

Article for use in SWCD Annual Reports

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This past year was quite an exciting year in conservation. Watching the conservation title unfold and signed into law May 13, 2002 was a very interesting experience. While the Farm Bill was evolving, the Natural Resources Conservation Service worked with partners to develop strategies to handle the additional workload and new opportunities that we anticipated.

One tool we have discussed in great length this past year with Soil and Water Conservation Districts and other partners is Tech Service Providers. I see these professionals working closely with NRCS and districts to help us tackle additional work the new Farm Bill will generate. We will work hard together to provide seamless service to Iowa's landowners. It will take time to develop a new and effective working relationship required by this opportunity, but with good communication and cooperation the end result will be more conservation planning and healthier natural resources in Iowa.

The new Farm Bill also emphasizes our need to refocus on the locally-led process that drives our conservation efforts. In fiscal year 2003 it is our joint challenge and responsibility to bring stakeholders to the table. We need local work groups to advise us and help guide the process. These local groups, involving stakeholders representing diverse interests in the agriculture and natural resource areas, will be making recommendations on cost share rates, how to fund program applications, and other local priorities. Local stakeholder involvement is critical to successful implementation of many of the programs provided in the 2002 Farm Bill. We need to support local stakeholders. I encourage you to reach out to new and diverse groups in your community and to encourage their active participation.

We are now faced with the reality of the 2002 Farm Bill and all that it provides for private landowners and the conservation partnership. We are ready. And that is because of the talented, capable, and dedicated individuals that make up Iowa's 99 Soil and Water Conservation District Boards and staffs, the Conservation Districts of Iowa, the Iowa Dept. of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the many other conservation professionals with whom we partner each day. I am proud to work with each of you and be part of the conservation effort in Iowa. I look forward to working together to care for Iowa's soil, water and wildlife, and wish you great success in reaching your conservation goals in 2003.