

Fall Ag Review

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Judge in home stretch in campaign for ag secretary

Albian sees every county in Iowa in quest for heading Iowa agriculture

By DAVE PAXTON
Editor and Publisher

Patty Judge has spent the better part of a year traveling hundreds and hundreds of miles into every county in Iowa, hitting 30 county fairs and meeting thousands of Iowans in her quest for Iowa Secretary of Agriculture.

She hasn't spent the kind of time and effort in her campaign to be satisfied coming in second, but realistically, she finds herself in the best of all political positions.

If she wins, she has a chance to help shape the future of an Iowa agriculture department that badly needs to prepare itself for the 21st century — one of the most exciting tasks in this midwest agricultural states.

In the event she loses, she maintains her powerful seat in the Iowa Senate, has enjoyed the opportunity of a lifetime in meeting Iowans from every corner of the state and has positioned herself for future political battles.

Her campaign started in January with the announcement of her campaign and a whirlwind trip around the state hitting all of the major cities in the state. Then she returned to the Senate and her campaign was greatly curtailed until May. The fact that she didn't have a Democratic challenger in the primary helped her jump start the campaign after the legislative session ended and she has been on the road non-stop since then.

"The fact that I didn't have a pri-

mary helped me keep focused on the work in the Senate," said Judge, who is in the middle of her second term representing the 46th District and holds the powerful position of Assistant Minority Leader for the Democrats in the Senate.

Adjournment came in late April and Judge moved out full speed on the campaign trail. Son, Joe, joined the campaign when classes ended in early May at the University of Iowa. The Judge's youngest son served as his mother's driver and assistant throughout the summer months.

When he returned to school in August, the campaign hired Mitchell Gross of Grinnell, who interned with U.S. Senator Tom Harkin. A graduate of Ripon College in Wisconsin, Gross has broad knowledge of agricultural and economic policy which helped as Judge faced critical questions about a collapsing world agricultural economy.

In the final week of her campaign, television advertising in major metropolitan markets in Iowa have taken the place of the daily grind of the campaign. She is still on the road, but is hitting spots she hopes will turn out big blocks of votes.

"I'm glad I did it," said Judge last week, suffering from a cold and sounding a little road weary. "I'll be glad when it's done. We've done some polling and we look good."

It hasn't been an easy year to be a Democratic politician. "The Clinton scandal isn't what people wanted to

talk to me about," said Judge. "The looming agriculture crisis really has been on everyone's mind. But Clinton's problems did affect fundraising."

"What people in Iowa wanted to talk about in this campaign is what the department of agriculture could do about the price of corn. What can we do to boost livestock prices. They wanted my feelings about us heading into another farm recession. I found the campaign very issue-oriented."

Unfortunately for Judge, whose family farms, many of the major problems facing Iowa farmers are federal issues. "Our agricultural economy is so tied to the world economy that there isn't a lot we can do to immediately improve prices," she said.

"Certainly things I'd advocate as ag secretary would be a strong Congressional lobby to push for things like Fast Track, the development of international markets, things like that," she said. "We need to network with trade organizations and development positions for Iowa in making our case to the federal government."

"In some ways, though, we're just going to have to weather the storm."

One thing the campaign has taught Judge is that fear of an impending ag disaster is in every corner of the state. "People are very concerned," she said. "No one is untouched. Those who survived the 80's are concerned we're going back to that economic situation."

Many people are wondering if they can weather that sort of thing again."

Judge doesn't think the same dynamics exist today as they did in the early 1980's. "We are not experiencing the high interest rates that started in the late 70's and stayed through the early 80's," she said. "There are not as many farmers who are leveraged like they were back then. I don't think we'll have the same kind of full-blown recession we saw at that time."

Judge said that it is hard in a campaign to have to tell people government can assure them of success. "I don't think that is the function of government," she said. "When things are totally beyond the control of the producer, the government does need to look at what it can do."

Freedom to Farm

Judge may differ from some of her more liberal Democratic friends in her continued support for the Freedom to Farm Act, derided by many as the "Freedom to Fail Act."

"A lot of people want to abandon it, but they will admit the plan has never been fully carried out," she said. The marketing component has never been tried. We can't say definitively whether it works or not until it is implemented."

Judge says that in her travels around the state she hasn't got the sense that people want to jettison the entire farm program. "Sometimes I'll be talking to people and they'll tell me they really support Freedom to Farm, then they'll tell

me components that need to be added that are totally against the spirit of the law. We're a long way from stabilizing the program and getting a true picture."

Judge has found a mixed reaction to the hog confinement issue around the state. "The issue is very localized," she said. "In some areas of the state it is the major hot button and in other areas it isn't a big deal."

"I think we passed good legislation last spring, setting up a new system of inspections and establishing construction standards," she said. "In the past we had inspection based on complaint. Now we have mandatory yearly inspection of facilities. If local people disagree with the DNR on the appropriateness of a site they can seek intervention from the EPP. What is yet to be seen is how the recent Supreme Court ruling making ag areas unconstitutional will affect farmers," she said.

"We tried hard to find a balance to let the hog industry grow and not drive them out, but make them operate in an environmentally sound manner. I think we've done a good job in Iowa finding that balance. I've looked at other states and their legislation and I'm proud of what we've accomplished."

One of her goals, should she win election as ag secretary, is to return livestock regulation to the Iowa Department of Agriculture. "The whole arena of livestock regulation has fallen by default to the DNR," she said. "I'll work to return inspec-

tion of livestock facilities back to the department of agriculture."

Attitudes in Iowa

The campaign has been a huge learning experience for Judge. Even though she has served in the Iowa Senate and has worked in different parts of the state as a farm mediator, Iowans, she has discovered, are different.

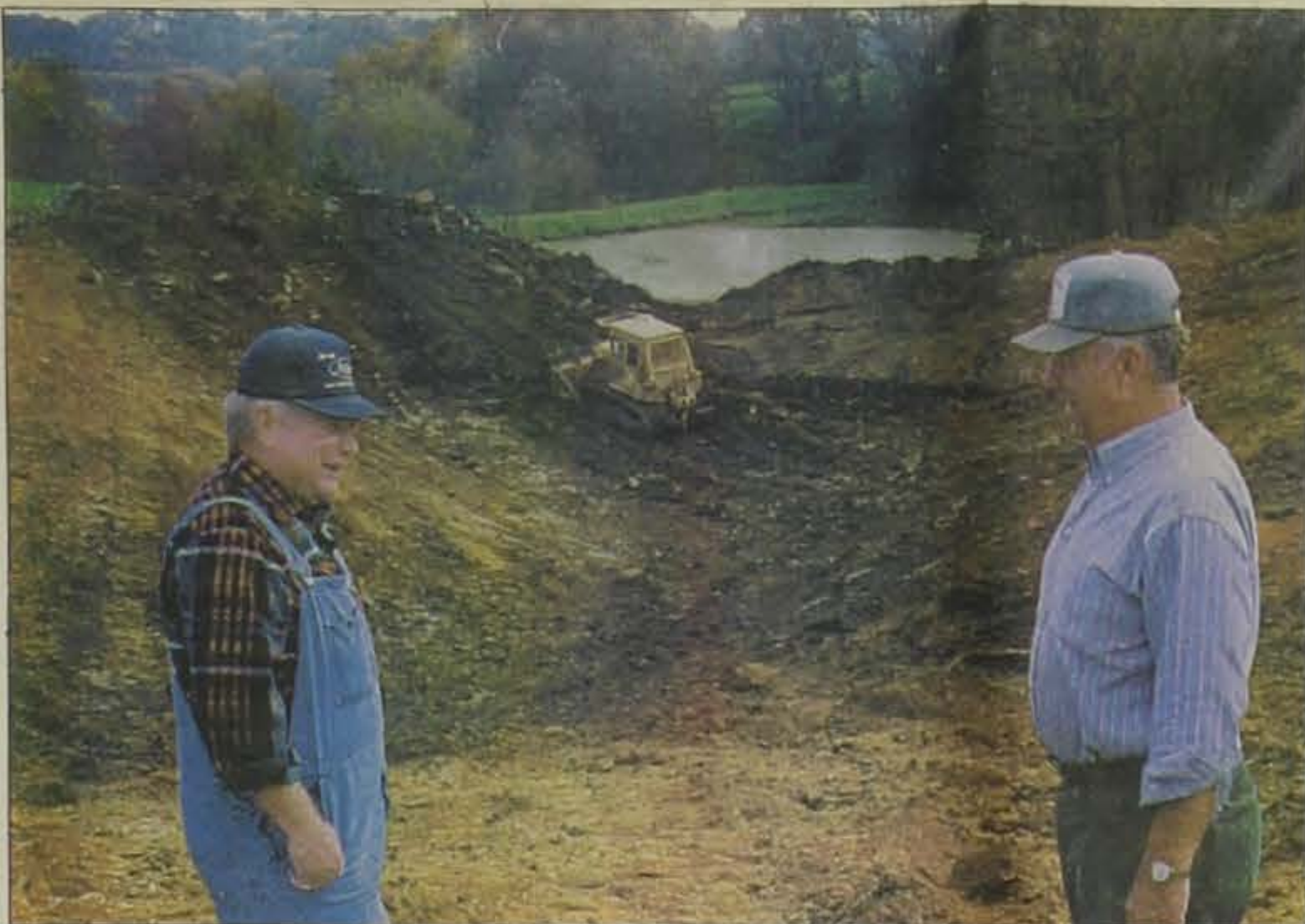
"We think of Iowa being so homogeneous, but there are differences," she said. "It is so interesting to travel to different communities and try to guess what they might be about by looking at their buildings, their churches, seeing what immigrant group originally settled in the area."

"I was in Emmetsburg doing a tour of four counties in far northwest Iowa and was being teased about the fact that no Democrats reside up there," she said. "I went anyway and had a good time. 'The richness of the soil in one part of the state compared to another really is a factor in how farmers approach different problems and challenges,' she said. 'I was in a part of the state where the soil is lush and after I spoke to a gentleman that came up to me and said, 'tell me one thing, how in the world do you folks make a living?' I said we are really resourceful.'"

Judge said that she didn't sense farmers in any sort of conflict with each other from one ag area to

PATTY JUDGE

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DAYTON KENDALL AND his earth-moving contractor, Frank Rhinehart, discuss the progress on completion of Kendall's new erosion control structure. Severe gully erosion contributed to a heavy sediment load into an existing pond. That will be solved by the new structure.

New hay directory available to farmers

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) is now accepting listings from Iowa hay and straw producers who wish to be included in the Department's 1999 Hay and Straw Directory.

This directory will list the names and locations of Iowa hay and straw producers and the types of forage they have to offer. It also will list Iowa hay associations, forage testing laboratories, auctions and dealers.

The 1998 Hay and Straw Directory listed 108 individual producers, four forage testing labs, eight forage auctions, 12 forage dealers and brokers, four custom hay grinders, 20 custom balers and numerous businesses and associations that serve hay producers.

Listing forms that are now available at County Extension offices and Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices. Completed forms should be mailed or faxed by Nov. 6 to the Agricultural Marketing Bureau, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Wallace Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Fax: 515-242-5015.

Loan Deficiency Payment information available on Iowa State web site

AMES — The Center for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD) at Iowa State University calculates the day-to-day fluctuation in the Loan Deficiency Payment (LDP) for corn and soybeans, and is offering this information on its Web site <www.card.iastate.edu>

The LDP constitutes one of the marketing options available to farmers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture under provisions of the 1996 Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act. The CARD Web page is presently the only public source offering daily updated LDPs for all counties in the Cornbelt.

Throughout the harvest and storage period ending May 31, 1999, county-specific information about the LDPs, as well as the loan rates, will be an important tool that growers can use to more effectively market their crops.

Low corn and soybean prices this growing season have placed greater emphasis on the governments price-support programs than in previous years. Choosing either the loan or the LDP, a farmer can: 1) request a loan at the county's given loan rate, or 2) collect the LDP, which pays the difference between the posted county price and the loan rate on any given day. Of course, the decision process is more complex and takes into account more variables than is suggested by these two choices.

For in-depth discussions and data, see CARD's Briefing Papers: Loan Deficiency Payments or the Loan Program and Are Loan Deficiency Payments Too Low in Iowa? (The first paper is available in print form as well as on-line, phone 515-294-7519; the second paper, which includes color maps, is available online only.)

Premium prices for tofu soybeans has Monroe County farmers going organic

By DAVE PAXTON
Editor and Publisher

When R.D. Curran read about Japan paying premium prices for organically grown, edible soybeans for its huge tofu market, he looked around the farm land he owns in south central Iowa and decided to give it a try.

An interesting niche market for a man whose entire life has been devoted to the livestock industry, but a move a lot of Iowa farmers are taking a look at as traditional markets for corn, soybeans, beef and pork remain depressed.

Tofu is a staple in the Japanese diet, said Curran, who is working on his second crop of organically-raised soybeans with another Monroe County farmer, Dean Lathrop. "The Japanese export markets are troubled right now, so we're not sure what the beans will eventually sell for," he said. "But tofu is what the Japanese base their diet around and the market isn't going to go away."

Information from Iowa State University suggests that prices for the specially grown, edible soybeans are anywhere from \$10-\$15 per bushel and sometimes higher. But there are reasons for the premium.

First of all, for the buyer and exporter of tofu beans, there is money to be made. About one bushel of soybeans makes 500 to 600 pounds of tofu, a food that Japanese use like Americans use bread.

On the grower side, it is somewhat more expensive. To grow the crop, says Curran, you almost have to step back 20 or 30 years in production techniques. "The growing and marketing of the beans is closely monitored by an organic certification group," he said. "You have to plant the soybeans on hay or pasture ground that hasn't had pesticide or herbicide application for the past three years. You plow and disc the ground like we used to do before the advent of modern herbicides to gain weed control. Then you rotary hoe it twice and cultivate it a couple of times. It's pretty labor intensive."

Curran and Lathrop used a Pioneer brand edible soybean, which is a bit bigger than a regular soybean and higher in protein.

"The first year the weed control isn't too bad," said Curran. "The second year you plant on the same ground

TOFU SOYBEANS

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ALBERT TANGIE, MONROE COUNTY SOIL and Water Conservation District Commissioner, and Drew Nardy, Assistant Manager at the Albia Hy-Vee store, stand next to the "No Fall Tillage" drop box. The campaign, sponsored by the Monroe County SWCD and Hy-Vee, is intended to provide some encouragement

to area farmers to save soil by not tilling their land this fall. By signing a no fall tillage pledge card, farmers are eligible for a series of drawings to be held in December for \$500 in cash and prizes. Farmers are encouraged to sign a new pledge card and drop it in the box each time they come into the store.