



Quad-County Conservation News

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Mystical hills touch Bob Romeo's soul; \$4,000,000 easement preserves them

By Dorathea Rebecca
Graham, Quad County
Conservation News

He liked to hunt around the timbers and the edges of the fields near Boys Town when he was a boy. He remembers west Omaha when it wasn't even Omaha or a stylish address, but simply farms and trees, with deer and other critters and brush and fence rows rife with pheasant and quail.

Then Bob Romeo, the city dweller who loved the land, bought a farm in the Honey Creek, Iowa area. It was a small farm and it was for sale by sealed bid. His was the highest. Now, he had to fig-

"He showed me a fence...a few inches of being covered. That's erosion," he told me.

--Bob Romeo,
Landowner

ure out what to do with it. He called the Pottawattamie County Soil and Water Conservation District office and Bill Hammitt, (then district conservationist) and asked him to come look at his 50 acre farm.

"He showed me a fence on the property that was within a few inches of being completely covered by soil. That's erosion," he told me. Coming from the city, I had no idea what erosion looked like." Hammitt helped him make up a conservation plan.

Not only did he learn about

ROMEO 4



Harrison County NRCS District Conservationist Russ Kurth (left) looks on as landowner Bob Romeo explains plan for \$4,000,000 conservation easement on his Honey Creek farm.

Quad County News/Pete Graham

INSIDE

● Avoca's Jim and Pat Sievers
build a pond, conserve habitat

SEE PAGE FIVE



In partnership with the land

By Lynna Miller
Crawford County Soil
Conservation Technician

Perhaps more than any other state, Iowa is land; great rolling reaches of it, blunt as a workboot, fine textured as Japanese paper. Georgia has its piedmont, Arizona its rock desert, but Iowa has, Iowa is, land. Everything that grows on it gratefully pushes roots into its dark soil; everything that humans build on it casts small shadows across its great presence. Land is to Iowa as water is to the sea, the one essential thing.

Drake Hokanson, author of that statement, surely knew what he was talking about.

Indeed our "Iowa" land is the "one essential thing." Our lives, especially those of the farmer, daily revolves around the land, literally depend on the soil. How fertile or poor. How wet or dry. How steep or flat.

So, quite naturally, most farmers are also conservationists. That term probably has several individual meanings because of the mere fact that it is so many practices and happens at so many levels. Conservation, as defined in the American Heritage Desk Dictionary, is "the controlled



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The Backhaus' have had no-till yield test plots for the Iowa Crop Improvement Association's Iowa Crop Performance Test for several years now. Rod notes that they are one of three farms in district 4 that provides crop yield data specifically for no-till. "This is an excellent source of information for those producers selecting NT hybrids," he says. You can find this info by going to [HYPERLINK http://www.iastate.edu/](http://www.iastate.edu/) www.iastate.edu/. Then select the following options: departments, agriculture, Extension, ISU Extension, Publications, Crop Yield Tests, and finally Iowa Crop Performances. If you don't have Internet access, this information is also available through the local extension office.



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Missouri Valley, Iowa 51555

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Lynn Petersen farm is Composting Central in Shelby County

By Dorathea Rebecca
Graham, Quad County
Conservation News

Lynn A. Petersen is deep into composting. For anyone that doesn't know what composting is, Lynn explains: "Composting is a process by which organic matter is decomposed to humus."

He goes on to say: "Organic matter, (such as) feed stock used on my farm are mostly old hay, yard waste (grass,

tree leaves, etc) wood chips and cattle manure." The compost piles are maintained on his traditional farm near Elk Horn, Iowa, and at another site.

The correct carbon to nitrogen ratio needs to be established when the piles are constructed.

"These feed stocks are inoculated with a compost starter when a "window" is made. Temperature is moni-

tored regularly with a compost thermometer. The piles are turned or stirred to regulate temperature and to admit oxygen to the center of the pile. Temperatures should not exceed 150 to 155 degrees F.

Aerobic microbes need oxygen just as humans do, thus the need to stir or turn the piles often for the first 30 to 40 days of the decomposing process. If the piles are kept aerobic throughout the pro-

cess, a higher quality product will be produced in the end.

"A sample of the finished product is taken from most of

the piles and sent to Agri Energy Resources for an anal-

PETERSEN 8



Lynn Petersen maintains a variety of carefully balanced, turned compost heaps on his farm for commercial and home use.

Quad County News/Pete Graham

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Romeo conservation easement

erosion, but he learned about terracing, and putting erosion control structures in the gullies to stop erosion of the banks. He even filled in a ravine. He jokingly told Russ Kurth, District Conservationist for Harrison County NRCS that he had put in terraces where he wasn't supposed to put in terraces.

But once it was done, he looked out over the land, over the beautiful vista, the "mystical" call of the Loess Hills settling on his soul and he knew he could not let what happened to all that land he had hunted as a boy, and watched bulldozed for houses, happen to his land, to the hills he'd come to love.

This time the advice came from Tim Sproul, executive director of the Harrison County Conservation Board. Sproul walked the land with Bob 15 years after Bill Hammitt had, and this time the advice was not to build any more conservation projects but to protect the land long-term with a conservation easement.

This was not as easy as it may seem. First, he had to have the land surveyed and divided up into building lots and have those lots (159 of them) assigned a value. In this case, the farmland, timber and native prairie, which comprises 500 acres in Harrison County and 250 in Pot-

tawattamie County, was valued at approximately \$4,000,000. Then the value of the land used as farmland and pasture, access roads and prairie and 13 building lots reserved for development by family members, heirs, or future owners, was deducted. The difference will be taken as a tax deduction, which Bob ruefully noted that his lawyer also informed him, would, in the case of such a large amount, automatically trigger an IRS audit. It's not all sunshine, no matter how good your intentions are.

Bob set his easement up with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation in Des Moines, which transferred it to the Harrison County Conservation Board. Bruce Mountain, speaking for the Foundation, stated that for a conservation easement to be accepted, it must be turned over to a conservation board or foundation for yearly oversight. The Foundation, in this case, felt the Harrison County Conservation Board was closer to the land and could more easily oversee the annual required inspection.

Mountain said that there were two kinds of conservation easements, one for conservation and one for taxes. The one for conservation, such as the Rocking R Farms, Inc. (the company that Bob Romeo founded to hold the

continued from page 1

land) is set up to keep the land from being sold to builders and to keep conservation steps taken by the corporation from being undone by future owners, such as the planting over of natural prairie, destruction of terraces or other conservation projects such as buffer strips in order to put more land into production.

Mountain also said there were tax easements. He said you could keep your land safe from anything as wild as kangaroo hunting to protecting one pine tree while building 100 houses around it. But if you are serious about keeping your land agricultural, with the conservation projects in place that you have put there and to have it put to the use you envisioned, then consider getting a conservation easement.

Bob Romeo made one further point. He has donated \$10,000, plus two percent of the value of any of the 13 lots held aside for development to the Harrison County Conservation board to be used to defend the easement against any future lawsuits. He said that the money could end up being used to defend the land against some future heir of his, but he doesn't care. He said there is no agreement or contract or legal document that can be drawn up that some lawyer somewhere, sometime, will not think he can unravel.

The farmed portion of the 750 acre tract is usually planted to corn and soybeans. There is some pasture for

horses. The rest is timber and there is 100 acres of mostly virgin prairie. The prairie has been burned off several times to bring out the native grasses and plants, which includes a rare prickly pear cactus and some 45 other species.

Bob started working for his father, Don, when he was sixteen. Don was founder and owner of Don Romeo Agency, the original "Romeo Entertainment," a widely noted booking agency for major entertainment for fairs and festivals. His Dad, however, insisted that he go to college, before coming into the business fulltime. So the Creighton Prep graduate went to the guidance counselors at the University of Omaha (now UNO) and asked what degree took the shortest amount of time. They told him "fire engineer and arson investigator." So that's what he took, graduating in 1978, three years after high school. Then he went into business with his father.

He designed one of the first retractable stages, while working with his Dad, for outdoor concerts and founded Four Star Productions in 1976, handling production for outdoor shows.

He bought the Don Romeo Agency from his Dad in 1989.

Bob is now President of Romeo Entertainment Group, a TBA Entertainment Company, which purchased Romeo Entertainment last year. It has offices in Omaha. Bob now works out of a large, rustic office complex just west of Crescent, Iowa.

Bob has booked shows for over 20 years. He is an integral part of the Country Music Industry, and has expanded Romeo Entertainment Group into one of the biggest and most powerful entertainment promoting and booking agencies in the country. Many of the most successful shows have been born of his creative ideas, including touring two headliners together from different walks of music such as "Alabama" and the "Doobie Brothers."

Career highlights include: 1993 CMA Country Music Association/SRO Talent Buyer of the Year; 1997 ACM Academy of Country Music Talent Buyer of the Year and formerly: Board of Directors (CMA Country Music Association President (EBA) International Entertainment Buyers Association.

Bob is married to Amy and he has four children: Dominic, who is the oldest, "R.J.," Michelle and Michael.

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Thoughts on spring planting, 2001

By Leslie Cleveland, Coop employee

As I write this on the last day of February, the outside temperature is eleven degrees and snow covers the ground. Everyone is complaining about how hard this winter has been.

But March is here and spring is definitely just around the corner--it may even happen overnight. If that turns out to be the case, how will you, as a producer, get the planting done? Do you feel the need to run over the ground with a disk to work residue in? Last year we used to figure that as a six-dollar per acre farm expense item. Increased fuel prices may make that number too low. Would a field cultivator that can handle crop residue work just as well? It would take less field time and would be less expensive to operate.

Reports tell us that we are in a dry cycle. Would it be best not to stir the soil at all? A no-till system that disturbs very little residue would keep that precious moisture from evaporating. It would also eliminate the expense of going over the ground with a disk or field cultivator.

Yes, the ground will not warm up as quickly; but have patience. The seed will sprout and grow. Just keep in mind that there's moisture there to sustain it into early summer. How are you going to fight the weeds? I had a local farmer in the other day that said he had tried no-till several years ago and it didn't work. This year he's going back to no-till because of the new improved herbicides. They are more farmer friendly and do a better job of controlling weeds.

As you make your tillage decisions for this spring, please take these things into consideration.

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How do you go about building a pond? Ask Jim Sievers and SWCD

By Dorathea Rebecca
Graham, Quad County
Conservation News

When he walked into the East Pottawattamie office of the NRCS, Jim Sievers wasn't sure what kind of help that they could offer: maybe some cost share on the pond he wanted to build?

Jim, owner of Sievers Plumbing Corporation in Avoca and his wife Pat, a

registered nurse, bought the approximately 70 acre farm, where they had the pond dug out last January. The three staff members who worked on the project were: Denise Miller, a federal technician, Clair Acker, the state technician and Michelle Zimmerman, a county resource planner. They

SIEVERS 9



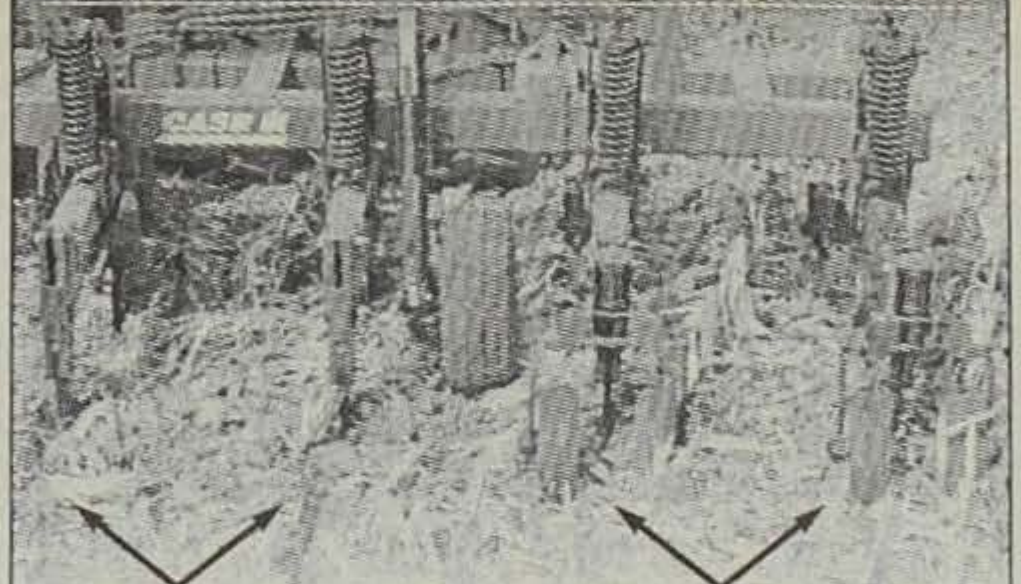
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use and systematic protection of natural resources."

A commendable undertaking in the eyes of most when you consider all the variables that are ultimately included in that process. However, Dennis, Rodney and Jerry Backhaus, father and son(s) farmers of rural Vail, feel that their No-Till farming system has taken conservation one step further. They've seen first hand how No-Till not only "protects" the soil, but is also capable of rebuilding it.

continued from page 2

In 1984, son Rodney came home from college with a new idea: No-Till. Dad, Denny had been farming since the mid 1960s, and although they had been practicing minimum tillage since 1982, this was still a new concept.

According to Denny, his dad Harry didn't think much of the idea at all. They didn't have near the equipment, herbicide, or seed varieties available back then that they do now, but they went ahead and tried it. A field here and

there at first, then entire farms. It wasn't long before all of them, even grandpa, were believers. "Dad backs No-Till 110 percent now!", adds Denny with a smile.

Rodney admits that the biggest reason they started No-Till was for the fuel and soil savings but soon found that soil health improved along with infiltration rates. The big rains in the 90's were the true test. "We had very little runoff," Rodney says,

"while neighbors had terraces break--the soil just becomes a better sponge."

They credit the better soil permeability to higher earthworm populations, and the increased organic matter.

What about farmers just getting started in No-Till? Denny notes that there seemed to be an increase in no-till this spring just because of the moisture shortage but thinks most will probably go back to what they were doing before

already next year. "You need to change your whole frame of mind and stick to it (no-till) if you want it to work," says Rodney. When you're starting from scratch, there may be some problems as your soil makes the transition.

"They shouldn't give up right away," Dennis says, and adds, "(you've) gotta give it five years, then you'll start to see the real benefits." He realizes that farmers can't afford crop failures during these tight economic times but notes several advantages that have recently developed for the no-till farmer.

These include better herbicides and insecticides, genetically engineered seed varieties, improved planters and equipment, and recent high fuel prices also make it look more attractive. "Most of the problems associated with no-till, can be managed; even more so once you've done it a few years," Denny said.

The Backhaus' have also found a way to work livestock into their program. The 5500 head of hogs they send to market every year, produce approximately 700,000 gallons of liquid manure, all of which is utilized as fertilizer. The manure goes on cornstalks rather than bean stubble and is broadcast rather than injected or incorporated. The reasoning here being that soybeans utilize manure quite well and the cornstalks limit runoff since the manure isn't incorporated. (Note that incorporation would be equivalent to tillage.) "We spread when the soil is dry or frozen to minimize compaction," says Dennis, "and, we manage our application according to phosphorous levels instead of nitrogen. We have enough acres available to us that we can spread it pretty thin. We'd prefer using the liquid manure to commercial fertilizer; with the increased organic matter, the soil becomes a better sponge."

Grid sampling has also been incorporated with a GPS system on their farms. Commercial fertilizer, phosphorous, potassium (N-P-K) and lime are all applied at variable rates across the field. "This has really evened out the yield across the field. No-

Crawford NRCS/SWCD

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Re-elected Harrison County commissioners talk about future

Discuss goals for soil, water improvement

Three dedicated, long-time soil and water conservationists were re-elected in Harrison County during last November's General Election, starting their new terms in January, 2001. They are: Babetta Lucke, Zane McBride, and Anita Methers. The three recently discussed their backgrounds and hopes for the future for the Soil and Water Conservation District.

BABETTA LUCKE

Babetta Lucke, 62, of 3815 315th Street, Persia, has been a commissioner for seven years.

She farms 980 acres with her husband Bill near Persia and lives just two miles from where she was born and raised. The farm is planted to corn and soybeans, and in earlier years they raised livestock. Conservation structures and practices are in full use on their farm. The couple has four children, Kevin, Gay Lynn, Craig, and Ann. Grandchildren are David and Bryan.

Babetta attended classes at Mercy Hospital in Council Bluffs, 1957-59 and became a certified x-ray technician. She was employed in that capacity at Mercy from 1964-1990. She worked part-time for awhile after retiring. Since retirement, Babetta has been anything but retired, working with Bill in all aspects of farming, and providing much service to her constituents through the SWCD.

She said she began her SWCD career in March of 1994, when she received a letter asking if she would be interested in becoming an assistant commissioner. She was elected as commissioner in November of 1994, replacing Doyle Knadle, who had chosen not to run for re-election. "I thought I could learn a lot about water quality, one of my important issues, and help make it better for our children and adults, as well," Babetta noted. She has learned a great deal more and today she oversees maintenance for Harrison County structures in the Mosquito Creek Watershed, personally clearing away brush and performing other chores. She is the regional director of Region 5 of Conservation Districts of Iowa, which includes 10 districts. She has served as vice chairperson and is currently chairperson for the district, a position she has filled since 1997.

Babetta's goals for the Harrison County District are to maintain and improve the quality of soil and water resources, and be an advocate for terracing and no-till operations on the county's farms.

ZANE MCBRIDE

Zane McBride, 77, resides at 323 N. 4th Avenue, Logan, but is a life-long farmer. He and his son, Kent, farm over 400 acres with corn and soybeans, and keep some cattle in the warm months. Zane has been an assistant commissioner and commissioner for 29 years.

He and his wife, Alverna, married since 1956, have two sons, Kent and Karol. Grandchildren include: Gary and Teresa (Kent), and Valeria and Angia (Karol).

In addition to his SWCD duties, Zane is known far and wide for his 36 years of work for the Harrison County Fair as a member of its Board of Directors. He is also known for his ready wit and "zany" sense of humor.

Asked why he has spent so many years working for betterment of the county's soil and water resources, Zane said: "I suppose I just want to leave the place a better one than it was when I started. The Harmony Creek Watershed project was one of the first in Iowa, and my farm is in it. I'm proud of that!"

Zane said his goals for the district include continuing to have an excellent office, good personnel, and a great working relationship with the NRCS, all of which he said are in place today.

He is currently active in getting some structures completed in the Harris-Grove Watershed. Zane has served many times as contracting officer in the Mosquito Creek and Mill-Picayune Creek Watersheds.

ANITA METHERS

Anita Methers, 43, resides with her family at 2030 Laredo, rural Logan, where she and husband, Curt, oversee the operations of their 1,000 acres of farmland, which is located near Mondamin, Magnolia, and Moorhead. The Methers plant corn and soybeans and raise "a few 4-H lambs." The couple has three children, Lynn, Jennifer, and Michelle.

Anita has been a commissioner for four years, and ran for another four-year term in November. She was an assistant commissioner for three years prior to that. Zane McBride "talked her into it" originally, because he believed she was dedicated to the SWCD's mission and goals. "Curt and I are no-till buffs, having utilized the method since the 1980s, and I like to talk it up wherever I go," she said.

Her goals for the district include getting more farmers to use no-till, and she and Curt are interested in building up carbon sequestration in the soil through



Anita Methers, Zane McBride and Babetta Lucke talk conservation at the SWCD office in Logan. Quad County News/Pete Graham

no-till. "That's a long-term thing," she stated. Carbon sequestration is when farmers use methods that trap carbon from the atmosphere in their soils, offsetting carbon released by heavy industry and power generation. If farmers can sequester enough carbon they could not only enrich their own soil, but help cut pollution around the world. Soil conservation is a key issue for Anita.

Anita's other activities center around this declaration: "I'm a mom." She helps with her children's school and sports activities, with one proviso--no spring or summer sports. "We're just too busy farming for that." She helps a lot at the Logan Christian Church, and is known as the "video lady," because she helps kids to check out Christian videos from the church. She also plays piano and is superintendent of the primary Sunday School department, and assistant chairman of the Worship Committee. She still helps with 4-H, but no longer has time to be a leader.

Anita briefly involved herself in politics some years back when she ran for County Recorder as a Republican. She currently has no political ambitions, but does not rule it out in the future.

Anita's husband, Curt, served on the Harrison County Corn Growers Board for a number of years, and remains a member of the Harrison County Fair Board.



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Petersen composting

continued from page 3



Lynn Petersen checks temperature of his newest compost heap, something that is carefully monitored. Quad County News/Pete Graham

ysis report before it's sold or used on our farm. Most of the finished compost is spread with a modified lime spreader.

I built an agitator in the center of the box above the web to keep material flowing onto the web and out the back to the two hydraulic spinners," Lynn said.

Lynn is a dealer for Agri Energy Resources, Princeton, IL. Agri Energy manufactures biological fertilizer products for agricultural uses. Lynn received some training in composting from Midwest Biosystems a few years ago in Tampico, IL.

Lynn is also involved in the carbon sequestration, the process in which farmers trap carbon dioxide emissions from such sources as Canadian power plants, in their soil. According to The Des Moines Register, "Polluting Canadian utilities want to pay Iowa farmers to cut carbon dioxide emissions for them.

"Under the exchange, Iowa farmers could earn as much as \$100 million by keeping carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, said Greg Lewis, president and owner of Cquest LTD. Of West Des Moines.

"Emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases have been blamed for contributing to global warming. The buildup of the gases creates what is known as the greenhouse effect by trapping the sun's heat

close to Earth.

"The Canadians' plan would allow farmers to earn carbon emission reduction credits by tying up carbon in their soil and keeping it out of the atmosphere. A utilities consortium would purchase the carbon credits from Iowans because the utilities want to offset their own carbon dioxide emissions, said Steven Griffin, vice president for strategic development at IGF Insurance Co. of Des Moines."

Lynn is a third generation farmer in Clay Township, Shelby, County. Lynn and Joyce, his wife, have three children, a son Brian, who lives in Rochester, MN; is an engineer and who also has a large organic garden. He sells his produce at a Farmers Market on Saturday mornings.

Kimberly, his daughter, is married and lives at Eldora and Kevin lives on one of their farms at Walnut, where he has a tree trimming and yard and garden business. He brings a lot of wood chips to the compost piles from his tree chipper.

Lynn grew up on this Clay Township farm and went to a country school near there. He graduated from Elk Horn High School and was a mechanic for 10 years in Los Angeles and Denver and other places before joining the U.S. Army in 1956. He was honorably discharged in 1958

and moved back to Iowa in 1965. Joyce is from Des Moines and graduated from Roosevelt High School there.

Elk Horn residents have been "educated" by Lynn and by his friend, the Mayor of Elk Horn, Howard Sorensen, a man he grew up with, not to put plastic in with the yard waste they bring to Lynn. "I get most of Elk Horn's yard waste," says Lynn. That accounts for about 700 households, according to the latest census. Lynn uses the humus on his land and what he doesn't use he sells back to the community for their lawns and gardens.

The Clay Township farm is 290 acres, planted to corn, soybeans, and alfalfa. Lynn also has 99 head of feed cattle right now. While he feels he should be "semi-retired," the changing times in agriculture keep him interested and his commitment to the science of composting brings new challenges daily.

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Sievers builds pond

continued from page 5

provided survey, design and technical assistance.

"The unique thing," they agreed, "is that Jim was willing to provide wildlife habitat. He was concerned about fish and wildlife habitat, whereas most land owners are concerned with just water conservation and livestock watering."

The four acre pond was put in this summer. It will fill from an 80 watershed and stream, which, because of the dry year, had no water.

The actual digging of the pond was done by Larson and Son from Walnut. It took about two weeks and they brought in a couple of bulldozers and a large backhoe.

On an island in the center of the pond, Jim and friends of his and Pat's, planted Cedar trees. He put in goose nests on the island so predators couldn't get at the eggs, and put in fish habitats. He hopes to attract deer, pheasant, turkey, and quail. The grass on the island is a combination of brome, orchard, timothy and rye. He plans to stock the pond with bass, bluegill and catfish.

In addition to the pond, the Sievers are being helped by the NRCS with a three year project to put in a field windbreak. That project has begun already. Jim and friends are planting blue spruce and black hill spruce.

The Jim and Pat Sievers Farm, as it is called, is corn and soybean based with some pasture and timber. Edna and Les Thompson, the previous owners, planted some fruit trees and some shrubs and flowers.

Jim and Pat have been married for 26 years. They have one son, Shane, and his new wife Carrie. Shane has graduated from the University of Northern Iowa. They also have two daughters, Allison, who also attended the University of Northern Iowa and graduated in December; (she plans to attend graduate school), and Andrea, who is in her last year at Iowa



Denise Miller, Federal technician from the East Pott. NRCS office, Jim and Pat Siever, and Michelle Zimmerman, County Resource planner for the Conservation District--near pond excavation.

Quad County News/Pete Graham

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East Pott. Conservation Leaders Attend National Meeting in Fort Worth

Conservation officials from the East Pottawattamie County Soil & Water Conservation District joined over 1700 leaders from across the nation to discuss natural resource conservation issues on private land in America.

The 55th Annual Meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) met from February 4 - 7 in Fort Worth, TX, to set policy, discuss key conservation issues, elect officers and recognize national award winners. The theme of the meeting was "Bullish on Conservation."

Bernie Bolton, Vice Chairman of the Conservation Districts of Iowa, and the commissioners from East Pottawattamie SWCD, brought back new information and ideas for the district. "While

our local conservation work will help ensure continued quality of life for our children and future generations, we have a responsibility to make sure our conservation programs help our producers on the land remain economically viable today," they said.

Bolton said they are working with local farmers, ranchers and other landowners to improve conservation practices on the land that will benefit water quality, clean air, and wildlife habitat. For example, districts have been supporting the CRP buffer initiative by helping to provide an additional office staff person to promote the program to local farmers.

The keynote speaker Bruce Vincent challenged conservation officials to lead local discussions on conservation is-

sues so that economic and ecological choices can be in harmony. He reminded them that 50 million rural citizens in America can have a strong voice and should be offering policy makers a reasonable, practical approach to land management decisions.

NACD President Rudy Rice, who was succeeded by Read Smith of Washington State challenged the group to reach out, listen, learn and lead, and "never give up on taking steps necessary to improve the quality of life for all Americans."

Pearlie Reed, chief of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, told the conference attendees that "the new administration understands that farmers and ranchers have to make a living before they can practice conservation, and that USDA is working to ensure that technical assistance is provided to farmers and ranchers at the local level."

Since the conference was held in Fort Worth, known as America's cow town, much of the focus of the annual meeting was on economic and en-

vironmental challenges of livestock grazing. Conservation districts believe that sustained yields and multiple use of renewable natural resources should be basic principles of public and private grazing land management.

A special forum on carbon sequestration and bioenergy addressed what is becoming a major emerging conservation issue. Using plants to trap carbon from the air may be a way to help the environment and financially reward America's farmers and ranchers.

Plants have the ability to trap carbon both above and below the ground, thus creating a win-win situation in terms of economics and conservation for the farmer.

The East Pottawattamie SWCD has been working with landowners and other interested parties since 1942 to provide natural resource conservation protection and technical assistance.

For more information contact the district at 321 Oakland Ave., Oakland, Ia., phone 712-482-6408.

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Your soil and water conservation district has access to a fund which provides loans at no interest to eligible landowners for constructing permanent soil conservation practices.

In this program, eligible landowners can borrow up to \$10,000 at no interest for up to a ten-year period to construct terraces and water and sediment control basins.

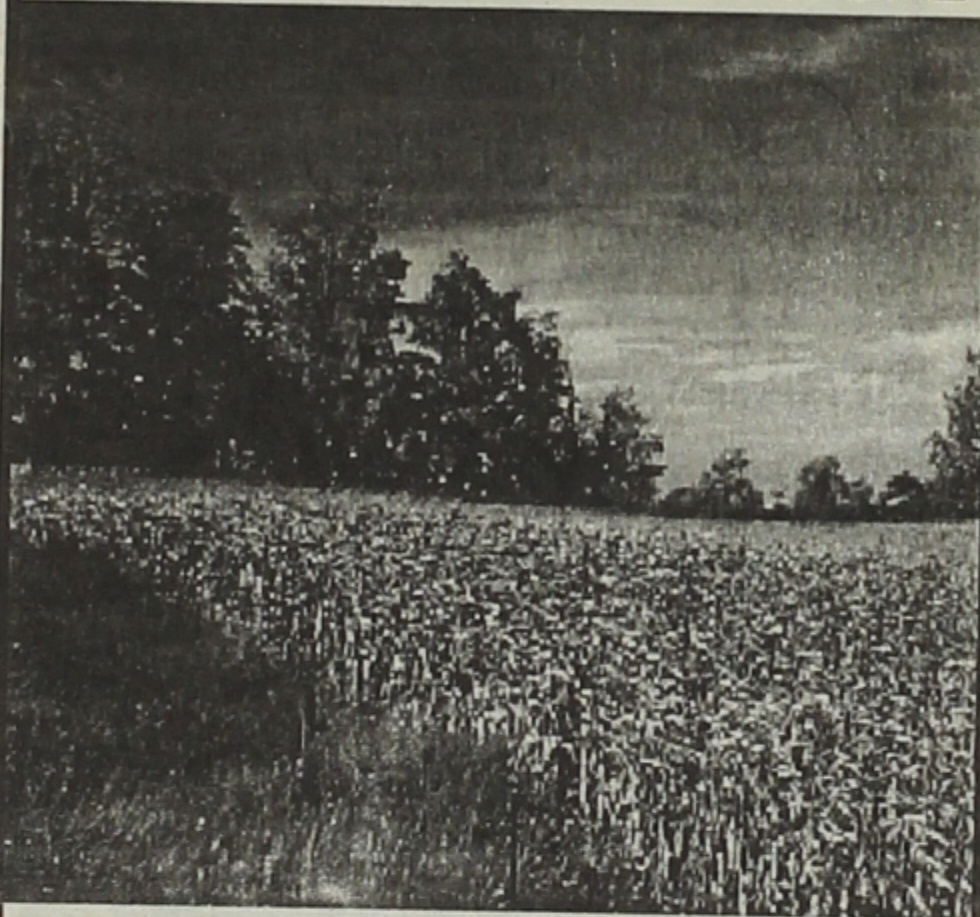
To be eligible, a landowner must be able to secure the loan, and be capable of repaying the loan in ten annual installments. Some restrictions apply.

The district must submit a list of names of interested landowners to the Division of Soil Conservation in April. The exact date has not been determined yet.

Once the Division has received the requests from all of the districts in Iowa, it will then divide the funds up between all of the districts requesting loans.

If you would like to apply for a no-interest loan or would like some more information, contact the soil and water conservation district in the county your land is in.

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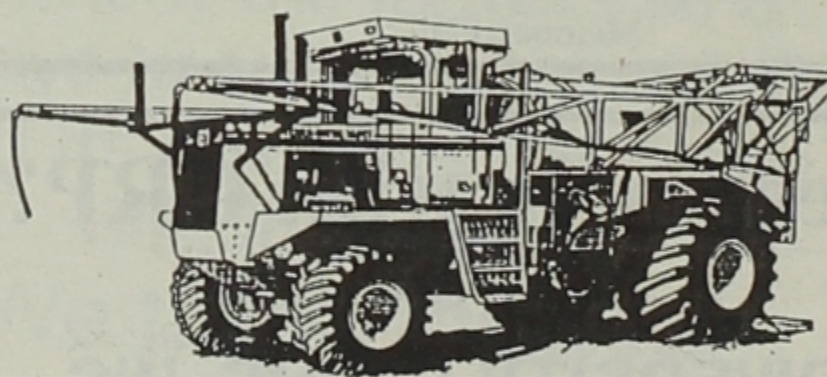
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Legislators hear from locals at Oakland informational meeting held in January

QCCN-Spring, 2001-PAGE 11
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The East Pottawattamie Soil and Water Conservation District and the local Iowa State University Extension hosted an informational legislative meeting in Oakland, January 26.

The ISU Extension Council asked 4-Her Tiffany Obecht from Oakland to explain SOFA (Speak Out For Agriculture). Brian Bentley from rural Carson told about the Tri County Steer Carcass Futurity Program.

East Pottawattamie SWCD Commissioner, Marlyn Von Weihe, spoke to the legislators about District watershed activities and the need for additional erosion control practices. Marlyn used the example that one mile of terraces can reduce erosion for that area being protected by ten tons per acre or over 250 tons of soil saved.

State Representative Jack Drake, Senator Charles Grassley's aide, Mary Ann Hanusa, and State Representative Dick Weidman provided budget proposal information for the twenty-five people in attendance.

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East Pottawattamie SWCD Commissioner Marlyn Von Weihe addresses legislators on soil erosion and watershed activities.



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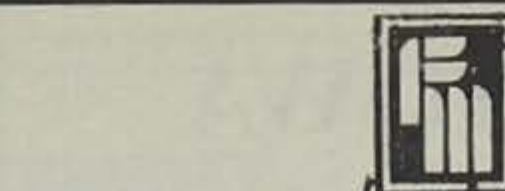
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Partnership

continued from page 6

till has improved the general soil quality and the grid sampling has put the fertilizer where it needs to be. This combination has helped maximize each acre's yield potential," says Rod.

One other unintentional benefit is the natural cover no-till affords wildlife. In a day and age when wildlife habitat comes at a premium, a no-till system incorporates it naturally (no pun intended). "Not only is there more natural cover, but harvest loss isn't buried with tillage and nests aren't disturbed in the spring," says Denny. "We've seen an increase in fox, rabbits, and other (wildlife) that you never used to see."

Other conservation practices on the Backhaus farm include

contouring, waterways, filter strips (non-CRP) and crop rotation. While you do see some terraces, they are certainly not the primary practice, but Rod and Denny agree they have their place.

There is also talk of putting a proposed East Boyer structure on one of the farms they rent. "I think it's a good idea to slow down some of this water before it hits the river," says Denny. Rod quickly adds, "but to be really effective, upland treatment needs to change. If some continue to farm like they are, those new structures will be silted in ten or twenty years from now." Both agree that conservation needs to be a whole system approach--when planning, you need to look at the big

picture.

When asked if they'd ever go back to traditional tillage, both were quick to reply, almost in unison, "No." We've seen what it's done for farms that were virtually dead. Seen those poor areas returned to their original state," says Rodney.

"Neighbors have called us the Trash-Farmers," says Denny, "but we wouldn't go back. As far as we're concerned, tillage is entirely recreational. I just don't understand why it's acceptable to lose soil and herbicide down the river," he continues. "They'll complain about a few cornstalks in the ditch (after a big rain) but I can grow more cornstalks in a season--it takes a hundred years to replace that soil."

Both father and son feel that the system needs to change

and encourage other farmers to step back and take a look at themselves and their current practices. "Rather than have the EPA or DNR regulate what we can or can't do, we need to take care of some of this ourselves," he said.

The door is always open and anyone interested in discussing no-till-farming methods is always welcome. Rod comments, "We've learned by doing. If we can help someone get started or avoid some of the mistakes we've made, we'd be happy to do so."

Rod, Jerry and Denny are only three of approximately 4.7 million individuals who own/manage the 907 million acres of cropland, pasture or range-land in the United States.

The responsibility of stewardship lies in their hands and we rely on them to main-

tain this fragile partnership with the land. It is through their care of these resources, that we hope for more than food and fiber. I think a quote from, "Iowa-Portrait of the Land," sums conservation up well:

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In Partnership With The Land 9/2000

By Lynna Miller

Soil Conservation Technician



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What About Beans On Beans?

by Bill Hammitt, Soil
Conservation Technician,
Shelby County NRCS

This year many farmers may have to plant soybeans on last years' soybean ground if nitrogen supplies for corn are not available or too expensive.

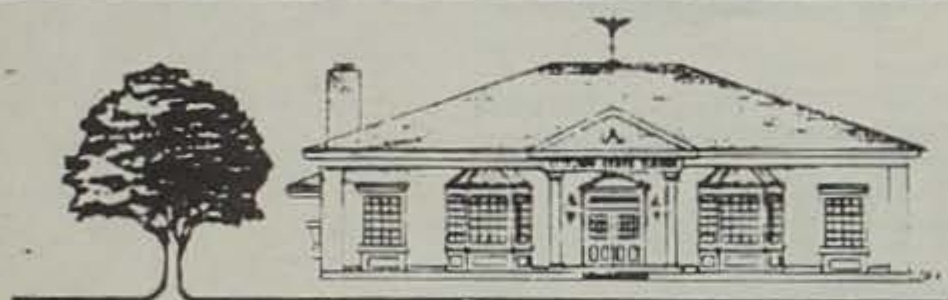
How will this affect soil erosion or conservation compliance requirements? According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service many farmers have a corn-soybean rotation in

their conservation plans, most with some no-till requirements.

Beans on beans can be planted but should be no-till or kept on non-erosive soils. Any tillage with this type of rotation on highly erodible land would be too erosive according to NRCS

conservationists.

Agronomists recommend selecting disease resistant varieties and fertilizing according to soil test needs before planting beans on beans.

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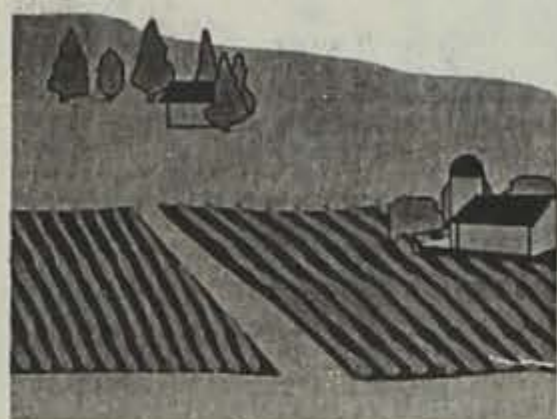
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Complying with open feed lot regulations

By Jason Wernimont

Recent inspections of open feedlots by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have captured the attention of the media as well as those involved in the cattle industry. Many feedlot operators do not have enough information to determine what they need to do to ensure their lots are in compliance with current regulations.

It is estimated that at least 300 open feedlots in Iowa will need to obtain operation permits because they exceed the threshold of 1,000 animal units (1,000 animal units is equal to 1,000 beef animals). Currently, only 33 operations are permitted

in Iowa. Because census data shows that many farms exceed 1,000 head, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is being forced by the EPA to step up enforcement of open feedlot regulations. The DNR has put together a feedlot working



group (including university

extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service, industry groups, EPA and environmental organizations) to develop a plan to assist feedlots in achieving compliance. The compliance initiative has three parts: 1) feedlot registration, 2) environmental risk assessment, and 3) compliance. The details of this process will be available in March. Nonetheless, current regulations need to be addressed.

What manure controls are required for all open feedlots, regardless of size?

The minimum level of manure control for any open feedlot is removal of settleable solids prior to a discharge to a water of the state. Iowa law requires precise design specifications for solids settling basins. Settling basins are typically constructed of concrete. Settling basins can also employ the use of terraces or soil berms. The exact design depends on the size of the feedlot area and existing site topography. Settling basins need sufficient capacity to settle solids between periods of manure removal and from ten-year, one-hour precipitation events.

What additional manure controls are required for feedlots with more than 1,000 head?

Feedlots with capacity over 1,000 beef animals or 700 dairy animals must maintain a containment area to hold: 1) all manure flows from the feedlot

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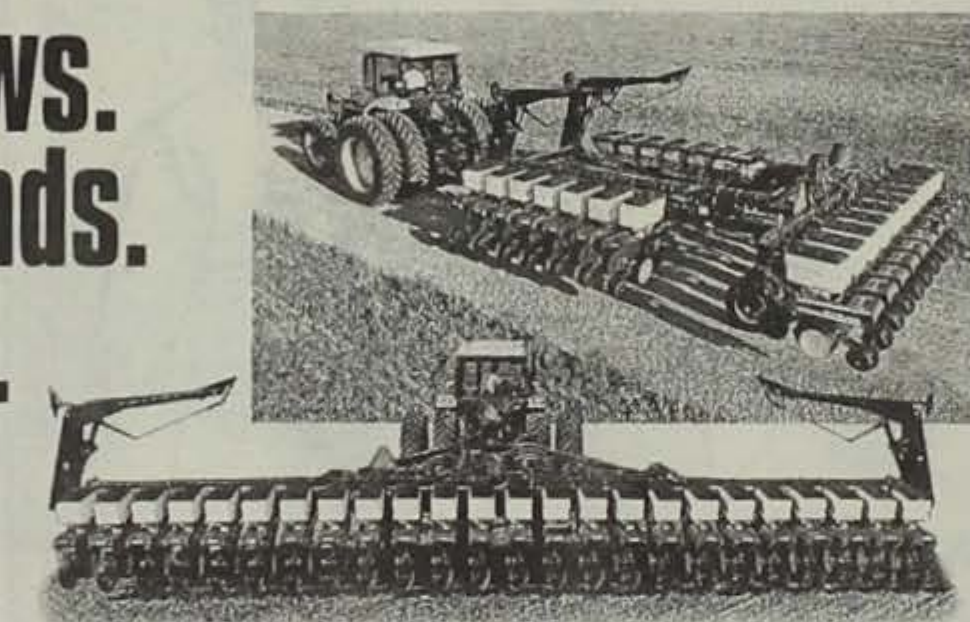
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Feed lot compliance

continued from page 14

areas, 2) all runoff from other contributing areas, and 3) all flows resulting from the 25-year, 24 hour rain event (this event is 5.4 to 5.6 inches).

Runoff from contributing areas includes roofed areas and non-feedlot areas such as farm building sites and upland crop areas. The size of the containment basin will vary depending on the drainage area size and how often the structure is emptied. A solid settling structure must precede the containment area.

The use of clean water diversions can significantly reduce the amount of required containment. Clean water diversions can be soil berms, concrete curbs or channels that allow clean water to be directed away from the feedlot area, thereby reducing the total volume and area requiring containment.

Who needs operation and construction permits?

Feedlots with a capacity over 1,000 head of beef or 700 head of dairy cattle must obtain an operation permit (also called National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit) and construction permit from the Iowa DNR. Producers with 300 to 1,000 beef cattle, or 200 to 700 dairy cattle, may need to have an operation permit depending on how the feedlot's manure and wastewater discharge is managed. All feedlots that are required to have operation permits must obtain construction permits prior to construction, installation or

modification of the waste control system. The construction permit application must be submitted at least 90 days before construction is scheduled to begin.

Who needs to register their feedlot?

Producers who meet the criteria for needing an operation permit are requested to register their feedlot with the DNR before December 31, 2001. Registering your feedlot officially notifies the DNR that you intend to comply with the compliance process and participate in the amnesty program.

Registered feedlots have several advantages: 1) EPA and the DNR have agreed not to inspect feedlots that are registered, unless a violation is reported, 2) The DNR will grant a conditional amnesty to registered feedlots. Lots will not be fined for not having a permit if the feedlot adheres to the compliance process.

What happens after I register my feedlot?

The DNR will conduct feedlot assessments at their Des Moines office to determine a feedlot's impact on water quality. This assessment will be conducted by the DNR in Des Moines using aerial photos, a state database of water wells and other geographic

information such as distance to bodies of water and details from the registration form. The area office may need to follow up with an on-site facility review before the assessment is complete. The DNR assessments will determine which feedlots will be required to undergo the permit application process first. This assessment is ONLY for ranking purposes - not for assigning fines. The higher your feedlot 'scores', the sooner you will have to begin to bring your feedlot into compliance. It is estimated that it will take up to five years to bring the feedlots in Iowa into compliance with current regulations.

How do I bring my feedlot into compliance?

Nearly all feedlots will have to perform some construction to modify their manure settling and storage facilities to bring them up to code. This will require the services of a licensed professional engineer. It is also in your best interests to work with a manure management specialist to ensure that the proposed facility meets current AND pending regulations.

What new regulations have been proposed by the EPA?

Many of the proposed changes in regulation deal with the management of nutrients from concentrated animal

feeding operations (CAFOs). Changes may include the use of Permit Nutrient Plans (PNPs), which would essentially be a part of a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP). These plans would focus on proper nutrient crediting and proper land application of manure.

EPA has proposed to reduce the permit threshold (currently 1,000 animal units) to 500 animal units. This action has the potential to double the number of open feedlots in Iowa that would be required to obtain a permit.

What next?

Cattle producers must make critical decisions as to the future direction of their operations. Producers need to seek out people that have experience with feedlot production as well as insight into the myriad of compliance issues.

Contact your local NRCS, Extension Service, or any private firms for assistance.

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"Nearly all feedlots will have to perform some construction to modify their manure settling and storage facilities to bring them up to code."



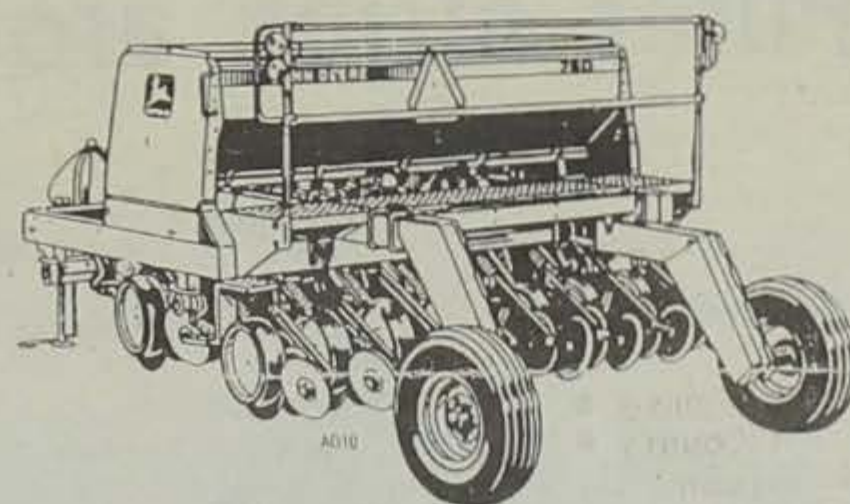
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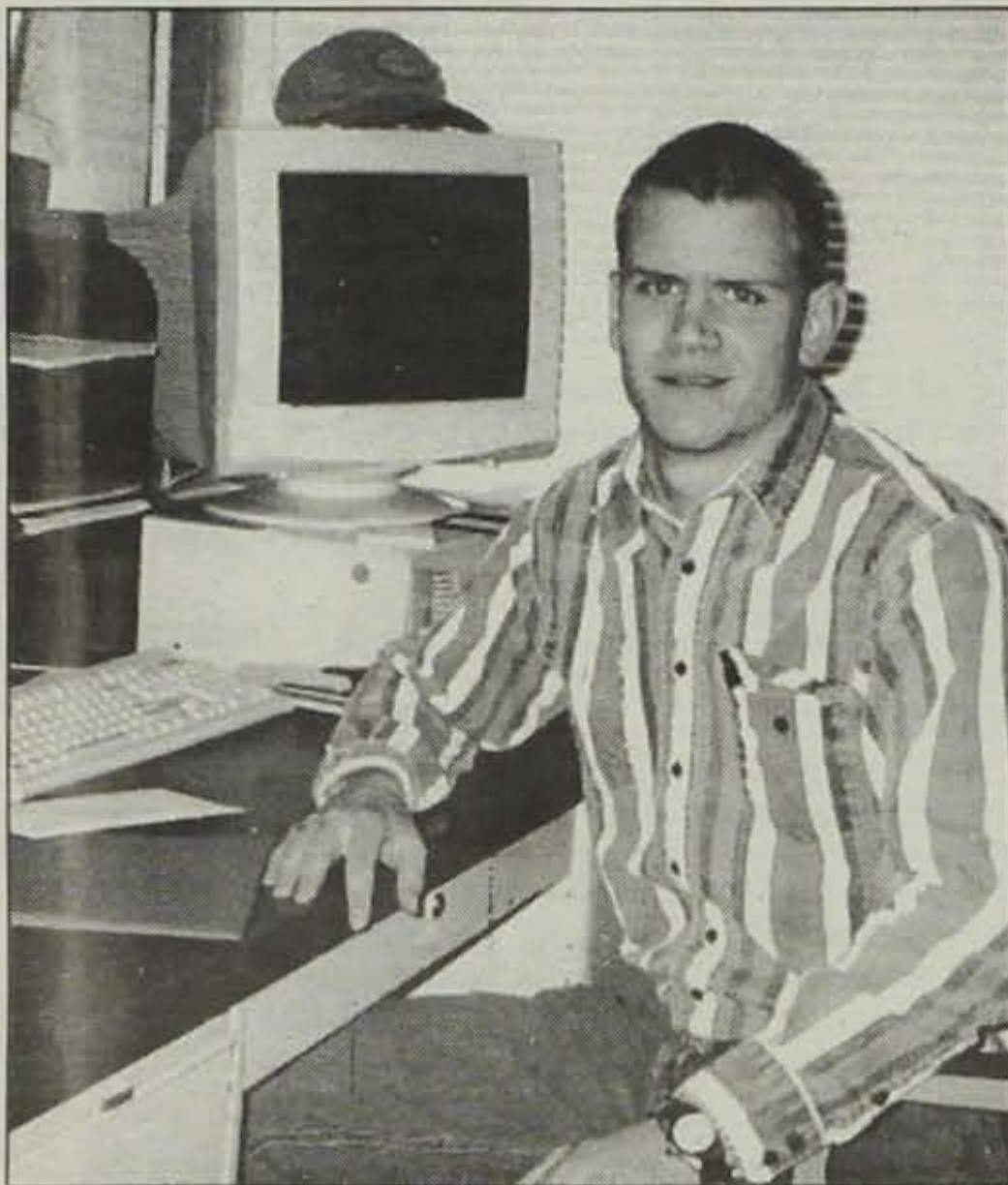
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LUKE ZAIGER

Luke Zaiger joins Harrison County NRCS office in Logan as fulltime Soil Technician

Luke Zaiger, 21, formerly of the Audubon area, is the newest Soil Conservation Technician with the Harrison County Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Logan. He began work full-time in the county December 18, 2000.

Zaiger, in his third post with the NRCS, grew up in rural Audubon where his parents farm. He graduated from Audubon High School and attended Iowa Western Community College, Council Bluffs, majoring in Agri-Business.

Zaiger's parents, Leo and Dianne Sheehy, over-the-road truckers, also farm 240 acres near Audubon, planted to corn and soybeans. He has two brothers, Jason and Bart. He also has a sister, Kim. Luke is the youngest.

His job with the NRCS re-

quires him to work with farmers/landowners to assist with Conservation Reserve Program sign-ups and implementation, writing whole farm plans and the designing, and laying out of conservation practices. "I'm sure looking forward to working in Harrison County with our farmers," Zaiger said. When

interviewed he was deeply involved in revamping an NRCS computer program utilized by he and his fellow technicians in Harrison County.

Zaiger reports to Russ Kurth, District Conservationist for the NRCS in Harrison County, and can be reached at 712-644-2210.

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