

FARM

Webster County launches county soil survey project

By **RANDY MUDGETT**
 Messenger staff writer

FORT DODGE – The first soil survey in nearly 40 years in Webster County was kicked off Tuesday during a ceremony at the Webster County Fairgrounds in Fort Dodge.

Gary Smith, district conservationist from the Webster County Natural Resources Conservation Service, said the new soil survey will benefit all the people in the county by providing up-to-date soil mapping of the county's many soil types.

"Soil types may not change much in the past 40 years, but the soils may be redefined," Smith said.

The soil survey is designed to provide modern information pertaining to evaluating potential soil and management techniques. The current soil survey will be incorporated into modern com-

puter-based soil data bases.

The \$700,000 Webster County project is partially funded by the county with the remainder of the expense for the four-year project funded by USDA's NRCS.

Robin Wisner, a soil scientist with NRCS, said soil samples will be taken in suspect areas where past surveys may have overlooked the zones. Wisner said about four soil scientists will work on the project in the county.

"We want to get more information to put in the soil survey," he said. "The soil types don't change much but we need to fine tune the report. The technology has improved by leaps and bounds since the last survey."

Recently, Humboldt County finalized work on updating the county's soil survey. The finalized computer-based maps were displayed during the county cer-

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emony. Farm managers, in particular, have said they can take advantage of the updated, computerized surveys by incorporating the soil information into cropping data for area farmers. In many cases, city planners, community officials, engineers, developers and home buyers can use the survey to plan land use and select sites for proper practices.

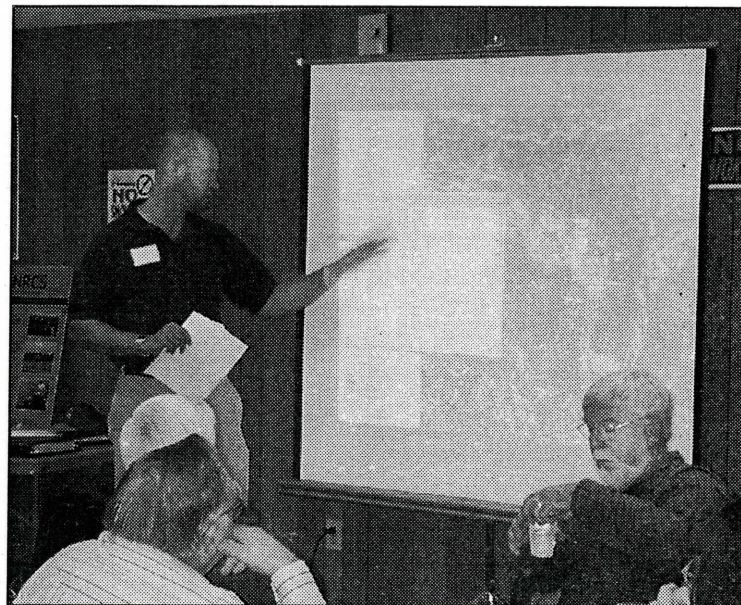
Mark Thompson, a land manager with Sunderman Farm Management, said the soil survey has

proven to be the single most critical piece of information the farm management operation uses when selling farmland or providing useful cropping practices.

Mike Sucik, a state soil scientist with NRCS, said farmers use the soil survey to base their current cash rent prices.

"How we use soil information has changed," said Sucik. "When the last survey was taken, farming practices were the focus. The demand for this information has increased. There are water quality issues, open feedlots and new regulations coming from the EPA. So, if we use this information to plan for the future, we can conserve all of our natural resources by using these surveys."

The first Webster County soil survey was performed in 1918 and then was updated in 1961. The last soil survey took six years to complete.



Messenger photo by Randy Mudgett

MIKE SUCIK, a state soil scientist with NRCS, points to a GPS map of recently taken soil surveys in Humboldt County. He said Webster County engineers, planners and farmers will greatly benefit from similar update soil maps in the county.