

2015-2016 CHEROKEE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT

Cherokee County Soil and Water Conservation District

314 Lake Street
Cherokee, IA 51012
Phone: 712-225-4151 or 225-3769
Fax: 855-233-1296

Annual Report of our Conservation Progress

The Commissioners of the Cherokee County Soil and Water Conservation District are pleased to present this Annual Report of conservation accomplishments. It reflects the efforts of many individuals and groups working together to improve our environment through conservation programs. We hope our cooperative working relations continue as we work to protect our natural resources. The District is always ready to assist you with any conservation problem you may have.

Along with the landowners and operators in the county, we would like to thank the government agencies, news media, schools, businesses, and individuals that have assisted in the promotion and application of soil and water conservation.

Cherokee County District Commissioners



From left to right: Scott Osborn (Assistant Commissioner), Cherokee; Linda Bindner (Assistant Commissioner); Marcus Brian Mugge, Cleghorn; Keith Glienke, Aurelia; Tom Bindner, Marcus Russell Winterhof, Aurelia; and Ramona Nitz, Cherokee. Assistant commissioners Nathan Anderson, Pam Pierce and Daryl Ducommun are not pictured.

PERSONNEL

Commissioners

Russell Winterhof, Chairman	Aurelia
Brian Mugge, Vice Chairman	Cleghorn
Tom Bindner, Co-Treasurer	Marcus
Keith Glienke, Co-Treasurer	Aurelia
Ramona Nitz	Cherokee

Assistant Commissioners

Nathan Anderson	Aurelia
Linda Bindner	Marcus
Daryl Ducommun	Larrabee
Scott Osborn	Cherokee
Pam Pierce	Cherokee

Field Office Staff

Justin Boersma	District Conservationist
Nick Livermore	Soil Conservationist
Tracy Rasmussen	Conservation Assistant
Katie Cedar	District Technician
Sam Thomas	Civil Engineering Tech.
Amy Crouch	Little Sioux Project Manager for The Nature Conservancy



Back row (left to right): Justin Boersma and Nick Livermore. Front row (left to right): Tracy Rasmussen, Sam Thomas, and Katie Cedar. Amy Crouch not pictured.

We're now on Facebook under
Cherokee Swcd

2016 DISTRICT ACTIVITIES

- 21 Regular Meetings
- Organizational Meeting to Approve District Policies, elect officers, and establish committees
- Conservation Partnership Legislative Day
- Booth at the Cherokee County Ag Show
- Poster Contest Presentations
- Hosted CDI Spring Regional meeting
- Held Gere Creek Annual Review Meeting
- Northwest Iowa Regional Envirothon (environmental competition for high schools)
- Reviewed scholarship applications
- District Tree Sales
- 4th Grade Poster judging
- Held Cover Crop Field Day
- Watershed inspections
- Scholarship presented at Cherokee's Washington High School Awards Program
- 4th grade posters displayed at the Sanford Museum
- Paid CDI and NACD Dues
- Conservation Tour
- Held Pollinator Habitat Field Day
- District Audit
- CDI Annual Conference
- New commissioner elected
- REAP Assemblies

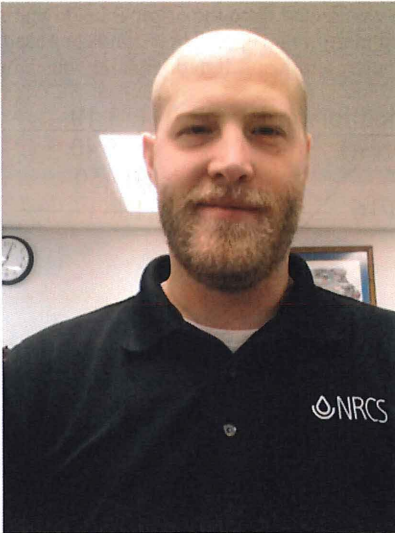


Russ Winterhof presents retiring commissioner Gary Otto with a plaque at the December commissioner meeting.



Pollinator Habitat Field Day held in Cherokee County.

New District Conservationist



Hi, my name is Justin Boersma and I'm the new District Conservationist in Cherokee, so I'd like to take this opportunity to tell you a little bit about myself.

I grew up on a row crop/livestock farm a couple of miles west of Hospers, and attended MOC-Floyd Valley High School. After high school I attended Northwestern College where I received an Ecological Science degree and the University of Northern Iowa where I received a Professional Science Master's degree in Ecosystem Management.

In the summer of 2010 I accepted a position with the Allamakee County Soil and Water Conservation District to conduct a watershed assessment of Waterloo Creek. Then in August of 2010 I was offered my first position with the NRCS as a Soil Conservationist in Anamosa. After serving 18 months in Anamosa, I accepted a transfer to Atlantic where I served as the Soil Conservationist for the Cass/Audubon County management unit until June of 2013. In early June 2013 I accepted a transfer to the O'Brien County field office where I worked as the Soil Conservationist until I took over the District Conservationist position in both Cherokee and O'Brien County this past April.

It was a long journey to get back home, but I really appreciate the opportunity to come back and promote conservation in my home area. We here in the Cherokee County NRCS office have several different conservation programs with financial assistance that I'd be glad to talk to you about.

If you have any questions about our conservation programs or other natural resource concerns, be sure to stop up here in the office and I'd be glad to discuss them with you. If you don't have any questions, please still feel free to stop in and introduce yourself. I look forward to working with as many Cherokee County producers as I can.

New Soil Conservationist



Hello, my name is Nick Livermore and I started as the new Cherokee County Soil Conservationist in mid-September. I am very excited to be working and living in Cherokee. For the kind people of the area that I have not yet met, I would like to further introduce myself.

I grew up in eastern Iowa between Dike and New Hartford with two older brothers and an older sister. Growing up I developed a heavy passion for the outdoors and conservation through my parents and lifestyle. I spent the vast majority of my free time in the woods and on the water.

At Iowa State University I gained a degree in Agronomy, with a minor in Sustainability. While in school and during a few summers I worked on a half conventional/half certified organic farm near Alleman Iowa. Working on that farm helped to develop the experience and knowledge I needed to follow my dream of one day working in conservation.

After graduating ISU I spent two years working for Monsanto managing 26 research corn plots between Des Moines and Devils Lake North Dakota. After my wife Lisa found a veterinarian position in Cherokee and we found a house to live in, I began looking for a job that would result in less travel. I worked out of Calumet soil sampling for about six months before accepting the Soil Conservationist position in Cherokee. I am very happy to be here and look very much forward to meeting and working with the people of Cherokee county.

STATE FUNDING

(July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016)

Cost Share and REAP Practice Funds are used to provide up to 50% cost share for installing practices such as waterways, terraces, and water & sediment control basins. Management Practice Funds are used to provide a one time incentive payment to try no-till, strip-till, or planting cover crops.

REAP F/NG Funds are used to provide up to 75% cost share for planting windbreaks.

Cost Share Fund

Allocation + Carryover + Supplemental Received	\$ 56,464.22
Transferred to Management	17,120.00
Total cost-share paid	13,994.57
Total approved & pending	<u>25,349.65</u>
Balance 6/30/16	\$ 0.00

Cost Share - Management Practices

Transferred from cost share	\$ 17,120.00
Total cost-share paid	17,120.00
Total approved & pending	<u>0.00</u>
Balance 6/30/16	\$ 0.00

REAP Practices Fund

Allocation + Carryover + Supplemental Received	\$ 36,687.58
Total cost-share paid	30,934.37
Total approved & pending	<u>5,753.21</u>
Balance 6/30/16	\$ 0.00

REAP Forestry/Native Grasses Fund

Allocation + Carryover	\$ 3,357.41
Total cost-share paid	2,354.17
Total approved & pending	<u>0.00</u>
Recalled 6/30/16	\$ 1,003.24

Gere Creek WIRB Grant

Allocation	\$ 239,942.00
Total cost-share paid	73,026.41
Total approved & pending	<u>70,286.13</u>
Balance 6/30/16	\$ 96,629.46

Statewide Water Quality Initiative Funds

Approvals made	\$ 12,823.60
Total cost-share paid	9,775.05
Slippage/Cancellations	<u>3048.55</u>
Balance 6/30/16	\$ 0.00

Low Interest Loan Program

3 loans made totaling \$488,880.40

Little Sioux Flood Prevention Watershed Maintenance Funds

(July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016)

These funds were collected from the original landowners in the Little Sioux Watershed many years ago. These funds are used to pay for repairs, maintenance, and inspection of existing watershed structures.

Balance carried forward	\$176,113.10
Income (Interest)	\$ 1678.40
Expenses	<u>\$ 605.50</u>
Balance 6/30/16	\$177,186.00

General Fund (Revolving)

(July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016)

These funds are generated through tree sales, donations, and coop agreements. They are used to pay District expenses that are not covered by IM Funds and to hire employees.

Balance carried forward	\$50,903.36
Income	\$42,701.56
Expenses	<u>\$29,716.56</u>
Balance 6/30/16	\$63,888.36

Commissioner Expense Fund

(July 1, 2015– June 30, 2016)

These are funds appropriated by the legislature to reimburse commissioners for traveling expenses as well as pay for district office expenses.

Allocation + Supplemental	\$ 2,250.00
Expenses: Mileage reimb.	\$ 1,396.83
Dues	\$ 850.00
Postage	<u>\$ 3.17</u>
Balance 6/30/16	\$ 0.00

Extra commissioner expenses of \$1431.44 incurred, but not reimbursed.

FEDERAL FUNDING

(October 1, 2015 - September 30, 2016)

Funded 5 new EQIP contracts totaling \$105,442.37

115 CRP Contracts approved

Cherokee SWCD Awards Scholarship



Each year the Cherokee SWCD gives one or more scholarships to high school seniors who will be pursuing programs of study in any field of conservation or agriculture. Scholarship applications are judged according to scholastic achievement, involvement, leadership, character, career, and conservation message. The District forwards the top scholarship application to the Conservation Districts of Iowa regional director for a chance to compete for regional and state scholarships.

On May 16th the Cherokee Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) awarded a Cherokee Washington High School student, Bailey Gaydo, with a \$250.00 scholarship.

Bailey is the daughter of Timothy and Jennifer Gaydo of Cherokee. In high school Bailey participated in Cross Country, Bowling, Track, 4-H, and County 4-H Youth Council. Bailey spent first semester studying Animal Science at South Dakota State University in Brookings, SD. After the first semester she transferred to Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown, SD where she is studying Agri-Business.

Together, Conservation Districts of Iowa and the 100 Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Iowa, fund and implement the scholarship program as part of their mission to protect and enhance soil, water, and other natural resources valuable to our state.

New Conservation Education Program for Youth

Cherokee SWCD Commissioner Ramona Nitz started a new conservation education program this year for Cherokee County youth who are interested in farming. Ramona meets with the kids in her home to discuss topics relevant to today's agriculture. So far they have discussed topics such as no till, cover crops, and various lab experiments the students have been doing in their Ag classes. Ramona also serves the kids a lunch sponsored by the Cherokee SWCD.

If any area youth would like to attend these Lunch 'n' Learn sessions they should call Tracy at the NRCS office (225-3769) and she will make sure they're invited to the next session.



Lunch 'n' Learn kids pictured: Back row from left to right: Trey Claycamp and Jaden Ducommun. Front row from left to right: Caleb Wolterman, Jake Zwiefel, Drew Ducommun, Dawson Ducommun, Austin Wilkie, and Jared Woltman.

Conservation Education 2016: Students Learn About Why We Need Trees

In the spring, 4th grade students from Cherokee, MMC, Aurelia, and River Valley had an opportunity to participate in the Cherokee County Soil & Water Conservation District's poster contest.

The theme of this year's contest was "We All Need Trees". Mike Henderson, Area 1 Agronomist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Laura Kohn, Cherokee County Naturalist, spent time in each 4th grade classroom explaining the poster contest, as well as conducting a program on trees. They played a game with the students called Forestry BINGO where each pictured item on the sheet had some tree product in it. For example ice cream has lignin from trees as a thickener. Students also learned that material from trees is in cement and building materials. Laura and Mike reviewed the importance of trees to both us and animals by discussing our favorite foods that grow on trees and by reviewing the profile of a hollowed out log that Mike provided. This profile allowed the students to see that trees hollow from the inside out and provide great nesting materials for raccoons and various birds. Mike and Laura also built a tree from the roots up, discussing the importance of each part and what items come from each part of the tree.

Posters were judged on the following criteria: 50% for conservation message, 30% for visual effectiveness, 10% for originality, and 10% for universal appeal.

Cherokee SWCD Commissioner Ramona Nitz presented the first, second, and third place winners from each school with ribbons, certificates, and Dairy Queen gift cards from the Cherokee SWCD.

From Aurelia the winners were Andrew Bush – First Place, Maggie Bloom – Second Place, and Kayla Mongan – Third Place. Cherokee's winners were Ava Anderson – 1st place, Amelia Brown – 2nd place, and Emma Patterson – 3rd place. From MMC the winners were Cody Simons – 1st place, Elizabeth Pederson – 2nd place, and Carly Fuhrman – 3rd place. River Valley's winners were Taryn Kurtz – 1st place, Adrienne Wiley – 2nd place, and Teresa Todd – 3rd place.

Andrew Bush's poster was chosen as the overall winner for Cherokee County and was sent to the Conservation Districts of Iowa Regional Director for the regional competition.

All of the participating students' posters were on display at the Sanford Museum during the month of June.

Aurelia 4th Grade Poster Winners



From left to right: 3rd place winner Kayla Mongan, 2nd place winner Maggie Bloom, and 1st place winner Andrew Bush.

Marcus-Meriden-Cleghorn 4th Grade Poster Winners



From left to right: 1st place winner Cody Simons, 2nd place winner Elizabeth Pederson, and 3rd place winner Carly Fuhrman .

Cherokee 4th Grade Poster Winners



From left to right: 3rd place winner Emma Patterson, 2nd place winner Amelia Brown, and 1st place winner Ava Anderson.

River Valley 4th Grade Poster Winners



From left to right: 1st place winner Taryn Kurtz, 2nd place winner Adrienne Wiley, and 3rd place winner Teresa Todd.



Andrew Bush's poster was chosen as the overall winner for Cherokee County.

Contributions

Contributions are the primary source for financing educational and promotional activities. We would like to thank the following contributors who donated money from October 2015 through September 2016. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

Soil & Water Sustainers

Foundation Analytical Laboratory Inc.– Cherokee
Chuck Peters
Steve and Gwen Peters
WHJ LLC
Farmers State Bank - Marcus
Martin Roepke
Western Cherokee Mutual Insurance - Marcus

Soil & Water Stewards

Scott and Sally Wilkie
Filmore and Darlene Gustafson
Timothy and Angela Cronin
First Trust & Savings Bank - Aurelia, Cleghorn, Marcus
Sharon Nelson
Randall Reardon
Helen Hudson
George Mundy
John and Ramona Nitz
Tom and Linda Bindner
Russell and Beth Winterhof
Schmillen Construction - Marcus
Lundell Construction - Cherokee

Soil & Water Savers

Jim and Judy Ducommun
Joel and Jan Thevenin
Tom and Susanne Oswald
Smith Insurance Services LTD - Marcus

Soil & Water Supporters

Barbara Esch
Fordyce Family Farm LLC
Duane and Lucille Kent
Mark and Janice Carlson
McGuire Auction - Holstein
Miller, Miller, Miller P.C. Attorneys At Law - Cherokee
Craig and Beverly Simonsen

Conservation Tour

We decided to try something a little different for our 2016 Conservation Tour. Rather than traveling to 3 or 4 spots in Cherokee County to view and learn about various conservation practices we spent the evening at the ISU Northwest Research & Development Farm near Calumet. On July 14th the Cherokee and O'Brien commissioners, state & field office staff, legislative people, and farmers met at the research farm.

The evening began with Josh Sievers, Ag Specialist for ISU Research Farms, and Joel DeJong, ISU Extension Field Agronomist, giving a fascinating demonstration on how drones work. Then the group headed out to the field where Joel and Josh showed them several research projects dealing with surface runoff, water table monitoring, cover crops, and tile water quality. Afterwards the group enjoyed a delicious meal sponsored by the O'Brien and Cherokee Conservation Districts.



Josh Sievers does a demonstration on drones.



The group rode in comfort around the research farm.



Conservation and Your Operation in a Watershed

By James Gillespie

Division Director

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship

Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality

Everyone lives and works in a watershed and everyone has a responsibility to take care of the resources in that watershed. I am going to give you some simple tips on how you can assess and get help treating the resources in your watershed.

The first thing you need to do is a visual assessment of the land you own and/or operate and see if there are some issues or problems (i.e. erosion, gulley's, flooding, water quality, poor seeding) that need addressed. After identifying the problem, can you determine what is causing the problem? What should or can I do to help solve the problem or do I need some technical assistance?

If you need help with these situations, there are resources available at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Soil and Water Conservation District, ISU Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa Learning Farms and other conservation service providers. You may have other landowners and farmers in your area that host field days and do demonstrations that may help you understand what can be done. It does not make any difference if you live in town or in the country, there is great technical assistance available and there may be some financial assistance as well.

A good conservation plan with scientific technical assistance can get you started down the road to protecting your resources and concerns. If we work together on the issues in our watersheds, we will not only protect and improve our land and water but make sure that we are preventing any impacts on resources around us.

Iowa has always been a leader in conservation of our natural resources and watershed protection. Thank you for what you do, do not ever hesitate to ask for assistance and always be looking for opportunities to make improvements because we have some of the best natural resources in the world and we need to take care of them.

2016-2017 Tree Price List

Cherokee Soil & Water Conservation District

314 Lake Street, Cherokee, IA 51012 PH: (712) 225-4151
FAX: (855) 233-1296 EMAIL: Tracy.Rasmussen@ia.nacdnet.net

Species	Size	Type	Trees Per Bundle	Price Per Tree	Price Per Bundle or Pot	No. of Bundles	No. of Trees	Total Price
If you are looking for a species not listed below, give us a call. Other varieties may be available.								
Deciduous Trees								
Male Cottonwood (seedless)	4-5'	Seedling	Bundles of 25	\$2.80	\$70.00			
Autumn Blaze Maple	2-3'	Seedling	Bundles of 5	\$13.00	\$65.00			
Silver Maple	5-6'	Seedling	Bundles of 10	\$3.70	\$37.00			
Sugar Maple	2-3'	Seedling	Bundles of 25	\$2.40	\$60.00			
Bur Oak	2-3'	Seedling	Bundles of 10	\$2.20	\$22.00			
Red Oak	3-4'	Seedling	Bundles of 10	\$3.00	\$30.00			
Hybrid Willow	2-3'	Seedling	Bundles of 25	\$2.00	\$50.00			
Shrubs								
Nanking Cherry	2-3'	Seedling	Bundles of 25	\$1.88	\$47.00			
Common Chokecherry	2-3'	Seedling	Bundles of 25	\$2.00	\$50.00			
Cranberrybush	2-3'	Seedling	Bundles of 10	\$2.40	\$24.00			
Redosier Dogwood	2-3'	Transplant	Bundles of 10	\$2.40	\$24.00			
Common Purple Lilac	2-3'	Transplant	Bundles of 10	\$2.40	\$24.00			
Amur Maple	2-3'	Seedling	Bundles of 10	\$1.80	\$18.00			
Common Ninebark	2-3'	Transplant	Bundles of 10	\$2.60	\$26.00			
American Plum	3-4'	Seedling	Bundles of 10	\$2.20	\$22.00			
Evergreens								
White Pine (2 Gal)	18-24"	Potted	Any Quantity	\$18.00		NA		
Black Hills Spruce (2 Gal)	18-24"	Potted	Any Quantity	\$18.00		NA		
White Spruce (2 Gal)	18-24"	Potted	Any Quantity	\$18.00		NA		
Meyer Spruce (2 Gal)	18-24"	Potted	Any Quantity	\$18.00		NA		
Colorado Spruce (2 Gal)	24-30"	Potted	Any Quantity	\$20.00		NA		
Special Order	Size	Type	Trees Per Bundle	Price Per Tree	Price Per Bundle or Pot	No. of Bundles	No. of Trees	Total Price

All Orders Subject to Availability!

50% Deposit Required on all orders.

Please make checks payable to Cherokee SWCD

No survival guarantee on stock sold at these prices.

Trees will be available the first or second week in April for pickup.

SUB TOTAL	
7% STATE & LOCAL OPTION TAX	
GRAND TOTAL	
CASH/CHECK#	
AMOUNT PAID	
BALANCE DUE	

Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Dear Soil & Water Conservationist:

For over 70 years the Cherokee Soil & Water Conservation District has been helping producers conserve two of our most valuable resources, our soil and water. We believe that soil and water conservation is an easy task that everyone can do and we need your help. We invite you to join our local conservation efforts by becoming a Conservation Club Member for 2017. All Conservation Club funds collected are used specifically for projects like: scholarship awards for high school seniors, Lunch 'n' Learn meetings with area youth, conservation education materials, 4th grade poster contest prizes and materials, and our yearly Conservation Tour in which the public views newly implemented conservation practices. We also provide technical assistance in the local office by paying for part-time employees.

As Iowans, we all share similar concerns for soil and water quality as well as protecting these resources for future generations. Iowa is faced with challenges that will impact conservation programs. By donating to the Cherokee SWCD, we can continue to promote, educate, and implement these important conservation practices. Any support you can give to the SWCD is greatly appreciated. And remember, your contribution **is tax deductible**. If you would like to make a contribution, please complete the membership form below and mail it with your donation, made payable to the Cherokee SWCD.

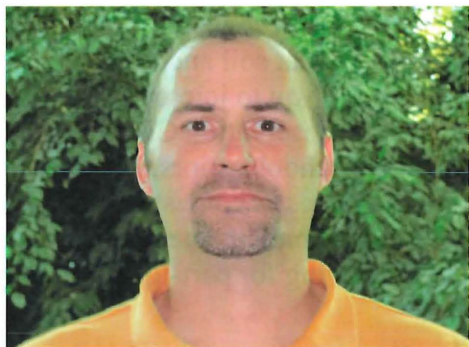
With Sincere Thanks,

Cherokee SWCD Commissioners

Please make your donation payable to:

Cherokee SWCD

					
Name: _____		Cherokee SWCD			
Address: _____		314 Lake Street			
_____		Cherokee, IA 51012			
_____		712-225-3769			
<u>Levels of Support</u>					
Soil & Water Supporter	\$20 - \$49.00	Soil & Water Saver	\$50 - \$99.00		
Soil & Water Steward	\$100 - \$149.00	Soil & Water Sustainer	\$150.00 and above		
Donation enclosed: _____		Any Amount Welcome			
					
.....					
					



Have we been ignoring Water Quality in Iowa?

By Vince Sitzmann

Field Services Bureau Chief

Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship

Division of Soil Conservation & Water Quality

Over the past couple of years we have heard a lot about water quality in Iowa. Even more so now than I can ever remember in my 18 year career with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. And rightly so. Water quality is and should be important to Iowans, all Iowans. But just because we never used to talk about water quality doesn't mean we've been ignoring it.

In 1971, Iowa legislature passed the sediment control law that establishes soil loss limits for every soil type in the state, making it the first of its kind in the nation. In 1973, Iowa was the first state to appropriate state cost share funds to work with landowners to address soil erosion. In 2013, Iowa was the second state in the Mississippi River Basin to develop a nutrient reduction strategy for the entire state. Not once in the three examples listed above was the word water quality mentioned, however all of these programs have had a major impact on Iowa's water quality.

So what's the relationship between reducing soil erosion and protecting water quality? Every ton of soil we keep in the field helps keep it out of the stream. Sediment is also a major transporter of phosphorus. If you stop the sediment you stop much of the phosphorus too. Keep in mind that reducing soil loss doesn't solve all our water quality concerns we have in the state, but it's a great start, particularly in fields that have highly erodible soils. We need to continue looking for more and better ways to address both phosphorus and nitrogen losses from our fields, but solving these issues requires multiple approaches. Some areas of the state are very susceptible to nitrogen losses while others phosphorus. Addressing water quality issues across the state will require a diverse use of management practices such as no-till and cover crops, structural practices such as terraces and waterways, and edge of field practices such as bioreactors and saturated buffers. New and emerging technologies that have yet to be refined will also be a key if we are to continue making improvements.

So have we been ignoring water quality in Iowa? No, water quality just wasn't the buzz word at the time, soil erosion was. The real question is can we do more? I believe the answer to that question will be coming soon. The governor's office, legislature, ag groups, and others have gone on record in support of additional funding for water quality. What that level of support ends up being has yet to be determined. As a lifelong Iowan, I'm looking forward to being part of the future efforts to protect our soils and continue to improve water quality in Iowa.



Collaboration is Key for Meeting Iowa's Water Quality Challenges

By Kurt Simon

Iowa NRCS State Conservationist

I just completed my first year as State Conservationist this past October. During that year I crisscrossed the state at least a dozen times, meeting with nearly every Natural Resources Conservation Service staff member and partner employee. I've also met nearly half of Iowa's 500 soil and water conservation district commissioners.

I've formed relationships with members of the Iowa conservation community including farmers, state agencies, commodity groups and other non-profits. My goal was to listen and learn so that I can make informed decisions about NRCS policies, programs, funding and staff.

Despite the different backgrounds, professions, ages, and opinions of the people I met, there is one powerful common characteristic shared by nearly every person: We all care about Iowa farmers and the future of Iowa agriculture.

I've worked for NRCS for more than 30 years. And I don't recall a time when the conservation community has been involved in such an important wide-scale public debate. Water quality is a complicated issue, with many stakeholders with opposing positions on the best solutions for Iowa's water quality concerns.

Although this is a challenging time for conservation farmers and professionals, from my perspective, it's also one of the most rewarding. The impact of our work has never been greater, the conservation focus has never been stronger and our decisions have never been more significant.

So, as I move forward in my second year here in Iowa, I am optimistic that members of the conservation community will choose to focus on what we have in common and not our differences.

At NRCS, our work is guided by the nine steps of conservation planning: a conversation-driven, decision-making process. Simply put, it's a professional conservationist talking with a farmer about his or her concerns for their land and economic sustainability.

During that process, the NRCS conservation planner and the farmer work towards the best solution for each of the concerns. Ultimately, by focusing on shared goals, we move forward. Decisions are implemented which improve, protect and conserve natural resources.

If you are a farmer with water quality, soil health or erosion concerns come see us. We want to collaborate with you to plan a workable solution. And, when we can, provide financial assistance to help you apply more conservation to your farm.

