

LEE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
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DATE: November 14, 1995
TO: The Media
FROM: Lee Soil and Water Conservation District
SUBJECT: Lee SWCD's 50th Anniversary Event - December 1, 1995

LEE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT TO
CELEBRATE 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The Lee Soil and Water Conservation District is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year and will mark the milestone with a public open house on December 1st, 1995 in the Donnellson Community Room from 9 a.m. until noon. Melvin Sanders, district chairman, announced the celebration today by extending an invitation to all Lee County residents and landowners to attend this special event.

Organized on January 12, 1945, the Lee Soil Conservation District was one of 100 districts chartered in Iowa between 1940 and 1952. The Dust Bowl Days of the 1930's triggered federal legislation in 1935 establishing the Soil Conservation Service within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 1937, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, was instrumental in drafting Soil Conservation District legislation, and in 1939 the Iowa General Assembly passed Soil Conservation District legislation that created the grass-roots network of local conservation districts. Today over 3,000 conservation districts serve 99 percent of the nation.

Lee Soil and Water Conservation District, and others nationwide, are legal subdivisions of state government and are governed by five commissioners elected in the general election on a nonpartisan ballot. Commissioners serve without pay and are responsible for carrying out state laws and programs within district boundaries.

In 1945, Lee County citizens Ben Foecke, L.D. Boyd, and O.C. Krebill chartered the Lee Soil Conservation District. Delbert Foster, Extension Director, was appointed secretary and the district, chaired by Ben Foecke, initiated a cooperative arrangement with the USDA-Soil Conservation Service to provide supporting staff and services. Parks Forester served as the first District Conservationist. Henry F.A. North served as the first Farm Planner and Richard Hall served as the first Conservation Aide. In 1946, Harvey Hasenclever was elected commissioner and Franklin H. Mullen joined the staff as Farm Planner and served until 1973 as District Conservationist. Commissioners elected to office during Mullen's tenure included Lee residents, Harry Dresser Jr., George Schneider Jr., Darrell Seyb, Anson Johnson, David Weisinger, Raymond Hohl, Harold Gardner, Daniel Wilbert, James Hawkins, Raymond Lang, Charles Burk and Harland Weisinger. In 1954, Delbert Foster resigned his Extension Director post and was replaced by Robert N. Dowling who also assumed duties as secretary to the Lee Soil Conservation District briefly. Burdette and Marjorie Stamps joined the staff in 1954 and served as Conservation Aide and State Clerk, respectively. Mr. Stamps served until 1971.

Isabelle Campbell assumed State Clerk duties in 1969 and served the district for fifteen years until her retirement in 1984. Her replacement, Mary Adkins, serves currently.

In 1972, the State of Iowa became the first nationwide to develop a state funded cost-share program by which the state shared with the landowner, the cost of conservation measures applied to the land. This historic event accelerated the application of conservation measures to the Lee County landscape with the installation of terraces, water and sediment control basins, grade stabilization structures, grassed waterways and high-residue tillage systems. Between 1972 and 1995, the State of Iowa contributed \$1,580,577.33 in cost share dollars to Lee District. Programs by which funds were allocated included the Iowa Financial Incentive

Program, the Resource Enhancement and Protection Program, and the Organic Nutrient Management Program. County funds also contributed to the district program from 1979 to 1992.

Steve Probst joined the staff as District Conservationist in 1972 serving until 1975 when Herbert Davison assumed the position. Commissioners serving the district during this period included Wes Weber, Colette Clark, Larry Lang, John Sander, Scott Weisinger, John Blacksmith, Jack Neuendorf, and Melvin Sanders. Assistant Commissioners who served in advisory positions included Herbert Blacksmith, Phil Kimmell and Roger Higgins.

Doug DeRosear joined Lee District as State Technician in 1974 and expanded application of conservation practices by surveying and designing 1,576,350 feet of the 1,828,350 feet of terrace systems constructed to date in Lee County. DeRosear surveyed and designed 191 farm ponds in the district and worked closely with landowners to accomplish the 84,500 acres of conservation tillage present today.

Through the years the District staff and commissioners cultivated a strong alliance with local agencies, businesses, contractors and landusers to address resource management problems. Other accomplishments included the installation of 5,400 acres of contour farming, 4,000 acres of grassed waterways, 37,000 acres of pasture and hayland planting, 2,378 acres of tree planting, 69 farmsted windbreaks, 515 acres of timber stand improvement, 354 grade stabilization structures, and 240,000 feet of diversions.

In 1988, Kevin McCall joined staff as District Conservationist, serving until 1990 when William Brechbill assumed the post. During this period, commissioners elected to the district included John Bonar, Kevin Overton, and Dale Gorham. Assistant Commissioners serving included Miles Brewer, John Pomberg and Chris Lindner.

The passage of the Food Security Act of 1985 brought new challenges to Soil and Water Conservation Districts which were responsible for approving conservation plans on all highly erodible cropland. Lee District adopted conservation compliance and sodbuster plans on over 92,000 acres of highly erodible land by the 1990 deadline and has since recorded over 61,000 acres of highly erodible land protected from erosion by the implementation of these plans.

In 1987 Soil Conservation Districts were renamed "Soil and Water Conservation Districts" and took on added water quality responsibilities. Between 1986 and 1995, Lee District enrolled 17,500 acres into the popular Conservation Reserve Program.

In addition to supporting the state and federal conservation initiatives, the Lee Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners have established numerous local programs that reinforce their strong commitment to resource conservation and education. These ongoing district programs include the sponsorship of the annual Conservation Education Poster Contest, and annual graduating high school senior Scholarship Program, participation in the national observance of Soil and Water Stewardship Week, and cooperative efforts with other local conservation agencies and organizations.

In 1995, District Chairman Melvin Sanders was honored by the Division of Soil Conservation as Iowa's Outstanding Young Farmer and was awarded the prestigious Ken Wagner Award.

The proud 50 year history of the Lee Soil and Water Conservation District will be celebrated publicly on the morning of December 1st in Donnellson. The District Commissioners cordially welcome the public to attend this event and celebrate Lee County's soil and water resource conservation achievements.

Lee programs and services of Lee SWCD are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status, or handicap.