600) (ft)	5,543	9,452
Tree/Shrub Establishment (612) (ac)	106	35
Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (490) (ac)		58
Underground Outlet (620) (ft)		830
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) (ac)	2,471	471
Waste Storage Facility (313) (no)		1
Water and Sediment Control Basin (638) (no)	6	5
Watering Facility (614) (no)	1	
Wetland Restoration (657) (ac)	5	55
Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment (380) (ft)	490	1,136

ProgramsConservation Reserve Program

Program Eligibility Determinations (no)	602 no
Status Reviews Performed (no)	253 no
Plans Developed for Emergency Grazing (no)	2 no
Plans Modified to Include Emergency Haying (no)	2 no

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

Number of Contracts (no)	4 no
Dollars Obligated	\$105,540

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Number of Contracts (no)	2 no
Dollars Obligated	\$53,266
Acres Enrolled	1,350 ac

FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
 JULY 1, 2015 through JUNE 30, 2016

Payroll Savings Account

Beginning Balance	\$.76
Receipts	
Interest	\$.75
Transfers from Technical Account	15,836.80
Total Receipts	\$ 15,837.55
TOTAL	\$ 15,838.31
Expenses	
Federal Taxes	8,372.16
IPERS	4,428.26
State Taxes	1,242.00
Unemployment	190.90
Total Expenses	\$ 14,233.32
Ending Balance 6/30/16	\$ 1,604.99

FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
 JULY 1, 2015 through JUNE 30, 2016

Checking Account

Beginning Balance	\$ 1,464.24
Receipts	
Watershed Transfer	100.00
Money Market Transfers - IM Funds	2,800.00
Money Market Transfers	3,710.24
Total Receipts	\$ 6,610.24
TOTAL	\$ 8,074.48
Expenses	
ATV	160.79
Bank Charge	33.28
Education	1,181.10
IM Commissioner	3,142.33
IM Office	60.00
Meeting Expense	14.31
Office Supplies	834.69
Postage	347.00
Water Sampling	490.00
Total Expenses	\$ 6,263.50
Ending Balance 6/30/16	\$ 1,810.98

**FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
JULY 1, 2015 through JUNE 30, 2016**

Money Market Savings Account

Beginning Balance \$ 9,547.89

Receipts

Education	1,000.00
Farm Bill 13 - IDALS	4,793.38
Farm Bill 13B - IDALS	4,818.60
IM Allocation & Supplemental	2,800.00
Interest	41.23
Volga Lake Grant	9,294.00
Volga Lake Supplies Reimbursement	841.22
Upper Otter Creek Supplies Reimbursement	804.92

Total Receipts \$ 24,393.35

TOTAL \$ 33,941.24

Expenses

IM Transfers to Checking	2,800.00
Transfers to Checking	3,710.24
Transfers to Technical Account	14,814.90

Total Expenses \$ 21,325.14

Ending Balance 6/30/16 \$ 12,616.10

**FAYETTE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT
JULY 1, 2015 through JUNE 30, 2016**

Technical Account

Beginning Balance \$ 32,253.84

Receipts

Farm Bill 13 Funds - Division	\$ 6,168.60
Farm Bill 13 Funds - CDI	886.98
Farm Bill 13B Funds - CDI	2,466.00
Supervisors	2,000.00
Volga Lake Grant	8,646.30

Total Receipts \$ 20,167.88

TOTAL \$ 52,421.72

Expenses

Accounting Services	250.00
Health Insurance	3,288.96
Meeting Expense	163.96
Office Supplies	658.40
Payroll	24,435.00
Transfers to Payroll Savings	
Federal Taxes	8,992.32
IPERS	5,350.82
State Taxes	1,242.00
Unemployment	251.66

Total Expenses \$ 44,633.12

Ending Balance 6/30/16 \$ 7,788.60

FAYETTE COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT FOUNDATION ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT					
ACCOUNT BALANCE	Nov 2012 / June 2013	July 2013 / June 2014	July 2014 / June 2015	July 2015 / June 2016	July 2016 / June 2017
Beginning Balance	\$ 4,284	\$ 11,320	\$ 13,564	\$ 1,852	\$ 12,269
RECEIPTS:					
Transfer from CD #42000		\$ 10,000			
Transfer from Savings				\$ 5,000	
Trees	\$ 5,664				
Supporters Club	\$ 10,591	\$ 10,686	\$ 11,473	\$ 12,078	
Aerial Spraying	\$ 5,460	\$ 24,432			
Biannual Report Refund		\$ 45			
Transfer from Money Market					
TOTAL RECEIPTS	\$ 21,715	\$ 45,163	\$ 11,473	\$ 17,078	\$ -
TOTAL CASH AVAILABLE	\$ 25,999	\$ 56,483	\$ 25,037	\$ 18,930	\$ 12,269
TOTAL EXPENSES:					
CDI Dues				\$ 850	
Aerial Spraying	\$ 5,410	\$ 26,823			
NC&D Donations	\$ 2,000	\$ 4,000	\$ 2,000		
Memorial			\$ 20		
Auction Item for Annual Meeting			\$ 238		
Trees	\$ 2,542	\$ 46			
Freight	\$ 300				
Hog Farm Land Taxes		\$ 300	\$ 182	\$ 186	
Hog Field Day		\$ 980			
Legal Fees for Hog Property		\$ 112			
Field Day Expenses Buses		\$ 1,875	\$ 1,635		
Field Day Expenses Food		\$ 767	\$ 929	\$ 543	
Office Supplies		\$ 159	\$ 281		
Appreciation Dinner		\$ 363			
Ranger/Repairs		\$ 130	\$ 731		
Water Monitoring Expenses	\$ 2,750	\$ 680	\$ 440	\$ 220	
Office Help		\$ 200	\$ 12,682		
Adam Gries			\$ 500	\$ 500	
Phasants Forever Donation			\$ 500	\$ 500	
Soil and Water Conservation Scholarship			\$ 150		
Building Repairs		\$ 400	\$ 417	\$ 445	
Foundation Insurance		\$ 999	\$ 602	\$ 928	
Printing of Support Letters	\$ 3,543	\$ 1,868	\$ 514	\$ 574	
Postage for Support Letters	\$ 435		\$ 1,144	\$ 1,691	
Annual Report			\$ 220	\$ 225	
USPS Mailing Permit	\$ 483	\$ 427			
Income Taxes for Foundation / Sales Tax	\$ 14,479	\$ 42,919	\$ 23,185	\$ 6,642	
TOTAL EXPENSES:	\$ 11,320	\$ 13,564	\$ 1,852	\$ 12,269	\$ -
Period Ending Balance per Bank Statement					

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Now What? A Landowners Guide to Options

By: Rod Marlatt, Director,
Fayette County
Conservation Board

As the age of Iowa's landowners continues to rise, the uncertainty of the future stewardship of those lands comes into question. Many farmers and landowners do not have the opportunity to pass on their legacy to anyone or at least to anyone who will work the land. Many of these landowners have toiled diligently to leave the land better than they found it and have implemented their conservation ideals upon that land.

Not to put too blunt a point on it, but do we want to assume that our hard work will be recognized and continued by those who inherit the land? Things change, economies change and values change depending on how connected the next generations are to the land.

This article is an attempt to inspire landowners to think about the future of their land and to scratch the surface of several options available to landowners in Iowa to permanently protect their conservation efforts and legacy.

Land Donations: You can simply donate your land to a qualified conservation organization such as the County Conservation Board, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Soil and Water Conservation District or a non-profit conservation organization such as the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. An outright donation is the simplest method of protection and can carry with it substantial tax savings including property tax liability, estate taxes, and possible future income tax liability. An outright land donation can also give you substantial input as to how the land will be managed if agreeable to the recipient. Maybe you want the land to be a park, a

public forest, a public hunting area of a multitude of other possibilities. The Fayette County Conservation Board has been the recipient of many of these types of donations.

Conservation Easement: This option is of course leaving the land in your will. The land could be a quality natural resource area such as a prairie, wetland or forest or it could be of no resource value such as a house lot to be able to be sold by the recipient to fund conservation elsewhere. One of the greatest benefits of a bequest is that you retain ownership and use of the property during your lifetime. It simply passes the land to the public after you have borrowed it and nurtured it for a while. Though you can bequest the land without the recipient's knowledge, it is best to discuss it with the potential recipient so that your desires and intent are clear and expected. This can be done discretely and kept confidential if that is the desire of the donor.

Bargain Sale: Instead of an outright land donation, you can sell your land to a conservation agency or organization at a reduced price. Most agencies are limited by statute to pay no more than appraised value for land. They must also find a way to finance that purchase. Most of the time this is through grants such as the Wildlife Habitat Stamp program. A bargain sale will assist the receiving agency in being able to claim the bargain sale as required cost share match. A sale of less than appraised value gives the seller a multitude of possible tax advantages such as a reduction of capital gains, some possible income tax adjustments, and of course, less property tax liability.

Conservation Easements: A conservation easement is a contract between a landowner and a qualified conservation group. Examples

of qualified groups are County Conservation Boards, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Cities, Soil and Water Conservation Districts or non-profit conservation organizations. Each easement is custom written to fit the natural resources that exist on the property and the desires of the landowners. The easement does not change the ownership or the transfer of ownership of the land to future generations. The easement is, however, perpetual and follows the transfer of ownership. The easement simply spells out what can and cannot be done on the land and gives the responsibility of the enforcement of the covenants on to the "grantee." An example could be a forest owner may want to ensure that the timber values of a property be preserved forever and that any management (including harvesting) be done under an approved forestry plan. Another scenario could be an agricultural farm that the easement simply says that the farm must be perpetually farmed under a conservation compliance plan or similar plans that may exist in the future. In addition to ensuring the land be managed and preserved, the easement itself can have significant tax savings depending on what it encompasses as uses allowed or disallowed on the property. The Fayette County Conservation Board holds several of these easements and is always willing to add more.

These are only a few landowner options that can be considered for those who wish for the legacy of their land and their conservation ethic to endure. For more information, contact your County Conservation Board, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Soil and Water Conservation District, or a qualified non-profit organization such as the

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. We claim no guarantee of any tax advantages in this article and

as with any financial planning, you need to discuss this with your financial and tax advisor.

Conservation Planning & Conservation Programs

By: Aaron Anderson,
District Conservationist, USDA-NRCS

What is a conservation plan & how does it benefit me? This is a question that I'm often asked. Below is a definition from our planning policy:

Conservation plans are the basis for all assistance NRCS provides to clients, and the basic tool for clients to manage their natural resources. The greatest value comes by having the client engaged in every step of the process. Through this participation, the client develops an understanding of the natural resource issues and treatments necessary for resource sustainability.

The objective in conservation planning is to help each client attain sustainable use and sound management of the natural resources on their land. The purpose is to prevent the degradation of resources and to ensure their sustained use and productivity.

Simply put, conservation plans are the road map that gives direction in getting conservation practices planned and applied on the landscape. It contains a goal and objective stated by the client to keep folks on track. It is a living, working document.

Then, there is what we call financial assistance or conservation programs. And there are a lot of them. There are local, state, and federal programs that bring an assortment of opportunities for producers and landowners to implement conservation.

How do I know which program is right for me or my land? This is really where your conservation plan comes in. What are your goals? What are you trying to achieve? What is your timeline to implementing the practices on your land? A conservation plan can provide a lot of clarity to these questions and assist in narrowing down all the program options out there to fully benefit what you are trying to accomplish on your land.

I urge folks to review their plans for their farm or operation and assess what improvements can be made. Contact our office at 563-422-3868 Ext. 3 if you are interested updating or developing a plan on your land.



Aaron Anderson

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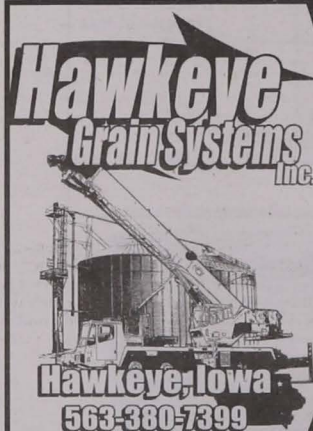
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For 32 years, Bill Bennett of Elgin served as a commissioner for the Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District. He recently retired from that position, and a retirement party was held in his honor Thursday evening, Nov. 17, at Gus and Tony's Town House Cafe in West Union. (Chris DeBack photo)

Bennett retires as SWCD commissioner

By Chris DeBack
Contributing Writer

The next Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District commissioner will have some big shoes to fill with the retirement of one of the current commissioners, Bill Bennett of Elgin.

Bennett has been an SWCD commissioner for the last 32 years, first running in 1984.

"Thirty-two years is a long time," Bennett said. "They need some new blood."

His father, Cleve Bennett, was a former commissioner and Bill's inspiration for taking on the task.

"When my dad was asked to run, I was wishing they had asked me instead," Bennett joked.

Now at 78 years old, it is time for Bennett to step away and allow some new members to help secure the future of this corner of our planet.

"When I would talk to the legislators, I would always try to explain to them that if we don't have good, healthy soil, if we don't have good water, and we don't have good, clean air, we don't need anything else because no one will be alive," Bennett explained. "It is pretty simple to me that these are the key things that we have to take care of. That is what [SWCD] have been trying to do."

The Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District Commission has had its hands in a lot of positive and important work over Bennett's 32 years. The most recent accomplishment was the completion of the Otter Creek Flood Reduction Project.

"We have had several watershed projects. One of the things we started was the first one on Glover's Creek," Bennett explained. "We came up with an idea of buffers around sinkholes. We never sold anyone on it, but now we come out and you have buf-

fer strips all over the state because of our idea. We started an Economic Yield Contest here in Fayette County that went on to be the 'Max Contest' that went on to nationals. It wasn't on who had the highest yield, but who made the most profit."

Bennett has also been a board member of Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development (NEIRCD) since its inception. He has helped bring nearly \$86 million into Iowa and \$10 million into northeast Iowa during his time on the board. This is money that wouldn't have been available if it weren't for the hard work that people like Bennett have put in at NEIRCD. Lora Priest, NEIRCD director, noted that Bennett is an invaluable resource that will be truly missed.

While the work of an SWCD commissioner is a noble cause, it is the people the retiree has met and the relationships he has developed from this position that he will miss the most.

"I'll miss the nice people that I have gotten to work with," Bennett said. "Like Lori Kohlmeier. For 30 years I have worked with her, and ever since her dad passed away I have kind of been her 'pseudo-dad.' It has just been family. We have done this, with all the trees I have planted, for future generations. That is what we are trying to protect."

The former Marine said he plans to travel a little more during his retirement and spend time with his family. While Bennett will surely miss the work and people, he believes it is time for him to allow new blood to infuse the Fayette County SWCD Commission with new life and direction. However, his sacrifices and vision for the future won't soon be forgotten.

Soil health: Let's keep growing!

Dr. Jennifer Stoffel
Associate Professor of Biology
Upper Iowa University

As the body of scientific knowledge and technological advancements continue to progress, so too does the societal knowledge of soil health. Soil health is defined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as "the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans." As an ecosystem ecologist, I enjoy understanding management changes to the ecosystems and thinking about how the parts of a system relate to its overall function. When considering a system, I ask that we think for a moment about our own health and our body. Our body is comprised of multiple different systems that all work together. For example, a blockage in your circulatory system could put you at risk for strokes, heart attacks, embolism or even death. Likewise, the health of the soil system can be positively or negatively influenced by actions we take.

Soil health is influenced by physical, biological and chemical properties that are inherent to the soil. For many years in management of agriculture and forest lands, we have heard about the physical properties of soil and how they are important. For example, you have likely heard many members of your community talking about soil texture—the composition of sand, silt, and clay that is found in the soil—and then speculated how rainfall will infiltrate differently among soil textures due to the available pore space. However, now imagine talking about soil texture along with soil structure, the spatial arrangement of soil particles in the soil. These two factors, when interacting together may differently influence the infiltration of water in new way than when examining these factors on their own. Are you excited, but slightly dismayed? Try not to be, it is a wonderful thing!

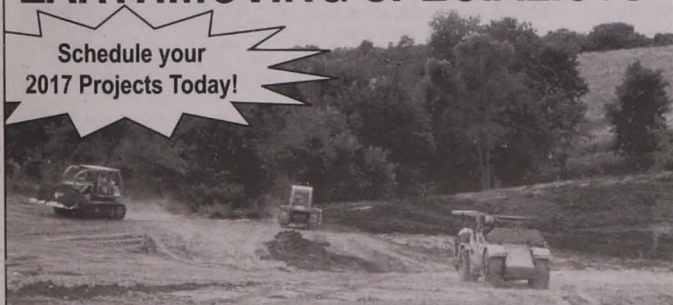
Soil is a beautifully complex ecosystem which is influenced by life! For example, utilizing no-till practices in your fields increase the amount of dead plant material on the soil. This dead plant material eventually helps to increase soil organic matter, which influences a myriad of soil properties including increasing habitat for soil organisms, increasing soil carbon storage, promoting soil aggregate formation and nutrient retention. Therefore, there are many management practices that humans, as stewards of the land, implement to promote or reduce soil health. These practices might change how the system functions to purify water, recycle nutrients, or maintain its productive capacity. These actions are complex and interconnected. Some of the connections between the biological, chemical, and physical properties are only now being described.

This is truly an exciting (but scary time) as we explore the once "black box" of the soil and explore the ecosystem fully. This exploration also comes at a time of need, making the cost of failure very high! A car only has so much horsepower, and even if technological adjustments are made, every system has its limits. While we are fortunate to live in an area with incredible soil and water, we need to think about the system and how we can assure that it continues to function healthfully.

Just as explorers of new lands communicated their discoveries with others, I too compel all of us to continue to communicate and learn from each other. Just as every student has positively impacted my ability to better serve future students; every landowner, professional in the field, and scientist has helped me make new associations between the soil properties and their impact to soil health and function. In a way, we all have an obligation to keep learning! I am fortunate because I learned early on that every person I meet has something to teach me, and I to teach them. I also learned growing up as an Iowa farm girl and now as a scientist that it is important to gather data and evaluate evidence from multiple sources, just as you would seek a second opinion from a doctor. So let's get out there and start learning and growing as we try to evaluate what we can all do to improve soil health and improve water quality.

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What is Soil Health? Why Should I Care?

Soil health is the *capacity of a soil to function*. How well is your soil functioning to infiltrate water and cycle nutrients to water and feed growing plants?



Soil is a living factory of macroscopic and microscopic workers who need food to eat and places to live to do their work.

There are more individual organisms in a teaspoon of soil than there are people on earth; thus, the soil is controlled by these organisms.

Tillage, fertilizer, livestock, pesticides, and other management tools can be used to improve soil health, or they can significantly damage soil health if not applied correctly.

Managing for soil health (improved soil function) is mostly a matter of maintaining suitable habitat for the myriad of creatures that comprise the soil food web.

Managing for soil health can be accomplished by disturbing the soil as little as possible, growing as many different species of plants as practical, keeping living plants as practical, keeping living plants in the soil as often as possible, and keeping the soil covered all the time.

Manage More by Disturbing Soil Less

Tilling the soil is the equivalent of an earthquake, hurricane, tornado, and forest fire occurring simultaneously to the world of soil organisms. Simply stated, tillage is bad for the soil.

Physical soil disturbance, such as tillage with a plow, disk, or chisel plow, that results in bare or compacted soil is destructive and disruptive to soil microbes and creates a hostile, instead of hospitable, place for them to live and work.

The soil may also be disturbed chemically or biologically through the misuse of inputs, such as fertilizers and pesticides. This disrupts the symbiotic relationship between fungi, microorganisms and crop roots.

By reducing nutrient inputs, we can take advantage of the nutrient cycles in the soil to supply crop nutrients and allow plants to make essential associations with soil organisms.

Diversify with Crop Diversity

Sugars made by plants are released from their roots into the soil and traded to soil microbes for nutrients to support plant growth.

The key to improving soil health is assuring that the food and energy chains and webs includes as many different plants or animals as practical.

Biodiversity is ultimately the key to success of any agricultural system. Lack of biodiversity severely limits the potential of any cropping system and disease and pest problems are increased.

A diverse and fully functioning soil food web provides for nutrient, energy, and water cycling that allows a soil to express its full potential.

Grow Living Roots Throughout the Year

There are many sources of food in the soil that feed the soil food web, but there is no better food than the sugars exuded by living roots.

Soil organisms feed on sugar from living plant roots first. Next, they feed on dead plant roots, followed by above-ground crop residues, such as straw, chaff, husks, stalks, flowers, and leaves. Lastly, they feed on the humic organic matter in the soil.

Healthy soil is dependent upon how well the soil food web is fed. Providing plenty of easily accessible food to soil microbes helps them cycle nutrients that plants need to grow.

Keep the Soil Covered as Much as Possible

Soil should always be covered by growing plants and/or their residues, and soil should rarely be visible from above. This is true regardless of land use (cropland, hayland, pasture, or range).

Soil cover protects soil aggregates from 'taking a beating' from the force of falling raindrops. Even a healthy soil with water-stable aggregates (held together by biological glues) than can withstand wetting by the rain may not be able to withstand a 'pounding' from raindrops.

A mulch of crop residues on the soil surface suppresses weeds early in the growing season giving the intended crop an advantage. They also keep the soil cool and moist which provides favorable habitat for many organisms that begin residue decomposition by shredding residues into smaller pieces.

Soil health is improved by disturbing the soil less, growing the greatest diversity of crops (in rotation and as diverse mixtures of cover crops), maintaining living roots in the soil as much as possible (with crops and cover crops), and keeping the soil covered with residue at all times.

Drills, planters, seed, fertilizer, pesticides, livestock, fences, water, farm implements, etc. are all tools that can be used to manage the soil habitat for the benefit of living members of the soil food web.

Many soils have a water infiltration problem that causes a water runoff problem. If soil health is improved, the structure of the soil results in greater water infiltration, less runoff, less or no erosion, and reduced incidence of flooding and sedimentation.

EDUCATION FIELD DAY



Erosion Station: Dick Jensen about to roll a tire down the hill to explain how slope and length of the ground is a factor in soil erosion.

Bee Station: Bob Fassbinder explains the importance of flowering plants throughout the growing season for bees to pollinate flowers and to collect pollen to make honey.



Volga Lake Watershed: Stakeholders voluntary working to improve the watershed

By Adam Grim, District Watershed Coordinator

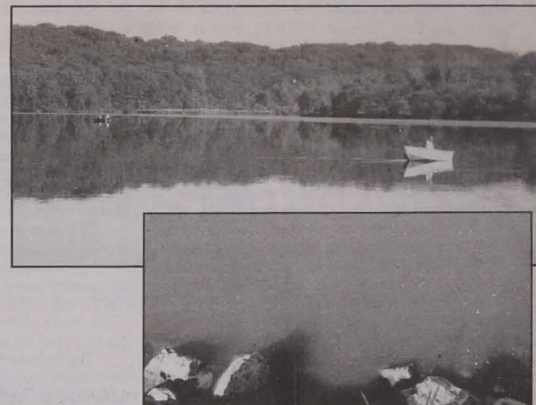
The Volga Lake watershed covers all or portions of Union township sections 26-36 and Westfield township sections 2-9. Volga Lake has a total job impact of 50 jobs and direct spending of \$4,070,000.



Adam Grim

The top two activities done at Volga Lake are fishing (79%) and wildlife (43%) and has predicted annual visits of 66,000. Volga Lake is currently not meeting its full recreational potential because of high levels of algae and nutrients in the water. The low water clarity in Volga Lake also impacts sight-feeding species such as Black Crappie, Bluegill, and Largemouth Bass by impeding their ability to feed effectively. This is attributed to phosphorus loading from the watershed and from phosphorus already accumulated in the lake. This nutrient is typically attached to sediment but can also be dissolved in the water, invisible to the naked eye.

The goal of Volga Lake Watershed project is to reduce phosphorus loading from the watershed to the lake through reducing the amount of phosphorus attached to sediment and phosphorus dissolved in water. Once this is done and maintained at lower levels, there may be opportunity to work on removal of phosphorus in the lake itself and to do more lake improvements. Improving water quality in the watershed and the lake is critical to increase the recreational opportunities Volga Lake has to



offer to the public.

Stakeholders in the Volga Lake watershed have already done a lot to improve water quality in the lake since the lake's creation by reduced tillage, terraces, grassed waterways, water & sediment control basins and grade stabilization structures and other ways. Today, stakeholders continue to do best management practices to improve water quality in the 6,038 acre watershed with no till, cover crops, extended crop rotation, utilizing sensitive areas differently. In 2016 through voluntary participation and funding from the Iowa Public Owned Lakes Program, stakeholders implemented 385 acres of cover crop and 177 acres of no till.

The Fayette County Soil & Water Conservation District conducted the Volga Lake Development Project in 2015 to assess land use, stream condition, and gully erosion in non-cropland. This project allowed the SWCD to apply for and receive funding through the State of Iowa's Publicly Owned Lakes Program in 2016 to provide financial assistance in the form of cost share to imple-

ment best management practices to reduce phosphorus and sediment loading. The Fayette Soil and Water Conservation District will continue efforts in 2017 as well.

The SWCD also partnered with Upper Iowa University and the IA DNR Lakes Restoration Program to conduct water quality sampling in the four creeks that flow into lake and in the lake itself in 2015 and 2016. Results from the monitoring show, the lake is titling on the edge from its current state of being just rich in nutrients to being extremely rich in nutrients which may lead to potential for oxygen depletion and fish kills.

Things stakeholders can do:

Set up a time to meet with local Fayette Soil & Water Conservation District staff by phone, 563-422-3868 Ext. 3 or by mail or stop in the office at 120 N Industrial Pkwy #2 West Union, IA 52175. Other things stakeholders can do are regular soil testing, proper calibration of nutrient application equipment, cover crops, no till, pasture management, etc.

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Creating Brush Piles for Birds

Often, when trees are cleared from pastures, field edges, or timber areas, they're left haphazardly where they fell or pushed into large, dense piles. Downed trees, whether in piles or not, are generally left to be burned with a follow-up fire. Downed trees left scattered or piled to burn usually don't cause an issue, but large, thick, unburned brush piles can be a problem for pheasants.

Generally, when trees are piled for "wildlife" or burning, it is done with a bulldozer and downed trees are pushed together in large, dense piles. These piles will persist for many years, unless burned. They will, indeed, house wildlife species, but usually, those species are not ones we want to encourage when managing for gamebirds. Since the dense brush piles are too thick to allow birds to flush from within the pile, they won't use these brush piles. Instead, those piles become dens for upland bird predators like skunks and raccoons.

With very little extra effort, brush piles that will be useful for escape and thermal cover by pheasants can be created. These "downed tree structures" are especially handy when trying to enhance bird habitat quickly, and can save a landowner money by utilizing something you already have to produce a required element of upland habitat—without having to plant native shrubs (that may take years to establish and fill in before being usable to birds).

Instead of using a dozer to push debris and tree trunks into large piles, simply stack the downed trees next to one another in just a couple of layers. Alternating trunk and crown ends may be beneficial. If selectively cutting trees or thinning dense stands of trees, those selected for cutting can even be felled in such a way that crowns fall next to each other to create these piles. By stacking trees next to each other, not pushed into thick piles, they are open enough that predators won't be as inclined to make dens under them and they are loose enough to allow birds to flush from under the pile if needed—all while deterring birds of prey.

The goal of this process is to create an artificial shrub thicket to add necessary structure to an area where shrubs do not occur or may be infeasible. In keeping with that, you'll want to remember what you're trying to emulate with these piles. Piles should be constructed to dimensions of 30 ft X 50 ft X 4-8 ft tall. Any type of tree can be used to create these piles. As those with brush problems know, fighting tree encroachment is a never ending process. There will be other trees that move in over time that can be used to renovate or replace degraded artificial thickets.

Hopefully this article will help you figure out what to do with the trees you clear from your property, but if you'd like even more advice, please call your local PF/QF Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist or DNR Private Lands Biologist.

Happy and safe cutting!
~ Allie Rath, Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist



A typical, bulldozer created brush pile. This will only provide predator habitat.



Artificial thicket ("downed tree structure") created with cedars and elms. Good game bird cover.

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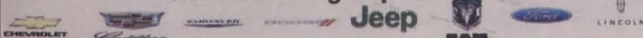
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This is the farm on Harding Road, rural Elgin, where Jim and Sue Kuennen Massman began making a conservation transformation.

'Labor of love' earns top conservation honor

By Janell Bradley
Contributing Writer

Perhaps it's not surprising to learn that this year's Iowa Conservation Woman of the Year was in 1969 the first female to join the South Winneshiek FFA chapter in Calmar. And since then, she's never stopped learning and giving her time to others while making the earth a better place to live.

Sue Kuennen Massman has achieved much: implementing conservation practices on her own farm in rural Elgin, volunteering as a Master Gardener, showcasing her talents at the Norman Borlaug Learning Center, and through helping others reach their own goals and achievements.

From her early days as an FFA'er at South Winn, she's never stopped being an advocate for female landowners, including assisting her own mother with on-farm management decisions.

When Sue and her husband, Jim Massman, bought a farm together at 6905 Harding Road in rural Elgin, they had great plans for the 160 acres of property. The farm was in dire need of conservation to control erosion.

The Massmans were interested in a variety of conservation practices and ways to diversify the farm, explained Michelle Schaefer, NRCS soil conservationist.

"They created a 'labor of love' as they began fixing up their farm in the spring of 2011," Schaefer recalled of meeting Sue and Jim.

Schaefer's friend how Sue told her they were like painters with a fresh palette and new canvas — dreaming, creating and planting together.

And then Jim became ill and was diagnosed with a terminal illness. He died Nov. 4, 2011.

Wishing to carry on with their work to honor Jim, Sue built a team of knowledgeable supporters to help her learn how to manage the farm.

In the spring of 2012, she completed Annie's Project, an ISU Extension program, to help her make farm-related decisions. She was then able to develop additional farm-related skills for problem-solving, recordkeeping, insurance, understanding the stock market, business and estate decision-making, retirement and succession planning.

Sue has also participated in Women, Land & Legacy and WFAN events, as well as various conservation field days in which she shared her own experiences with others and learned from their experiences.

After Jim's death, Susan worked with the local NRCS and ISU Extension to help her manage the farm with passion and an artistic flair. She established waterways on the highly erodible areas and includes hay in the crop rotation to help improve the soil. She continues to work with NRCS to enhance an already diverse wetland complex that includes a fen and artesian springs. The upland wildlife areas were enhanced with a hardwood tree planting of black cherry, red oak, white oak and swamp oak.

As a 10-year Master Gardener, she has taken pride in her own property. She maintains a vineyard; an orchard of plum, apple, and cherry trees; a variety of berries; and has an herb garden and a large vegetable garden that provide sustenance for herself, family, and friends. Sue also donates her organic produce to Hope Lodge in Rochester, Minn., where she and Jim stayed during his cancer treatments.



Sue Massman

Massman has also planted several varieties of willow to use in making her award-winning handcrafted baskets. She demonstrates her pioneer basket-weaving talent at various historic venues such as the Fort Atkinson Rendezvous and Osborne Heritage Days.

"Sue Kuennen Massman's connection and devotion to the land is unparalleled," said Schaefer, who, along with the Fayette County SWCD, nominated Massman for the award.

Sue accepted her honor at the 70th Annual Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners Conference at the end of August. While there, Sue networked with other producers and

professionals, and she can be seen in a podcast by ISU Extension's Iowa Learning Farm, which can be found at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/ilf/>.

Massman continues to work off the farm, but she still finds time to spend countless hours improving the dream farm she shared with Jim. She said she hopes to leave a legacy by improving her farm and leaving it in better condition than when they first purchased it.

"My reward is to know that I am able to make a difference on my farm and be an example to others through my conservation practices and management of my land," she reflected.

The conservationist is active in her faith community at St. Peter's Catholic Church in Clermont, and in 1983 she was voted Young Mother of the Year in part for her involvement in her children's youth organizations, 4-H and Scouts. Sue was an active 4-H member and officer during her youth, receiving several county awards. She continued assisting with 4-H as an adult having received the 4-H Alumni award and 25-Year 4-H Leader award for her many years of volunteer service at the county, area, state and national levels.

Massman was recently elected to the board of directors, as a representative of Fayette County, for the Norman Borlaug ISU Research Farm in Nashua.

Meet Tim Bruhler, FCSWD commissioner

By CHRIS DEBACK
Contributing Writer

Meet new Fayette County Soil and Water District Commissioner Tim Bruhler.



Tim Bruhler

The Hawkeye farmer grows beans and corn on his acreage while also helping his father, John, maintain a farm in Rushford, Minn.

Bruhler grew up in Rushford, where he graduated from high school in 2006. He attended Iowa State University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in agronomy. He then went to work for Servi-Tech as an agronomist, helping with crop consulting.

After five years at Servi-Tech, he fulfilled a lifelong dream by heading back to the farm.

"We always had some farm acres growing up when my dad was working for the United States Post Office in Rushford," he said. "Farming is in my blood, and I was glad to help my father."

Bruhler met his wife, Cara, while taking some college classes at Winona State University while still in high school. They now have two children, Olivier, 5, and Evelyn, 4.

Because of his own conservation efforts, the Fayette County Soil and Water District Commission asked the young farmer if he'd become a commissioner. Bruhler's father has no-tilled his crop ground for 25 years and has been honored as Conservationist of the Year in both Minnesota and Iowa.

"It is always a learning process," Bruhler said, "one that I am happy to learn about."

Bruhler's passion for conservation is what pushed him to accept the commission's invitation. As a new commissioner, he feels that continued education for all farmers is a must. He'd like to see the commission help create more educational material for farmers who are trying to decide on whether or not to implement conservation practices.

"I would like to see a lot more conservation education," Bruhler noted. "I feel that is lacking. I'd like to see more general knowledge of no-tilling and cover crops, which are the big things right now. There just isn't a lot of information on how to incorporate those practices."

"I think there are a lot of people interested in conservation; they just don't know how to do it," he closed. There is not a lot of emphasis on the economics. From a farmer's perspective, I am looking at the economics of it. I know it can work for a lot of people. When you think conservation, you think sacrificing economics, and that isn't the case."

Meet part-time intern Alisha Vander Woude

By CHRIS DEBACK
Contributing Writer

Alisha Vander Woude is a part-time intern with the Fayette County Soil and Water Commission.

She received her internship through the Pathways program at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The Upper Iowa University senior will graduate in May. She currently resides in Elgin with her boyfriend, Isaac Sedlmayr, who is the Gilbertson Park ranger.

As a part-time intern, Vander Woude's duties include working on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) plans and duplicating them for customers and other agencies.

The 2013 Delton Kellogg High School (Michigan) graduate has always known that science was the field of study for her, but she wasn't always sure in which specific direction she wanted to go.

"I knew I wanted to go into the science field and have it be with something outdoors," she explained, "so, I was very broad with what I wanted. Whatever opportunity came along, I took it. My sophomore year of college I was applying for internships and knew I wanted to go the conservation route."

The Delton, Mich., native has learned a lot during her time in the Pathways program and looks forward to finding her first career position in the near future.



Alisha Vander Woude

FCPF wildlife biologist Allie Rath

By CHRIS DEBACK
Contributing Writer

Allie Rath is the new Fayette County Pheasants Forever Farm Bill wildlife biologist.

Just a couple months into her new position, Rath has hit the ground running when it comes to helping plan conservation efforts for farmers.

Originally from Kalona in southeast Iowa, the 2003 Mid-Prairie High School graduate has held a number of different positions in the conservation field. After graduating from the University of Northern Iowa in 2007 with a bachelor's degree in biology with an emphasis in ecology, the new wildlife biologist stayed at UNI to work at Tallgrass Prairie Center.

"From about as young as I can remember, I just knew I wanted to be outside working on the landscape," Rath explained. "I didn't always know exactly what that meant or where I could even get a job doing that, but I was lucky enough to basically know since high school that biology, conservation, and land management was the way I wanted to go, and I just needed to figure out how to get there."

She then moved to southeast Florida and worked for the United States Environmental Protection Agency, for which she did a lot of pervasive species removal.

She then moved back to Iowa to work for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, where she was a natural resource aide before a short stint with The Nature Conservancy in Illinois.

"I would help with the wildlife management units and any of the public hunting areas in southwest Iowa," she recalled. "I helped with the Boone Wildlife Research Station, where I looked at some pheasant chick crops — basically, what they are eating — and then helped with some quail hunter harvest surveys. I helped burn and did some nongame surveying — mammal traps, butterfly counts, different things like that."

It was back to Iowa to once again to work for the DNR before taking a position with Kansas Pheasants Forever for the last five years. Despite relocating frequently, all the different experiences have helped prepare Rath for this latest position with Fayette County Pheasants Forever.

"Before Kansas, all my jobs had pretty much been public lands management," she said. "So, getting my hands dirty chainsawing, cutting, spraying with backpack sprayers, burning, and planting, all of the things that I personally did, I now recommend and plan for private landowners to do, so I can kind of give them some of the little tidbits that I learned. I can speak the language better when I am giving them more of the details as to how to really make something successful."

"For example, edge-feathering can be a hard concept to wrap the mind around," she added. "I have done it before, so I can take the landowner down the path and get them the most description and detail that they would need to accomplish it successfully and have a good feeling come out of it. I think that has been really beneficial for me, that and just being able to work with a bunch of different agencies and groups."

There are two types of typical days for the wildlife biologist. One will find her in the field all day, working with farmers to determine what would be the best practice for their situation. Another day, she might find herself behind a desk a little more than she would like, filling out paperwork and answering emails.

While she has moved around quite a bit, as long as the funding for her position is there from the farm bill, she plans to stick around. There is still much for her to learn, and she intends to learn as much as possible.

"I love Fayette County; it is a great county to get some of that prairie and driftless area," she closed. "Everyone has been very welcoming and super-nice. My neighbors have been stopping by, and everyone is always willing to lend a hand if I ever need it."



Allie Rath



This Fayette Soil and Water Conservation District sign on Paul Hoeger's land promotes his use of contour buffer strips as a soil conservation measure. Hoeger is an avid soil and water conservationist.

Seeing land as a community

By Gina Panuska
Contributing Writer

"We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

This quote from Aldo Leopold is one that Paul and Phyllis Hoeger have been living by on their family farm.

The couple live just west of Maynard on the Hoeger Family Century Farm. The land was purchased by Paul's great-grandfather in 1897, and Paul has resided on the farm since his family moved there in 1955, when he was just 3 years old.

Paul was always involved in the farming operation, picking up rocks, taking care of hundreds of chickens, planting and harvesting crops, and milking cows.

Right after high school, he began farming some on his own, but through the years he has always had off-farm jobs – from running a dairy/beef artificial insemination (AI) business, to fixing televisions, helping on neighboring farms, to most recently, offering a carpentry service from which he just retired last year.

Along with raising row crops and hay, the family milked cows until about 1991, when the herd was sold. The Hoegers then fed out dairy steers for seven years.

Throughout the years of the dairy operation, the Hoegers planted a corn/hay/oats crop rotation. Once the cows were gone, they changed to a corn/soybean rotation.

In 1986, the family decided to change the way they had been planting their crops and implemented contour strips in their fields. They had a neighbor who had been contouring since the 1960s, so they thought they would try stripping their hay and corn in the same field. They were extremely pleased with the soil conservation and drainage benefits from the contouring, and they have not turned over the soil with a moldboard plow since.

Paul does most of the work around the farm himself, only having the local cooperative do about half of the spraying and the fertilizer spreading.

"I'm the only one that works here," he laughed.

When asked about some of the bigger changes Paul has seen over the years or applied to his farming operation, he said he has focused more on changing the management of his land rather than his equipment fleet.

"It's amazing what technology can do, but I get by with my equipment; it does just fine," the veteran farmer said with a smile.

Among other tractors in Hoeger's fleet, he still uses the Farmall H and M tractors owned by his grandfather and father. He utilizes a Raven monitor on his sprayer and has upgraded from a four-row to an eight-row planter with a monitor over the years.

With his contour strips, the FSA marks every segmented area of a field as its own separate field, so, according to the system, Paul has 70 to 80 "fields" on each farm.

"Automatic planter row shut-offs would be nice to have, so I wouldn't have to lift up at each waterway," he commented.

When asked about the future of agriculture, both Paul and his wife, Phyllis, are extremely passionate about soil and water conservation.

"I think the future is soil health," Paul said. "We need to find ways to keep the soil where it belongs, the water where it falls, and the nutrients where they were placed."

Hoeger has never been a huge fan of tillage, as it takes extra time to do and can create more compaction in the field. He has implemented minimum tillage practices on his farm and has become a fan of no-till management. His hopes are for his farm to continue to use no-till practices in the future.

The Maynard farmer believes that cover crops will be an important tool for farmers in order to better their soil infiltration and help retain excess nitrogen to keep it out of our rivers, as water quality is an important issue affecting the agricultural community. Cover crops should also help with the management of resistant weeds.

"Weeds are tough to kill!" Hoeger exclaimed. "We need to keep on top of them each year, or else the next year will be a bigger problem."

With his passion, Paul serves on the Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District Commission. Through his farming practices and his involve-

ment with county conservation, he hopes to spread awareness to farmers and all residents of Fayette County to help make a difference for future generations, including both those who want to farm and those who live around them.

Paul strives to spread knowledge of soil and water quality issues and is glad to see other organizations like the Iowa Corn Growers Association, Iowa Soybean Association, Resource Conservation and Development offices, and the Farm Service Agency working to promote responsible land management practices. It is also necessary for farmers to pay attention to their manure management plans.

When it comes to giving advice to younger farmers, Hoeger notes that it is important for farmers to be good stewards of the land and be involved in doing their best to monitor and develop their soil health. It is also necessary for landlords to be involved in their farms as well.

"I think that using practices like cover crops and paying attention to soil health may offer just as good of benefits as pushing fertilizer and sprays," he said. "Spending time and investing in the soil isn't as glamorous as buying new equipment, though."

"It is important to keep experimenting and finding new ways to do things," added wife Phyllis, originally of Breda, Iowa.

As this longtime farmer looks toward retirement, he has enrolled part of his home farm in the Gaining Grounds CRP Program. The program consists of a mix of wildflowers and grasses that must be mowed until it is fully established. The Hoegers are hoping to see more pheasants in the future.

When he's not busy on the farm or working with county conservation groups, Paul spends his time helping neighbors and taking care of their poultry, volunteering as a First Responder in the town of Maynard, and working on projects around the couple's home.

"We need to work to develop our soil health and 'treat the disease' rather than the symptoms," Hoeger closed. "It's hard to change, and I don't blame guys for being hesitant. But the more people we get talking and involved, the better."

Soil Health Key Points

What's critical about soil health now?

1. World population is projected to increase from 7 billion in 2013 to more than 9 billion in 2050. To sustain this level of growth, food production will need to rise by 70 percent.
 2. Between 1982 - 2007, 14 million acres of prime farmland in the U.S. were lost to development.
 3. Improving soil health is key to long-term, sustainable agricultural production.
- Soil health matters because:**
1. Healthy soils are high-performing, productive soils.
 2. Healthy soils reduce production costs - and improve profits.
 3. Healthy soils protect natural resources on and off the farm.
 4. Franklin Roosevelt's statement, "The nation that destroys its soil destroys itself," is as true today as it was 75 years ago.
 5. Healthy soils can reduce nutrient loading and sediment runoff, increase efficiencies, and sustain wildlife habitat.

What are the benefits of healthy soil?

1. Healthy soil holds more water (by binding it to organic matter), and loses less water to runoff and evaporation.
2. Organic matter builds as tillage declines and plants and residue cover the soil. Organic matter holds 18-20 times its weight in water and recycles nutrients for plants to use.
3. One percent of organic matter in the top six inches of soil would hold approximately 27,000 gallons of water per acre!
4. Most farmers can increase their soil organic matter in **three to 10 years** if they are motivated about adopting conservation practices to achieve this goal.

How to begin your path to health soils:

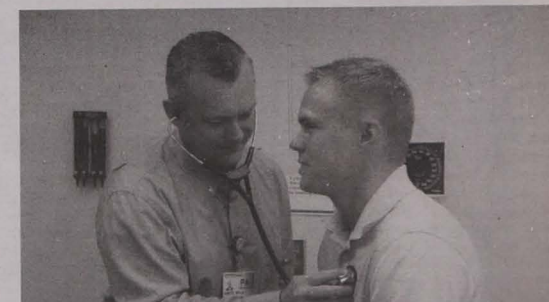
1. Keep it covered.
2. Do not disturb
3. Use cover crops and rotation to feed your soil.
4. Develop a **soil health management plan** with the help of NRCS.

Follow four basic soil health principles to improve soil health and sustainability:

1. Use plant diversity to increase diversity in the soil.
2. Manage soils more by disturbing them less.
3. Keep plants growing throughout the year to feed the soil.
4. Keep the soil covered as much as possible.

What is a Soil Management Plan?

1. It's a roadmap to soil health.
 2. It outlines a system of practices needed to enhance crop production and soil function, and improve or sustain water quality, air quality, energy efficiency and wildlife habitat.
- Some of the recommended conservation practices include: Conservation Crop Rotation, Cover Crops, No Till, Mulching, Nutrient Management, and Pest Management.
3. It provides environmental, economic, health, and societal benefits.
 4. It **saves energy** by using less fuel for tillage, and maximizes nutrient cycling.
 5. It **saves water** and increases drought tolerance by increasing infiltration and water holding capacity as soil organic matter increases.
 6. It **reduces disease** and pest problems.
 7. It **improves income sustainability** for farms and ranches.
 8. It **improves plant health**.



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Teaching conservation and nature to the next generation

By Ron Lenth, ISU Extension

How can we instill a Culture of Conservation in our youth whose life is surrounded by cell phones, sports, and video games? One day they are bouncing on our laps and the next day they're leaving for school, work, or the military. Someday some will play a key role in creating our future conservation and land use issues, soil and water legislation; and others will be raising their own children--

--what have they learned to share with that generation?

Several organizations such as county Soil and Water Conservation Districts, 4-H, Scouts, Take A Kid Outdoors (TAKO), etc., host field days, programs, and events to bring them closer to the land and how nature is interrelated with our lives and future.

What are some ways these groups, parents, and volunteers are locally getting kids involved

with our natural world? One of our greatest treasures is in our own backyard....our county park system.

Take kids on a nature hike and show them how to identify (any maybe learn yourself) different trees and why they grow where they do

Bring them to an area trout hatchery and explain why clean water and conservation is so vital to trout

Get their hands dirty planting a tree and explain how long it takes for a tree to grow

Get a copy of animal tracks and have the kids identify them in the wild

Walk them in a grassed waterway and explain why they are important

Have them plant a small garden and take a soil sample to figure out the fertility level and needs

Go fishing at a local pond or river and use this as a teachable moment about keeping soil on the land and out of our streams.

On road trips when you pass one, explain the role of a contour strip, cover crop, windbreak, etc. Don't assume they know.

Kids learn by doing, so it's up to each of us to do our part . . . and they will enjoy it.



Soil conservationist Halley Williams

By CHRIS DEBACK
Contributing Writer

Halley Williams is a new soil conservationist working in Fayette County through the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS).

The Barneveld, Wis., native graduated from Dodgeville High School in 2009. Not entirely sure what she wanted to do for a career, Williams took a few years off before attending college. In 2012, she enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and graduated in May 2016 with a bachelor's degree in crop and soil science. She also has a minor in environmental science.

Growing up in Barneveld wasn't much different from the small towns here in northeast Iowa. She comes from a farming background and knew she wanted to be involved in the agriculture industry in some way.

Williams interned in Muscatine through the Pathways program at the NRCS before being transferred to Fayette County.

As a soil conservationist, it's Halley's job to help with the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) planning.

"I kind of wanted to stay in the agriculture field and add conservation to it," she said. "I like my job a lot. I have been learning a lot and meeting a lot of new people. I have come a long way from what I started with."

The 26-year-old currently lives in West Union. She enjoys living and working in northeast Iowa and is excited about her first career position.



Halley Williams



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23P010-2013-IA

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

By Jesse Wegner

Farm Program Signup Underway

Producers are encouraged to stop by the Fayette County FSA office to complete their 2017 ARC/PLC contract enrollment, sign their 2017 Adjusted Gross Income Certification, and inform FSA staff of any other major changes in their farming operation.

If triggered by commodity prices or revenue, ARC/PLC payments for the 2017 crop year will be paid after October 1, 2018. Since ARC/PLC payments are based on Market Year Average (MYA) commodity prices and actual county average yields, payment s cannot be calculated until nearly a year after harvest for most crops.

This is a reminder that ARC / PLC contract enrollment is an annual task and must be completed to be eligible for any earned payment.

Please help eliminate office congestion during acreage reporting by completing these tasks today! Failure to sign an annual contract will leave you with no safety net for any year a contract is not signed. Please don't put it off. We thank you in advance!

Updates for your CRP Acres Establishment Seeding:

The Fayette County FSA office has mailed out cost-share paperwork to all producers who are scheduled for 2017 activities. If your CRP establishment seeding isn't finished, don't worry there's still plenty of time. CRP Primary

Nesting dates (May 15 - August 1) do not apply during the establishment period of CRP; however, you may want to check with NRCS on the seeding dates for your specific seed type.

To ensure a successful seeding, please consult with your contractor to determine that the necessary field preparations are taken before your seeding takes place.

If your seeding does not get completed this spring, a temporary seeding will be REQUIRED, additional planning with NRCS may be needed.

Once your CRP is seeded, timely mowing is the best method to get your seeding established.

Mid-Contract Management (MCM) Activities:

Mid-Contract Management (MCM) is a requirement for CRP. Producers, who are participating in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) are reminded to complete the required MCM activities as defined in your conservation plan.

As the spring burning window ends, planning an alternative MCM activity is a must, 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.

Please make the necessary arrangements to get your practice completed BEFORE May 15 or AFTER August 1. Absolutely no MCM activities are to be com-

pleted during the primary nesting season.

CRP Cost-Share:

Once your CRP establishment and/or MCM practice has been completed please contact FSA as soon as possible to finalize certification paperwork and turn in paid bills so cost-share payments can be calculated and paid. If you have questions, please call the FSA office and we can assist you with the paper work.

Spot Treatment of Weeds:

All CRP that is not in its establishment period - may NOT be disturbed during the primary nesting season of May 15 - August 1, except for spot treatment of acreage to control noxious weeds or other undesirable species, as approved on a case-by-case basis, by the Fayette County Committee.

Annual or cosmetic mowing of CRP is prohibited at any time. Prior approval is required before any spot treatment is completed and should be limited to the immediate area of infestation.

Spot treatments should be conducted in the method that results in the least damage to the nesting wildlife and habitat.

Non-compliance of these restrictions for spot treatment could result in payment reductions and/or termination of the CRP contract. All CRP acreage is subject to spot check.

Hamlett selected as 2016 scholarship winner

By Brian Smith
Contributing Writer

Sally Hamlett was the recipient of the Class of 2016 Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District Scholarship, awarded last spring by the Conservation Districts of Iowa. Hamlett, who graduated from Starmont in May 2016, is the daughter of Mark and Jennifer Hamlett of Aurora.

The scholarship is open to students from Iowa schools who plan on pursuing programs of study in any field of conservation or agriculture. Hamlett's educational goals are to major in animal science at Iowa State University and then apply to the veterinary science program at ISU. She hopes to specialize in large-animal veterinary science while also having a small dairy farm of her own.

"Every farm has to have a waste management plan in place so that the ground around is being conserved. Each farm should also have a water management plan to prevent animals from getting sick by drinking contaminated water," said Hamlett, who is making plans to put her beliefs about soil and water conservation into practice.

Active in both FFA and 4-H, Hamlett took on several leadership roles during her high school years. She served as president of her 4-H club, secretary and president of County Council, and secretary of the 4-H Foundation. She also represented Fayette County as Fayette County Dairy Princess and has volunteered her time for food drives and tree plantings.

Hamlett, a member of the National Holstein Association and the Iowa Holstein Association, has gained a good deal of practical experience by working for Starmont Holsteins, Monsanto, and local farmers - experience she no doubt hopes to put into practice as she pursues her goal of becoming a veterinarian.

"Being a veterinarian will help me find new ways to feed animals so that they produce as little amount of wastes and contaminants as possible. I want the future generations of the world to know that it is important to preserve the world for future generations," added the Starmont graduate.

Fayette County SWCD is currently considering the applicants for the class of 2017, 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.



Sally Hamlett

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Fund Iowa's Natural Resources & Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund

By: Rod Marlatt, Director,
Fayette County Conservation
Board

It's a question that has been pondered, discussed and debated for decades. How does Iowa create a sustainable funding source for the natural resources needs of the state? How do we actually tackle our water quality issues, habitat needs and soil health, and increase the recreational opportunities throughout Iowa?

That question has actually been answered. It was answered, vetted, and voted upon by the citizens of Iowa. After two consecutive years of required legislative approval, the citizens of Iowa were given the opportunity to vote upon the addition of a constitutional amendment called the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. This amendment also referred to as "Iowa's Water and Land Legacy" was passed in the general election of 2010 by 63%. The amendment and its formula says that the next time a sales tax increase is implemented in Iowa, the first 3/8 of a cent goes into the Trust Fund. The legislature could also modify the existing sales tax spending methods to fund the Trust.

Incredibly, recent local conversations and polling has shown that many voters actually thought that the Trust was funded when they voted for it. When asked if they still supported a sales tax increase to fund the Trust, almost all voters said yes.

Fully funding the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation

Trust Fund would mean around \$150 million each year. Not over time, but each year. Sixty to seventy percent of those funds will go to projects that directly and positively affect improvements to Iowa's water quality issues; issues that nearly all Iowan and legislators agree must be addressed. Every year the legislature wrestles with ideas and methods to fund water quality improvement. This is frustrating given the fact that the voters in Iowa have already approved the vehicle to do so with an actual amendment to our constitution. This concept is not new to the Midwest. Both Missouri and Minnesota have implemented this funding and are lightyears ahead of us in this regard. Let's not tell our children and grandchildren that if you want to recreate to go to Missouri and/or Minnesota.

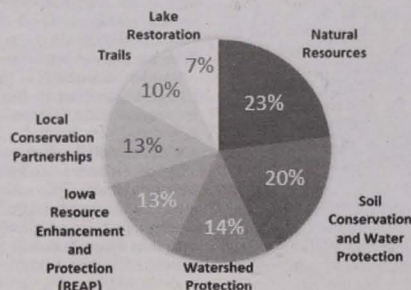
Incidentally, Iowa ranks 50th

in the nation for public land opportunities. Admittedly, we are an agricultural state and probably won't be #1, but surely we can do better than that.

This is an opportunity for all Iowans, visitors, and tourists to share in the critical investment needed to enhance Iowa's natural resource future. The majority of Iowans still support funding the Trust and many don't realize that it still has not been funded. Hundreds of organizations, including most of our producer groups, support funding the Trust.

You can help shape the future of conservation in Iowa by contacting your legislators and letting them know that you not only support funding the Trust, but that "yes," you also support a sales tax increase or modification to do so!

To find out more, go to: www.iowaswaterandlandlegacy.org



Herbicides Effect Cover Crop Establishment

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

Iowa farmers planted an estimated 500,000 cover crop acres last year, and although that record number is expected to increase in 2017, many of those farmers struggle to find a foolproof way to get consistent cover crop establishment.

Lack of rainfall and cool temperatures are cover crop growth obstacles which can't be controlled, but one thing that can be controlled is choosing the right herbicide this spring to reduce potentially injuring cover crops in the fall.

"What herbicide you choose this spring will definitely have an effect on success with cover crops in the fall," said Barb Stewart, state agronomist with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Des Moines. "In most cases there is a short time period between cover crop planting date and the onset of cooler fall temperatures, which increases the risk that herbicides pose to cover crops."

According to Iowa State University's "Effect of Residual Herbicides on Cover Crop Establishment" (Hartzler and Anderson, Feb. 20, 2015), the threat posed by herbicide to cover crop establishment is determined by:

- the chemical's half-life and availability in the soil,
- sensitivity of cover crop species,
- herbicide application rate and date, and
- environmental conditions throughout the growing season.

Hartzler and Anderson conducted greenhouse experiments of five cover crop species evaluating several herbicides commonly used in Iowa corn and soybean production. Radishes tended to be the most sensitive cover crop evaluated, while cereal rye was the most tolerant to herbicides.

Stewart says livestock producers who use cover crops for livestock forage should also consider restrictions on labels of herbicides used earlier in the growing season.

Iowa State University's "Herbicide Use May Restrict Grazing Options for Cover Crops" (CROP 3082, December 2015) includes tables that list herbicide products that allow the establishment of cover crops for grazing or forage harvest during the same cropping season as application.

For more information about herbicide use and cover crops, refer to:

- "Effect of Residual Herbicides on Cover Crop Establishment," Iowa State University Extension
- "Herbicide Use May Restrict Grazing Options for Cover Crops," Iowa State University Extension
- "Herbicide Rotation Restrictions in Forage and Cover Crop Cropping Systems," University of Wisconsin Extension

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Deutsch Farms Established in 2003

By Leon Deutsch



In the summer of 2003 my wife and I bought 20 acres of timber and HEL (highly erodible land) in Clayton County without having any idea that we would eventually be moving to Fayette County to retire. As it turned out, it was the best thing we have ever done. During that summer we worked hard to improve the land and make it a place for our friends and family to gather to get away from the city and enjoy the outdoors. Later that year we acquired a small house in the city of Volga to use as a cabin and place to hang our hat when we were at the land outside of town. When this all started we knew no one in the area, but soon met a lot of good people and made new friends. The 5 acres of land that was supposed to be cropland was enrolled in the SAFE program, and we did a nut seeding and planted 150 Red and White Oak trees in rows to get the new timber started.

Everything was going along as planned until the summer of 2007 when my son sent me an email telling me he found a place south of Wadena that would make a good building site for a real cabin in the woods rather than a house in town. I thought this was a great idea and my wife disagreed. She said if we were going to build something we would be building a house and we would move to the country together. From that day on we never looked back. We bought the 70 acres of what some would

call worthless land and started to clear the old dilapidated farmstead apart and make room for a shed and a place to build our new home. We worked hard on it every moment we had. There were paths to be cut so we could get around on the land and everything seemed to be up hill no matter which way we went.

As it turned out there was a small creek in the middle of the property that made it hard to get to the back half of the farm. In 2008 our shed was completed despite all the rain we had that year and plans were started for the construction of our new home in 2009.

With the help of the State Foresters, a Timber Management Plan was put together and work began on the timber improvements that were required. TSI work was completed, a small timber sale was done, and hundreds of Oak trees were planted on some of the HEL acres. In a couple of years, the forestry plan was completed and our small place was the site of a Forestry field day. It was great to see over 100 people show up and see what had taken place and share their ideas and experiences with us.

The spring of 2009 was upon us and we had our plans for the new house in the woods as our grandchildren called. A very good



friend of ours told us that if we would build it they would come. Construction started in June of 2009 and was completed by Thanksgiving. The carpenter who was in charge of the construction lived only a little ways away in the town of Wadena, so there were no delays during the project. It took us a while to sell our house in Waverly, Iowa but on Valentine's Day of 2010 we moved into our new home. At that point it was easy to think that we were home free, but that was not the case. With the house done and being here full time we were able to concentrate on the development of the land and timber very aggressively. All the cropland had been converted to some type of CRP program for habitat and erosion prevention and were in what we thought was a maintenance mode. Little did we know that the maintenance mode was more work than the development mode. The to do list to improve the property kept growing

despite the completion of many tasks each week. Our goal was and remains that we leave the property in better condition when we are gone than when we arrived. It is hard to put into words the satisfaction we have received from all the work done. Both my father and my wife Linda's father were both small farmers and they told us that we are only stewards of the land while we are here and we

have an obligation to take the best care of it possible. I guess that is why we have such a passion for the land.

Everything started to settle down a bit, but we still had the problem of getting to the back 40 as some would say due to the small creek and wetland. My neighbor and good friend said this is a simple problem and can be solved relatively easily. He had a vision of there being a pond located in the bottom land about in the middle of the property. At first thought we agreed and with his assistance and that of the NRCS office, the Army Corp of Engineers and the Area Wetlands office a plan was developed and implemented within a very short time. Construction started in August of 2014 and was completed within 30 days. A total of about 12,000 cubic yards of dirt were moved to build a dam across the wetland area allow a pond to be formed. It is approximately 1.6

acres and has a depth of 15 feet. It now provides habitat for all the wildlife as well as a way to get to the back 40. When the pond was partially filled a fish stocking program was implemented with the Decorah Fish Hatchery and we now have bass, bluegills and catfish in the pond. The pond filled to its capacity in about 90 days with the help of some much needed rains and the run off from the 55 acres of watershed area.

Since the pond construction we have concentrated our improvements on the cleanup of timber areas, paths through the timber and additional habitat for the wildlife of all kinds. There are so many things to do and it seems so little time to get them done so we continue and a daily basis doing what we can to make our little corner in Fayette County a better place to live.

Outside our small farm we spend our time supporting the local Pheasants Forever Chapter, the Fayette County Soil & Water Conservation District and doing as much hunting and fishing as possible. We are fortunate that our eight grandchildren enjoy the same things we do and cherish every moment we can spend with them in the outdoors.

We would like to thank all the friends and neighbors in the area who have made our new home in the woods a wonderful place to live. Also all the local contractors who have helped us develop this little place we call home. If you are traveling south of Wadena keep an eye out for us about a mile south of town on the right hand side of the road. If you have time stop in and see us at "Eagle Valley".

The Iowa Soybean Association (ISA) develops policies and programs that help farmers expand profit opportunities while promoting environmentally sensitive production using the

Soybean Checkoff and other resources. The Association is governed by an elected board of 21 volunteer farmers and serves more than 11,000 members throughout the state.

ISA was organized in 1964 by a group of Iowa farmers who came together with a common goal – to increase the profitability of soybean production in the state. At that time, the U.S. grew 701 million bushels of soybeans at a price of \$2.62 per bushel. In 2004, the U.S. grew nearly 3.2 million bushels of soybeans at a price of \$5.65 per bushel. Iowa is always a top soybean-producing state, and in 2004 it grew 497 million bushels of the total U.S. crop.

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The Iowa Corn Growers Association (ICGA) is a membership organization lobbying on agricultural issues on behalf of its 8,000 members.

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We are now accepting new members! For more information, please visit us online at www.iowacorn.org.

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Fayette County Corn and Soybean Association

Overcoming the Obstacles of Conservation

by Tim Bruhler

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 until I was a junior in high school to make ends meet. Dad would leave before we got up in the



Tim Bruhler

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 new Fayette County SWCD Commissioner, I have been tasked with breaking down 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 our pride.

Creating our own traditions

Oftentimes, a big reason why farmers don't switch to a true conservation tillage system is because they are stuck in old traditions. 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 forgotten. 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 still 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, no-tilling 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 be ahead of the game. Conservation is the way of the future, so what better time to start than now!

New FCSWD commissioner Leon Deutsch

By CHRIS DEBACK

Contributing Writer

From an early age, land conservation has been a top priority for new Fayette County Soil and Water District Commissioner (FCSWD) Leon Deutsch.

"My dad told me when I was a young man that we had to take care of the soil and water because that was so important to the world," Deutsch said. "We are only caretakers of the land; we should leave the land in better shape than when we got it."

Deutsch grew up near New Hampton, graduating from the local high school in 1968. He then attended the University of Northern Iowa, where he earned a bachelor's degree in accounting in 1973. While at UNI he

met his wife, Linda, and the two were married before he graduated.

His first job was working in the accounting department at the former Terex Cranes in Waverly. Over a 31-year career at Terex, Deutsch eventually moved into management and was president of the Waverly operation when he retired in 2010.

In 2007, the couple bought land in rural Wadena, built a shed on the property in 2008 and a house in 2009. After retiring, they moved to their acreage and have since built a pond and enrolled seven acres of land into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). This spring, he has three acres of CRP left to plant. The couple also planted over 1,000 trees and shrubs on five acres of their land. In total, Deutsch has 120 acres of land, 100 of which are in Fayette County.

"I got involved with the FCSWD after I saw how important it is," Deutsch explained. "The Army Corps of Engineers goes through a lot to protect the water. We're just above Brush Creek, so we had to get a permit with them to build out our pond, even though we didn't do any excava-

tion; we just built a dike and that blocked it up. Little streams feed into Brush Creek, and Brush Creek runs into Otter Creek, which runs into the Volga, so it eventually gets to federal water."

As a new commissioner, Deutsch would like to tackle water quality, ensuring that harmful runoff into creeks, streams and rivers can be as limited as possible.

"You read so much about the nitrate levels in the water; hopefully, we can get people to become more aware of that by giving testing kits," he closed. "I wasn't really involved in the Otter Creek watershed project, but I did a lot of reading and studying on it and listened to a lot about it. The portion that they have done has made an impact already. We have seen the flash floods in 2008 and all the other years we have had flooding around here. Projects like Otter Creek are so important. You have to start at the top; you can't start at the bottom to fix these things. I am retired and I like to keep busy, so it is something that I like to do."



Leon Deutsch

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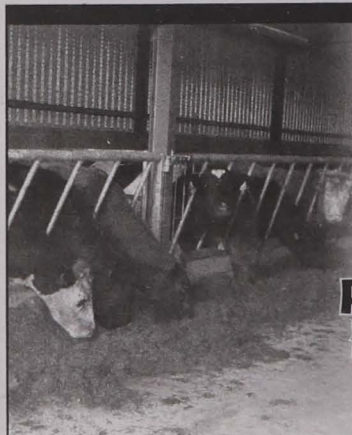
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Diemers receive windbreak award

By Zakary Kriener
Contributing Writer

The Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District was honored to present Kim and Kathie Diemer of rural Hawkeye with the 2016 Izaak Walton League Windbreak Award earlier this year.

Each year, the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) presents the award to a deserving recipient who has established an effective windbreak.

When the Diemer family built a new home on their Fayette County farmstead in 1996, the windbreak was one of the first things to be complete.

"We planted about 150 total trees," said Kim, who along with his brother farms approximately 1,000 acres of corn and soybeans. "The majority of the trees are arborvitae, but we also have some Black Hills spruce in the windbreak."

The tree line extends along the north and west borders of the property, which is otherwise surrounded by open fields.

"The windbreak definitely does its job," stated Diemer, who also raises hogs, cattle, and Boer goats. "Without it, the farm would be a mess during the winter months. It helps save a lot of time and resources that would otherwise be spent digging out after each snowfall."

The local farmer went on to say that when the trees were planted, they lost only one or two in year one.

"We got the trees from the Fort Atkinson Nursery, and they were planted after we had the area mapped and staked out by one of the NRCS programs," he explained. "In 2012, which was a dry year, we put in a drip line watering system to help make sure we did not lose any of the trees."

As for the benefits of having the windbreak, which took several years to mature before it became effective, the family enjoys the beauty of the trees and the wildlife drawn to them.

The Diemers contribute to conservation in several other ways in addition to the windbreak. In their farming practices, they utilize filter strips, conservation till practices, and recently began using cover crops on their farmland.

"It's important to make sure we do all we can to conserve our natural resources," closed Diemer. "Not only does it benefit our current farming operation, it will keep the land viable for generations to come."



Kim Diemer of rural Hawkeye was awarded the Izaak Walton League Windbreak Award for the approximately 150-tree windbreak he planted in 1996. The Fayette County farmstead is protected from the harsh winds and blowing snow that would otherwise make it difficult for daily chores on the Diemer farm. (Zakary Kriener photo)



This windbreak, which is now over 20 years old, consists of 150 total trees, including approximately 100 arborvitae trees, which provide the Kim Diemer property near Hawkeye with protection from wind and snow. (Zakary Kriener photo)

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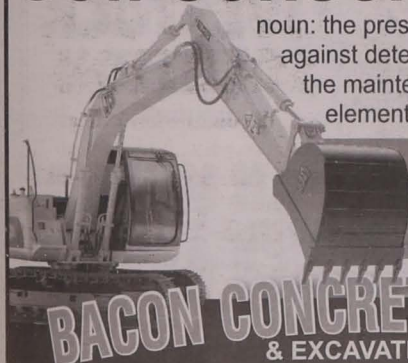
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soil conservation:

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Tallgrass Prairie Center

The Tallgrass Prairie Center is a nationally recognized leader in native vegetation restoration research, education and technology transfer. Since 1999 we have provided unbiased scientific information to support Iowa's Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) program, which involves 60% of public land in the state. Past accomplishments include the creation of foundation source-identified seed - 69 of the region's ~ 140 commercially available species, and the richest palette of available species for reconstruction efforts in the country. We collaborate with UNI's Department of Biology faculty and staff, who train and supervise six to eight undergraduate students per summer in vegetation and pollinator habitat evaluation.

The Prairie on Farms Program revolves around agricultural conservation ranging from monarch and pollinator habitat, to flood resilience, to nutrient reduction. Our general strategy for the Prairie on Farms program has four main components; the creation of demonstration sites designed for learning; technology transfer through focused training such as field days, workshops, and on-line tools; applied research, and support for a "community of practice" that is, bringing practitioners together to learn from one another, identify key barriers and challenges, and expand their technical capacity.

We have four demonstration field days planned for this 2017:

- 1) June 20th 9:00-11:00 Dysart Farm
- 2) June 22nd 9:00-12:00 Nashua Research Farm (lunch included)
- 3) September 20th 9:00-12:00 Cedar Falls Farm (lunch included)
- 4) September 21st 4:30-6:30 Roadman Farm, Dike (Dinner included)

Attendees will learn the benefits that native prairie can provide on agricultural farms. This event is for conservation planners, technical service providers, landowners, land managers and those interested in learning more about how to have a successful prairie planting. All field days will cover similar topics: 1st and 2nd year maintenance and weed control, stand evaluation, side-by-side comparison of three different seed mixes, and how to determine the proper seed mix for site-specific locations.

For field day locations and more information please visit <https://www.tallgrassprairiecenter.org/> or email Ashley.kittle@uni.edu or call 319-273-3828.



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