

Our Soil. Our Water. Our Future.

Miller Creek Challenge Seeks Funding to Expand Conservation Efforts

Farmers in the Miller Creek Watershed are implementing water quality and conservation practices so quickly, their efforts are outgrowing the amount of local, state, and national funds available for cost-share opportunities.

Over the past three years, cover crop acreage in the watershed has increased from 1000 acres to about 6000 acres.

"Nearly 16 percent of the row crop acres in the watershed are now in cover crops through cost-share programs," said Shane Wulf, Miller Creek Water Quality Improvement project coordinator.

"Due to this increased cost-share demand from producers, we've run out of practice funding for 2017," Wulf added.

When farmers who implement cover crops without any cost-share assistance are accounted for, it is estimated that 20 percent of the row crop acres in the watershed are in cover crops.

The Miller Creek project was established in 2014 through the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's (IDALS) Water Quality Initiative (WQI) to help encourage the adoption of conservation practices that will improve water quality and soil health and to provide related technical assistance to producers and landowners. In addition, two Regional Conservation Partnership Programs (RCPP) are also providing funding for stakeholders in Miller Creek. They include the Middle Cedar Partnership Project led by the City of Cedar Rapids and the Midwest Agriculture Water Quality Partnership co-led by the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance (IAWA) and IDALS.

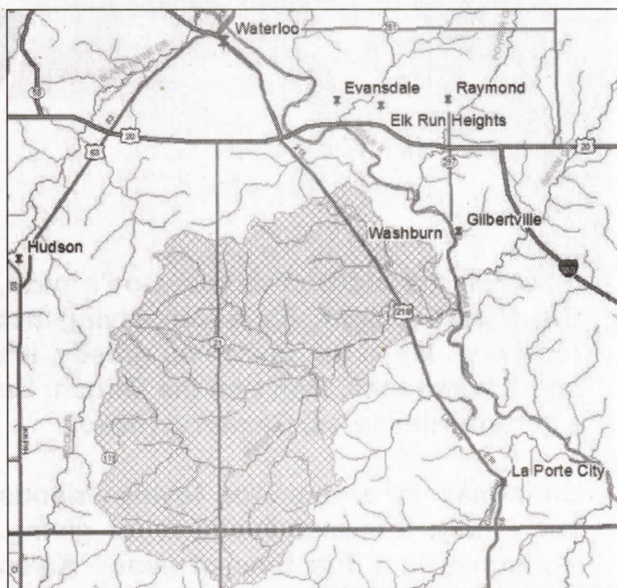
IAWA has pledged to contribute \$13,500 toward half of the 2017 cost-share deficit for cover crops.

"We want to help maintain the great momentum that the Miller Creek project has built by increasing farmer demand for conservation practices," said Sean McMahon, Executive Director of IAWA.

"We don't like to see interested farmers who want to implement cover crops or other practices turned away for lack of funding. That's why we're contributing financially and we've challenged the Miller Creek project to seek additional funding from the community."

Calling for local support

To this end, the "Miller Creek Challenge" has been established, with a goal of raising \$100,000 to match future contributions for conservation practices by farmers in the watershed. With accelerating demand from producers, Wulf anticipates additional funding will be needed to



MILLER CREEK WATERSHED - Nearly 90% of the Miller Creek Watershed's 42,431 acres, illustrated by the shaded figure above, is devoted to row crops, making it an ideal testing ground for conservation practices that support the Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

cover cost-share in 2018 and 2019 as well. The Miller Creek project aspires to increase cover crops to 50 percent of all row crop acres in the watershed and to be the first watershed in Iowa to meet the non-point runoff goals of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (reducing nitrogen and phosphorus loading by 41 and 29 percent, respectively).

The increase in farmers implementing water-quality practices is also matching the rising interest from the Iowa public. This sense of a shared urban-rural responsibility for water quality is reflected in the theme of the Miller Creek Challenge: "It's Our Soil. It's Our Water. It's Our Future."

"We know there is increasing interest from the community regarding improved water quality," said Jeri Thornsberry, Chair of the Black Hawk Soil and Water Conservation District.

"As we are now in the season of giving back, this is an excellent time for anyone — farmers, city dwellers, and local businesses — to join in this important effort."

Individuals can donate online and learn more details about the project by going to iowaagwateralliance.com/miller-creek-challenge.

How Cover Crops Contribute to Water Quality

Cover crops, such as winter rye, reduce the loss of nitrogen and phosphorus from the soil and capture nutrients for next year's crop while

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improving water quality. A significant component of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, cover crops provide immediate and long-term benefits for water quality and soil health. They have been documented to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus concentrations by about 30 percent.

About the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance

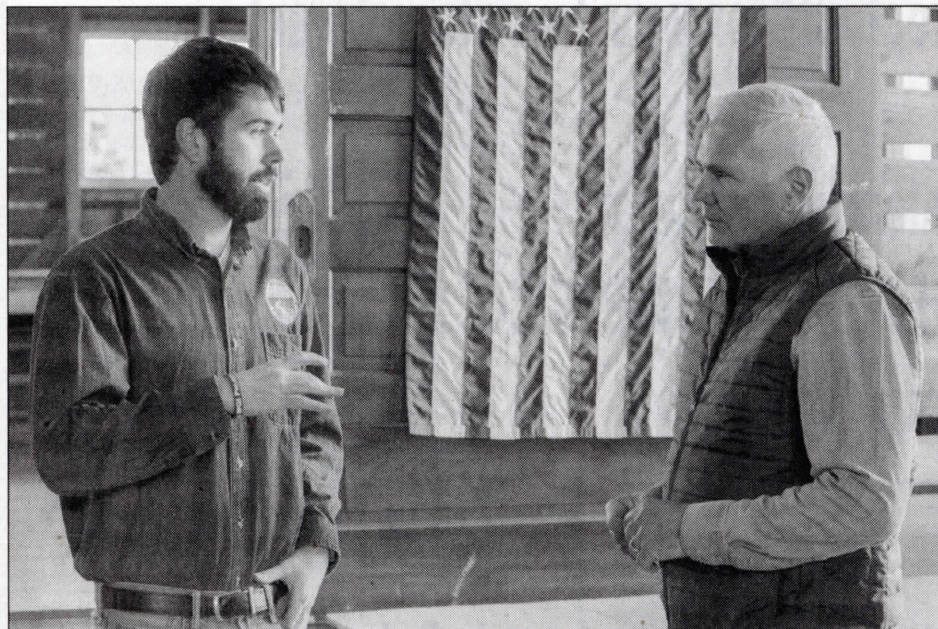
The Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance (IAWA) is increasing the pace and scale of farmer-led efforts to improve water quality. Founded in 2014 by Iowa Corn, Iowa Soybean Association and the Iowa Pork Producers Association, IAWA is building public-private partnerships focused on implementing water quality solutions. Iowa farmers are actively engaged in various conservation efforts that improve water quality. Learn more at www.iowaagwateralliance.com

About the Miller Creek Water Quality Improvement Project

The Miller Creek Water Quality Improvement Project supports the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy and the Iowa Water Quality Initiative (WQI) by working with producers in Black Hawk and Tama counties. Great progress has been made through the installation of demonstration practices to improve water quality and to provide an environment for producers within and around the region to learn more about conservation practices.

About the Midwest Agriculture Water Quality Partnership RCPP

The \$10 million grant awarded to the Midwest Agriculture Water Quality Partnership project is the largest National Funding Pool award in the country through the RCPP in 2016. These funds will be leveraged with



Miller Creek Water Quality Improvement Project Coordinator Shane Wulf discusses conservation issues with Louis Beck, Third-Generation Farmer and Union Community Schools Agricultural Instructor. *Photo courtesy of Iowa Ag Water Alliance.*

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