

SOIL HORIZON

your newsletter from

DES MOINES COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

1104 Derek Lincoln Drive, West Burlington, IA 52655

Phone 753-6221

Assisted by SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE



FEBRUARY, 1987

BRIGHT MOVING TO NE IOWA

Howard Bright, 42, for nearly 11 years Des Moines County district conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service, has resigned to take a position as soil conservationist of Clayton County.

His last day in the SCS office in West Burlington will be April 10.

Howard and his wife, Donna, own a 166-acre farm on the Yellow River 20 miles from Elkader. Eventually, they plan to build a house to replace the mobile home they have there now.

"The reason for the move is to begin a life style where we will spend more time together personally," Bright said. They will live in Giard, a small town 12 miles northeast of Elkader.

There's 35 acres of cropland on their farm that the Brights plan to plant this year,

at least some of it in wildflowers.

Alternative crops aren't a new concept to Howard and Donna. They joined Russ and Diane Reed in a broccoli project two years ago. The experiment was an economic success. Their one-acre plot netted over \$2,200.

Russ and Diane also have grown and sold strawberries on their farm near Danville.

Bright attended Eastern Tennessee State University at Johnson City as a forestry student. He transferred to the University of Tennessee and then switched to agronomy, graduating in 1968 with a BS degree.

He took postgraduate work there, studying climatology and cotton fiber length and yield.

He might have become a cotton specialist, but he was

offered a soil scientist position with Iowa State University. He was assigned at Iowa City in January of 1970 and worked under Ed Schermerhorn and Wayne Frederick.

"I learned the background and landscape and geology of Eastern Iowa," he said. Bright mapped for a soil survey of Cedar County and one in Johnson County.

He then became an area soil scientist, providing farm planning information for district conservationists from Delaware to Lee County, and the Mississippi River to Iowa County.

Bright recalled an occasion that helped him decide on a career move.

"It was in Muscatine County where I stuck a probe in a high clay soil. I had a back problem already and that probe



Howard Bright

just wouldn't come back out," he said. "I must have struggled with that for an hour."

He was offered a training position with Larry Heaton, district conservationist in

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CRP SIGNUP BONUS OFFERED

Farmers who want to enroll in the 10-year Conservation Reserve Program Feb. 9 through 27 can get a "bonus" payment.

It will take the form of an increase in rent this year or next year for the highly erodible cropland taken out of production.

USDA Secretary Richard E. Lyng announced the bonus and said it will be a one-time,

one-year payment.

The incentive will be equal to \$2 times the farm program payment yield for corn, times the number of acres the corn base is reduced by the CRP enrollment.

Here is an example:

A farm has 300 croplable acres and a 128-acre corn base. There are 42 acres, or 14

percent of the 300, enrolled in the CRP. At least two-thirds of this field must have highly erodible ground.

The corn base then would be reduced by 14 percent, or 17.9 acres. If the yield were 140 bushels per acre, the \$2 payment would be times 140, times 17.9, or slightly over \$5,000.

The regular CRP rental, possibly \$85 per acre, would be \$3,570, giving a one-time payment of \$8,570. The remaining nine CRP payments would be just the \$3,570.

The "bonus" will be paid with generic commodity certificates when a 1987

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HEAVY CRP ENROLLMENT SEEN

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rental payment will be only the amount specified in the CRP contract.

The fourth signup period ends Feb. 27. Howard Bright, district conservationist with the Des Moines County Soil Conservation District, said he anticipates that this time the participation will eclipse the previous enrollments.

Bright's office determines if a soil is highly erodible. Any soil with an inherent potential to erode at more than eight times its tolerable erosion rate is considered highly erodible under provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985.

"Since a paid land diversion is in effect under the 1987 Feed Grain Program to restrain further buildup of corn stocks, this rental payment is being offered to encourage highly erodible, excess corn acreage into long-term conservation

use," Lyng said.

The bonus offer is limited to new CRP contracts effective beginning with the 1987 crop year. It is not retroactive for corn base acreage under CRP contracts already signed.

Lyng said, "This additional rental payment will be made at the time new 1987 CRP contracts are accepted. It will be charged against the CRP maximum payment limitation and not against other program payments.

"Producers who have already enrolled in other 1987 production adjustment programs and received advance payments in cash and generic certificates may cancel their contracts and enter into the CRP," he said. "There will be no penalty, but payments already received must be refunded in cash."

During the signup period, producers will be given the option to enter into a CRP contract beginning with either

the 1987 or 1988 crop year.

The CRP as part of the new farm law is designed to reduce soil erosion.

Under the CRP, owners and operators of highly erodible cropland agree to halt production on the highly erodible land for a 10-year period and to devote this land to conservation uses.

Under provisions of a recent amendment to the legislation authorizing the CRP, alfalfa and other multiyear grasses and legumes in rotation during the years 1981-85, as approved by the Secretary, will be considered to be "agricultural commodities" for the purpose of determining eligibility of land to be placed in the CRP.

Not more than 25 percent of the total cropland in a county

may be placed in the CRP. This limit can be waived by the Secretary if there will be no adverse effect on the local economy. There are 13 Iowa counties where the ASCS committees were authorized to accept acreage into CRP in excess of the limitation as a result of contracts entered into during the third CRP signup.

These counties can not take offers for any more land to be placed in the CRP.

The USDA will establish maximum acceptable rental rates after signup ends and bid data is evaluated.

During the first three signup periods, 8,916,185 acres of highly erodible cropland were accepted into the CRP.

FARMER IDEAS

Interviews with farmers planning to enroll in federal programs this year disclose a variety of feelings — frustrations, resignation, some encouraging words and hopes.

They spoke while waiting to speak with program clerks or technical people at the ASCS and SCS offices.

Dick Wilkerson, renter of 700 to 800 acres of land in Washington township, said: "You can't afford not to be in some sort of program."

He enrolled in the maximum 35 percent land diversion. None of this land qualifies for conservation reserve, he said. It's so flat there's "a couple of inches of slope in a hundred rods," Wilkerson quipped.

He admitted he doesn't have any "ultimate answers" to the question of how profitability can be restored to American agriculture, in light of farm surpluses and world competition.

Marvin Pfeiff, Burlington Rt. 3, farms about 400 acres with the help of his brother, Wayne, and school-age sons, Richard and Michael.

He enrolled in the 20 percent set-aside program.

But Pfeiff said, "We'd all be better off if the government got out of the farming business and if we stopped all this corn-beans business."

"We need to get back to a rotation system. We took the

eggs and cream from 'mother,' and farming has gone downhill ever since."

He recalled there were hard times in earlier days, but people were more self-sufficient and there was good family life. He lives close to town and has noticed the people who moved out from the city aren't as strong in their family life and neighborliness as those with a farming background.

James Miller, Sperry Rt. 1, is signing up for 35 percent diversion. He commented that taxing of farm ground has gotten out of hand, that tax rates as high as \$48 per acre exceed cost of land payments.

Creative use of farm products is essential for the long-range good of the nation, he said, adding that such products as alcohol use in tractors would help the price of corn.

"If we made paper out of corn stalks, we'd have it made," he stated. International farm commodity trade wars concern him.

Charles Nealey, Danville Rt. 2, said he is going to enroll in the program with a 35 percent set-aside on most of the family farms. He also likes the CRP program, especially with the "sweetening" of the \$2 incentive payment.

"I'm going to see how much can qualify," he said. "Even with a \$75 (per acre) over the 10 years, it would give you at least \$90. It's interesting right now."

START AT ASCS

When you enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program, start at the ASCS office.

First, it's likely that Debbie Kennedy will be the one to take a cropping history of your farm, because she is the one assigned to CRP.

She will send you next door to the Soil Conservation District office and then Howard Bright, district conservationist, or soil conservationist Mark Fehseke, will determine the erodibility of the ground you want to enroll in the CRP.

If the ground is eligible, you can make a bid and sign a contract. After the enrollment period ends Feb. 27, the ASC County Committee will open bids and the offers will be forwarded to the Kansas City office for a decision on whether they will be accepted.

It usually takes two weeks to get the word on acceptance, Kennedy said.

All farmers enrolling in the Feed Grain program must develop and apply conservation plans that will reduce excessive erosion if they are to retain eligibility for USDA programs under the 1985 law.

That means that when Vicky Rechkemmer, program clerk, enrolls you in the program, she also refers your application next door so that you can qualify your acres with a conservation plan.

Programs covered by the regulations are USDA price and income supports, disaster payments, crop insurance, Farmers Home Administration loans, Commodity Credit Corporation storage payments, farm storage facility loans and other programs under which payments are made with respect to commodities produced by the farmer.

Farmers have several options under the law. Those who have highly erodible land or newly converted wetland or wetlands that they would like to convert may:

- Grow crops without using an approved conservation plan and lose their eligibility for covered USDA programs.
- Produce agricultural commodities on newly converted wetland and lose their eligibility.
- Develop and apply conservation plans that will reduce excessive erosion on highly erodible cropland, and retain their eligibility for covered USDA programs.
- Apply to enroll their highly erodible land in the Conservation Reserve if they meet the criteria for the program.

Debbie Kennedy, CRP program clerk at the ASCS office, said state officials reported at a recent meeting the rules will be relaxed in certain cases.

Presently, it's required that highly erodible land farmers want to put in CRP must have been in row crops two of the years between 1981 and '85.

"It is being relaxed to accept some hay in the cropping history, if that was ever in the rotation," she said.

EXPERIMENT WITH AMARANTH

Arlyn Musselman, Southeastern Community College agriculture programs director, is an integral part of the amaranth experiment at SCC.

When district soil conservationist Howard Bright suggested establishing a test plot of amaranth, Musselman provided space at the edge of a field cropped by the college.

Not only did he offer space and advice to the Geode Specialty Growers Association members, but he helped with the planting and harvesting of the crop.

Ten varieties of the unusual grain were seeded with a vegetable planter that Bright located.

Association members plan to continue the experiment this year, hoping to learn whether

the crop can be an economic alternative to traditional corn and soybeans.

There's a similar experiment under way at Iowa State University. Two researchers from ISU visited the SCC plot last summer and were interested in the southeast Iowa version.

They were Dr. Richard Wilson, USDA entomologist, and Jim Lehmann, research associate at the university's plant introduction station.

Lehmann said the United States is a net importer of amaranth, a highly nutritious grain that can be milled, popped or used in dozens of ways as human and animal food.

Bright has sought help from industry sources on cleaning and handling of the

grain. The potential of the crop can be gleaned by noting that a supplier is charging natural food stores and cooperatives \$1.86 per pound for the grain.

The amaranth plot isn't the only experimental work that Musselman's assisting. For several years, research into diseases of soybeans has been conducted by the USDA. Several new varieties resistant to brown stem rot have been developed through this plot and others in Iowa.

Musselman also helps with the IAAP tillage project, where the economic and soil saving advantages of conservation



Arlyn Musselman

tillage or no-till have been documented.

FRUITS, HERBS?

Geode Specialty Growers Association is on a hunting expedition, seeking growers of such products as fruits, vegetables, Shiitake mushrooms, herbs, flowers, small grains, country crafts, hay and organically grown produce.

The association is housed with Geode Wonderland RC&D at 3002 A Winegard Drive in Burlington 319-752-6395.

Linda Rex-Dobson, marketing director of the association, said the goal of all the seeking and the surveying is to accurately document the extent of these businesses and who is involved.

"We are actively pursuing and securing markets in an effort to assist producers in marketing products," she said.

"If you have or plan to have any of these products or similar products available for the 1987 season, please contact us. We might be of assistance to you in marketing them."

She said the association also wants to hear from people who are interested in farm land

hunting and leasing.

"Our purpose is to sustain the profitability of agriculture through leadership in diversification, marketing, research, promotion, information and educational projects," she added.

The unit was incorporated two years ago as an independent non-profit agricultural organization by Geode Wonderland RC&D. Rex-Dobson was hired in March of 1986 and she has helped form several producer divisions to assist members.

"We're trying to help farmers who are looking for more profitable crops," she said. "In 1929, Iowa was the nation's fifth leading state in commercial production of vegetables. We now import 90 percent of the fruit and vegetables consumed within our borders.

"Today, if we could buy locally grown products, the dollars would turn over numerous times within our economically depressed rural communities."

SCD SETS PRIORITIES

There are 165,000 acres of cropland in Des Moines County and 70,000 acres of them are considered highly erodible with an Erodibility Index (EI) of 8 or more.

These are the target and priority of the Soil Conservation District commissioners. They want to concentrate staff efforts on Conservation Plans of Operation (CPO's) and encourage permanent non-erosive cover on highly erodible land.

The commission also supports the 1985 farm bill. It wants the legislature to allow greater latitude in use of funds so the SCD may help landowners to establish a conservation plan as required by the Act.

In its long-range plan, the commissioners comment that they have little control over erosion when ASCS programs have forced marginal and highly erodible land into row crop production.



Mushroom growers Ron Harper, left, and Harold Thornburg, both of rural Farmington, with a single Shiitake. Iowa's oak logs are ideal for producing this specialty crop.

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CROP ROTATION STILL BEST

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Johnson County. After three months, he was named DC of Cedar County.

A year later, in March of 1976, he came to Des Moines County as a newlywed, having married Donna M. Krall, an Iowa City native and graduate of the University of Iowa.

This office has been a training center for district conservationists and college student-interns. One of the latter is Ron Williams, presently DC in Jones County.

Bright said he's seen soil protection plans come full circle.

"When I came here, we thought that God's answer to soil erosion was tile outlet terraces. These would be great if a guy could afford it, but at that time, the farmer wasn't under such a heavy economic load as he is today."

Some of the best plans cost very little, he said.

"In my opinion, grass waterways and crop rotation, with proper tillage practices are the best way to go. We're right back to what Ray Audsley was telling us," Bright said, referring to the first DC in Des Moines County two generations ago.

"We should never have backed down from that. Tile outlet terraces are great for keeping soil on the farm, but one of the biggest things we've done wrong is to do away with contouring, headlands and grassed waterways."

Meadow rotation is an essential part of the ideal program, he said, but Congress determines the type of soil that is economically attractive.

"All of our progress can be wiped out by a stroke of a pen," he added.

"I hope that whoever comes in has broad enough vision to get the most protection for the largest number of acres," Bright said, referring to his successor who is yet to be appointed.

"We've tried to make farming easier and more convenient, for instance with straight rows, but there's a point where we should say 'no.' The commissioners have a policy now that no terracing will be cost-shared on land with more than a 5 percent slope."

Among his interests has been the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant tillage project. The legislature funded this research into cropping under tillage programs ranging from full plowing-disking to no-till.

The work is supervised by

Dr. Walt Lovely of Iowa State University and Arlyn Musselman, head of Southeastern Community College ag programs.

He has encouraged economic development through alternative crops such as shiitake mushrooms. The oriental timber mushroom has been introduced into this area with the help of two RC & D units in southeast Iowa, Geode Wonderland and Pathfinder.

One of his major efforts in recent years has been the battle against another import from the Far East, the multiflora rose. The plant thrives in pasture and second-growth timber, forming impenetrable barriers to farmers, livestock and even wildlife.

Pierce Giffin, Burlington farmer and a victim of the plant, heads the anti-MFR task force of Geode Wonderland and also serves with Bright on the Iowa Multiflora Rose Technical Committee. Dean Giltner, a member of the Wapello County board of supervisors, is chairman of the committee

which coordinates county efforts to subdue the pest.

Bright said Dick Lewis, former chairman of the Des Moines County supervisors, was primarily responsible for getting cost-sharing funds from the legislature to encourage landowners to eradicate the rose.

Lewis also served on the state committee and new supervisor Dale Anderson was named his successor.

"We were instigators of control measures and we should continue to be leaders," Bright said. Des Moines County contributed funds to the battle and now is asked to join 33 other affected counties in supporting research into biological controls.

Dr. Abe Epstein, Iowa State University extension plant pathologist, is studying diseases of multiflora rose. RC&D members are seeking \$30,000 to finance this research, with the help of Liz Christiansen of the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission.

"I took \$1,350 to the last meeting of the state committee," Bright said. The contribution included \$250 from the Des Moines County Farm Bureau, \$100 from the Cattlemen's Association and \$1,000 from the Soil Conservation District.

The supervisors pledged \$1,000 and the County Conservation Board \$500.

"It would be worth millions to the nation to control the rose," Bright said. "I've fought it for six years and if we can just keep the supervisors interested, we can overcome it eventually."

Soon it will be time for him to take up his new duties in Clayton County.

"I'll work with the watershed up there, trying to protect the trout streams by entering into agreements with landowners. A second thing is a ground water study at Big Spring," Bright said.

He also will work with the Clayton County unit of Upper Explorerland RC&D.

COMMISSIONERS ELECT

Sherman Smith, Burlington, was re-elected chairman of the Des Moines County Soil Conservation District Commission on Jan. 2 at the commissioners' reorganization meeting.

Leonard Lane, Mediapolis, was elected vice chairman. Dorothy Davis, West Burlington, who is state clerk in the SCS office, was elected secretary and Horace Sutton, Burlington, treasurer.

The commissioners also re-appointed Sutton, William Walker, Roger Gay, Barbara Bonnett, Arlyn Musselman and

James Jennison as assistant commissioners. Harold Linder was reappointed but declined.

Elizabeth Christiansen was appointed as a new assistant commissioner.

The commissioners were hosts to a five-county meeting Feb. 11 at Southeastern Community College, where state and local SCS and ASCS officials discussed the 1985 Food and Agriculture Act, state and federal funding, work priorities and prospective legislation.

Among the participants were Sherman Smith and Howard

Bright, Des Moines County; Kevin McCall and Olin Jennings, Louisa County; Kevin Reynolds, Dorothy Miller and Dick Gholson, Henry County; Barbara Craig and Donald Kisting, Van Buren County.

James B. Gulliford, state conservationist with the SCS, spoke on legislation.

Virginia Striegel of the State Soil Conservation Committee was on the program and so were Lyle Asell, Fairfield, area conservationist, and Gary Cooper, Monticello, district director for the ASCS.

ROSE FIGHT FUNDED

A few landowners who are actively fighting the multiflora rose pest have taken advantage of state and county cost-sharing funds.

But there are more than \$2,000 in state funds available which must be used by June 30, 1987, and some \$1,600 allocated by the county also is awaiting claims.

State Clerk Dorothy Davis said the landowner should bring receipts for the material used for treatment and also prepare an aerial map designating the areas treated or scheduled for approved treatment.

The purchaser pays half of the cost, the county and state share the balance.

Most recent claimants were Pierce W. Giffin, who treated 300 acres; Carl Boecker, who treated 30 acres, and Louis Bannier, who treated 200 acres. Since the start of the current fiscal year, there were 12 applications approved, while a total of \$843.12 in cost-share funds have been disbursed.

While treatment is regarded as a "holding action," the Kill the Rose Campaign forces are promoting a \$30,000 drive to help finance research on biological control.

The SCD, Farm Bureau and Des Moines County Cattlemen's Assn. have provided \$1,350

while the county supervisors and County Conservation Board expect to provide \$1,500 more.

There are 33 other Iowa counties affected by the Rose that have been asked to contribute to the funding.

