

Special ornament thanks farmers

Many Iowa farmers are recognized for their efforts to comply with conservation regulations.

By **DON MUHM**

SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Hanging from Christmas trees in nearly 20,000 Iowa farm homes this year is a distinctive pewter ornament.

Its purpose is to express appreciation to farmers and landowners for conservation work done since the debut of tougher soil-saving and water-protection rules ushered in via the 1985 farm bill.

The specially designed ornaments are oval and feature an engraved conservation farm scene with the simple words, "Thank You."

The effort was arranged by Iowa conservationists, farm groups, agribusinesses and others.

"Special Appreciation"

Many conservation award programs are maintained locally, said Glenn Buresh of Ely, president of the Iowa Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners. "But since there has been so much (soil conser-



ORNAMENT Please turn to Page 2

The pewter Christmas tree ornaments feature an engraved farm conservation scene.

Ornament thanks farmers for conservation

ORNAMENT

Continued from Page 1

vation) work done in just the past few years, we felt some kind of special appreciation and recognition was in order."

The record of progress was underscored by Leroy Brown, the state conservationist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's old Soil Conservation Service, renamed the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"We've got more grass, more trees, more wildlife habitat and wildlife, plus better soil protection in Iowa now," said Brown.

Soil loss has been reduced by 35 percent in the past 10 years, Brown said. Iowans also have enrolled 2.1 million acres of highly erodible land in the Conservation Reserve Program — the centerpiece in the conservation section of the 1985 farm bill.

Full Compliance

The bottom line, according to Brown, is that nine out of 10 Iowa farmers are in full compliance with regulations provided by the federal soil conservation and wetlands preservation mandates of the historic '85

farm bill.

In addition, tree-plantings have increased 10 percent and 33,000 acres of wetlands have been restored across the state.

Moreover, Brown noted, Iowa farmers have reduced the possibility of water pollution through a significant reduction in farm chemicals. Nitrogen use, for example, has declined from an average of 90 pounds per acre in cornfields in 1985 to 77 pounds in 1993.

In addition to the ornament given out in 82 participating Iowa counties, the farmers also received:

- A thank-you card for taking care of Iowa's land and water. The card listed the major financial supporters of the Conservation Farmer Appreciation program and this message, in part:

"Iowans recognize the efforts you have made in soil conservation and improving water quality . . . Nearly all Iowa farmers have made progress in improving the environment, but you have been selected as a farm family who has gone the extra step. . ."

- A letter jointly written by Iowa's two U.S. senators, Tom Harkin and Charles Grassley.

- A window sticker proclaiming the owner is "proud to be a conser-

vation farmer."

All items were presented at local conservation appreciation open houses or meetings, said Lynn Betts of Des Moines, a conservation information specialist with the federal agency.

About 16 companies and organizations supported the effort with \$42,500 and a like amount in special merchandise coupons, Betts said.

Betts had no trouble attracting sponsors.

"Many people felt this was something that needed to be done," she said.

"Super"

One recipient, Charles McLaughlin of Britt — a conservation farmer and former president of the Iowa soil and water district commissioners' group — called it "a super idea."

"This was excellent," said McLaughlin, who was awarded at the Hancock County District's open house in Garner earlier this month. "People say 'thank you' less often than they should."

The open house sessions also featured a large, full-color Iowa poster showing 40 families and conservation projects on their farms. Brochures titled "40 Ways to Better Land and Water" were also available.

Betts and his staff produced the posters and brochure, which opens with "A Salute to Iowa's Conservation Farmers" that itemizes recent progress.

The brochure lists the Conservation Farmer Appreciation committee members: Iowa Corn Growers Association, Iowa State University Extension Service, Iowa Soybean Association, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Iowa Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and Division of Soil Conservation, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and USDA Farm Service Agency (Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service).

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