



Benton Community college prep English students swept all three places in the recent soil-water conservation essay contest (see story). Making the presentations above are, left to right: Paul Anderson, Jim

Brown and Henry Van Eschen. BC winners are Lori McKechnie, third place; Carol Silhanek, second place; and county essay winner, Cheryl Becker.

Cheryl Becker Wins Soil Conservation Contest

Cheryl Becker, Benton Community senior, won first place in the recent Second Annual Benton County Soil and Water Conservation essay contest.

Second and third places also went to two BC seniors, Carol Silhanek and Lori McKechnie. The contest was open to all Benton County high schools.

Each year the theme of the contest deals with either soil or water conser-

vation or both.

Mary Bell, English teacher, commented, "It is an excellent contest because it gives kids a different audience to write for. Also the topic each year is a vital concern to Iowans. Every student who enters the contest learns about soil and water conservation."

Becker received \$20 for first place. Silhanek received \$15 and McKechnie received \$10. Presenting the

prizes were Henry Van Eschen, Eden Mutual Insurance; Jim Brown, District Conservationist; Paul Anderson, chairman of Benton County Soil Conservation Commissioners.

The contest was sponsored by Eden Mutual Insurance of Vinton and Benton County Soil Conservation Commission.

Becker's essay will go on to the regional competition. Her winning essay follows.

A Waste Of Soil Is A Waste Of Life

By Cheryl Becker

I've let everyone do all the talking for me, but I think that it's about time I speak for myself.

A lot of things are being said about me. For instance, there's talk about me leaving in the future, but I'd like to stick around and, with everyone's cooperation, that may be possible.

Here in Iowa, just in the last 100 years, I've already lost half of my most precious part. People call it "the top soil." And in the whole United States, I lose the productive capability of one to one and a half million acres each year. That's an area equal to more than six cities the size of Chicago!

Unless I am held together by some sort of weed, grass or crop I am vulnerable to erosion. So, to minimize my chances of severe erosion, farmers must guard me from Mother Nature's temper.

Various methods have been developed to help conserve me. A few methods that have been developed to help protect me against water erosion are fertilization, crop rotations, contour farming and reduced tillage. But all the credit doesn't go to water erosion; there's

also wind erosion and oxidation of my organic matter.

In Iowa, I don't get blown around as much compared to the West and Northwest, where it's relatively level and open.

Oxidation of my organic matter isn't erosion, but it does do damage. When this is occurring, my organic matter is being released into the air in the form of carbon monoxide. One thing, for sure, is that it doesn't do any good up there.

A smart farmer will do all he can do to protect me. Besides providing the nutrients for his crops, I'm his family's future. It doesn't do him any good to hand down to his sons and daughters a farm that's been in the family for generations, but which has little or nothing left of me.

When the land isn't managed well, I lose much of my contents and also water is lost—water that could have been retained and put to good use if I would have been prepared properly.

One last thing that I would like to say: If you don't protect me, I won't be around...and neither will you!