



Including the SWCD districts of Crawford, Shelby, East Pottawattamie, Harrison and West Pottawattamie

Volume 1  
Issue 3

# Quad-County Conservation News



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## Former city couple sees rural dream come true

by Joyce Bohner

Ed and Chris Christensen were a city couple with country hearts. Chris grew up outside the city and wanted to return. Ed was born a city boy, but he also had a deep appreciation for rural life.

The couple lived and worked in the Council Bluffs-Omaha area, Chris at Commercial Federal Bank in Omaha and Ed at Jennie Edmunson Hospital in Council Bluffs.

Then five years ago they found their dream property and built a house. They could look out their front window and almost see Interstate 29 less than a mile to the west.

But out their east window lay the flat farm ground of what used to be the former Honey Creek Lake and just beyond that, the famous Loess Hills rose majestically in the background.

"It's not far from town, but when you get here, it feels like you're way out in the country," Chris said.

The Christensens' original plan was to use the farm ground for alfalfa to use for their horses.

But they soon found out the farm ground was wet. Almost always.

They built a channel to keep the water contained, but it was still wet.

The Christensens were always big wildlife fans and when they heard that some conservation groups, including the United States Fish and Wildlife Service had had their eyes on that particular piece of land for a wetland project, they were more than ready to cooperate.

"It was the hills and the ducks that convinced us this was the place we wanted to be in the first place," Chris said. "We were excited about the idea of having a wetland here."

As with a lot of government projects, the wheels ground slowly. There was a lot of paperwork, particularly since several agencies were involved including federal and state government as well as private organizations.

Steve VanRiper of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said, "The Christensens were incredibly patient. Ducks Unlimited had earmarked this site for years, long before the Christensens were the owners. It's so great for

it to all come together now and have so many be a part of it."

The Christensens have committed to a 20 acre development project, 18 of those acres will eventually have water on it.

Not all of it will be completed in one year, however. This year a three acre pond was dug.

With the help of neighbors the Fish and Wildlife Service hope to see a 30 acre wildlife area.

"It will be almost like the return of Honey Creek Lake," Ed said.

The first year they applied for the Wetland Reserve Program through the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the project didn't rank high enough for funding.

Through the efforts of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited and the district NRCS office, the project eventually came together.

Ed said, "It's just great so many people helped us out. Everyone was great. Our contractor, Chad Taylor, was very patient and helpful. He knew just what we wanted. 'I'm just glad it's finally happening.'"

The pond will have a lot of diversity in depth to attract a variety of wildlife.

Ed has already seen blue herons enjoying the spot and is looking forward to seeing more Canada Geese.

The Christensens have one daughter who is 12. Chris said, "She's going to love this as much as us. Since she's been old enough to walk, she's followed us outside. She loves to fish and since she was 8 years old, she's been bundling up and going duck hunting with her dad."

For most of the summer the Christensens lived with bulldozers and other equipment scattered over their yard.

The agreement was finally sealed in April and construction, proceeded rapidly when it began in late May.

The Christensens didn't really mind the inconvenience, or even thought that it will all happen again as various stages of the project are completed.

They just can't wait to see it when it all comes together and they can look out their back window and see geese, herons, ducks and other wildlife. They don't mind giving up their alfalfa field for that.



In top photo Ed Christensen, Steve Van Riper and Chris Christensen point out various aspects of their new wetland area as it is being created. In lower photo, Chad Taylor and his crew are busy creating the new wildlife area. The construction work was done in June of this year.

## Tree is new kid on the block in Oakland

*Shademaker News: New Kid on the Block*

There's a new kid on the block, his name is Mr. "Hoopsi." He arrived early this summer. He is located across the street from city hall in Oakland, along Highway 59 and Oakland Ave. Mr. Hoopsi is a conifer (needle tree); perhaps he is the bluest of the Colorado Blue Spruce family.

He will grow 6-12 inches a year. Mr. Hoopsi's needles are small to medium size. This coniferous tree has a dense conical form (shaped like a cone).

The reason Mr. Hoopsi is called a hoopsi is because he has an irregular shape and may lean to one side or the other. Mr. Hoopsi will be the future

attraction in Oakland during the Christmas season once decorated. Another beautification project by the Shademakers was purchasing Mr. Hoopsi. Mary and Tom Keast and Alan and Suzanne Vieth planted Mr. Hoopsi.

When driving along Highway 59, slow down, and admire, the new kid on the block, Mr. Hoopsi.

By Michelle D. Zimmerman

## West Pott. structure policy is announced

The following is the the West Pottawattamie SWCD structure policy:

The sign-up period is from January 1 through June 1. NRCS will do an initial survey and preliminary cost estimate and review with the landowner.

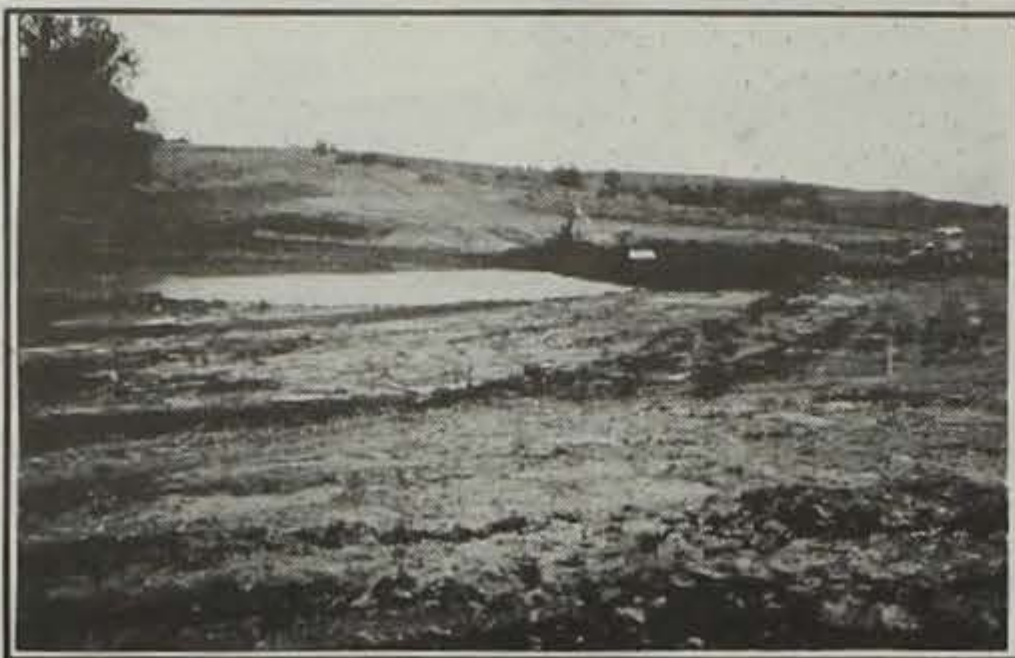
The objectives of the structure program for agricultural land is to provide erosion control and protect cultivated lands. The objectives for non-agricultural land is to provide erosion control, protect urban lands and associated uses.

Each structure project will have a \$20,000 cost-share cap. The owner will be required to obtain at least three (3) bids on any structure with a projected total cost of \$10,000 or more.

The owner is free to hire any contractor he/she chooses; however, the cost-share will be fifty percent of the engineer's estimate, fifty percent of the lowest bid or fifty percent of the bill, whichever is less.

On joint projects with multiple landowners, all landowners need to sign a joint project form and application.

All landowners need to be present for field visits. Land must be at least 75 percent treated above the structure. Structure applications are assigned priority based on benefit and erosion control.



These photos show Gene and Erika Seran's pond under construction, a dream come true, thanks to partnerships

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### News

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## Working together accomplishes goals in Pottawattamie County

### WORKING WITH LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS IS WORTH THE EFFORT

by Cindy Jones

It has been a long and somewhat winding road, but Gene and Erika Seran can now see the "fruits of their labors."

You might remember Gene and Erika Seran from the article done on them in the Summer/Fall 1999 Quad-District Conservation News, Volume 4, Issue 2. The Seran's are a lovely couple who are very interested in conservation of all types.

Just a little more that two years ago, Gene came into the West Pottawattamie NRCS/SWCD office asking about putting a pond on his property line.

He bought a farm that had a ditch he thought would work well for a pond providing wildlife habitat. He asked for financial assistance with this project from the West Pottawattamie SWCD Commissioners. Since the structure will also provide bank stabilization and erosion control, the commissioners approved assistance on the project.

Staff from the Council Bluffs Engineering Office and the W. Pott. NRCS/SWCD office conducted a topographic survey of the area. A preliminary design showed the pond would impact several neighbors of Gene and Erika's, both upstream and downstream. Gene and Erika made the necessary arrangements and filed all the paperwork, while

the engineering office finalized the plans.

After the final plans were finished, Gene applied, with the help of the engineering office and the NRCS staff, with the Hungry Canyons Alliance for additional financial assistance through the Small Structure Demonstration Project and was approved.

The pond, which has a watershed of approximately 290 acres, is located on a tributary to Snake Creek. It was originally designed to have a water depth of 26 feet and a planned pond area of approximately eight acres.

Thanks to the weather this spring, the pond area is actually larger than expected. The contractors were able to use borrow that was not originally planned to be used as the water table is normally too high. Gene and Erika also decided to have a small nesting island left for the wildlife.

This structure has had what could be called "the ripple effect." It started out with one family's dream and became a project that involved several local partners.

A special round of applause goes to Gene and Erika, who got this whole project started and whom without their dedication, this project would not have continued.

A pat on the back would also be appropriate for all partners involved, this includes: NRCS Council Bluffs Engineering Office, West Pottawattamie NRCS/SWCD staff and commissioners, Hungry Canyons Alliance, Pottawattamie County Engineer, Iowa State Research Farm and the neighbors who worked with the Seran's to accomplish this project.

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# Loess Hills is site of training session

## Loess Hills Ecology

by Julia Gubbels

Angi Hanson, Private Lands Biologist for a 20 county area in western Iowa, organized a training session on Loess Hills Ecology for NRCS and SWCD staff, commissioners, and landowners interested in the Loess Hills. Topics covered included an overview of the Loess Hills, Loess Hill prairies and management, Loess Hills forests, sharp-tailed grouse project. The afternoon included field trips to various sites.

Loess, from the German word meaning "loose" is fine wind-blown silt. During the ice ages, glaciers melted during periods of warmer weather causing floods in the Missouri River valley. These rivers of floodwater left deposits of fine pulverized silt in the floodplain. When colder temperatures returned, the silt would dry out and be blown eastward by strong westerly winds. The Hills are deeply dissected with narrow ridges and deep gullies caused by thousands of years of water erosion. Loess soil is extremely stable when cut vertically, with no other landscape like it in Iowa. Due to the few clay particles, the silt is very erosive when exposed to water.

The prairies in the Loess Hills are unique, due to the dry soils. Chad Graeve, Park Ranger at the Hitchcock Nature Area took the group on a hike and discussed prairies in the Loess Hills. The Loess Hills are located in the mixed prairie region. Chad stated, "this means the prairies in the Hills contain not only the tall grass species such as switchgrass and big bluestem, but also the shorter species such as sideoats grama and little bluestem. We are fortunate to have the largest concentration of mixed grass

prairie in the U.S within the Loess Hills." Chad explained the differences of remnant, restored, and reconstructed prairies. A reconstructed prairie is one that has/is "built". It was never prairie prior to establishment. A restored prairie is one that has always been prairie, but needs enhancement. Lastly is the remnant prairie, which is a well-established and maintained prairie. Chad has been involved with all types of the prairies at Hitchcock Nature Area. "In a restored prairie there will be approximately 5-10 grass species and 20-25 forb species. A remnant prairie will have approximately 20 grass species and up to 300 forb species," remarks Chad.

The majority of prairie grasses are warm season plants, which means they don't begin growing until the weather turns warm. Their growing season is from May until August. Species such as brome grass and blue grass are cool season grasses, and thrive in early spring, go dormant during the summer, and revive for a growth spurt in the fall. These characteristics are

important for prairie management. Burning has several effects on the prairie. After a fire, the ground is blackened which will absorb more sunlight. Since the prairie species germinate when warmed, the increased heat stimulates growth. The burn also releases nutrients that were held in last season's plants. These nutrients act like fertilizer so the plants in the burned area grow more rapidly. Often there will be an increase of some forbs immediately after a burn, but will lessen each year after the fire. Chad commented, "many people pay more attention to the recommended burn dates than when the condition is right for burning." Many prairies are burned in late spring, which damages the cool season plants and woody species, which have come out of dormancy and are growing. The prairie species are not only dormant, but they are also very deep rooted so the fire does not injure their root system. "The invading species in the prairies at Hitchcock are leafy spurge, sweet clover, and woody vegetation," states Chad.

In addition to the prairies there

are also Loess Hills forests. Paul Tauke, District Forester with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources discussed trees in the Hills. In this area sunlight and lack of moisture affect trees. Unlike the prairies, trees grow abundantly on the north and east slopes, with fewer on the other slopes. This is due to the hotter summer sun on the south and west slopes and the lack of available moisture. The young plants are unable to survive on these slopes. Paul states, "the pre-dominant tree in the Hills is the bur oak due to the bark that insulates and protects it during prairies fires." Many of the older bur oaks have wide spreading branches to absorb more sunlight. The spreading branches indicate that while the tree was growing, it stood where there was little competition for sunlight. Younger trees are more upright and less spreading because they are growing in a more crowded

condition. The primary invader tree species are sumac and ironwood.

Ed Weiner, Wildlife Biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources talked about the sharp-tailed grouse project in Monona County. By the 1930's sharp-tailed grouse were nearly absent from western Iowa except for wintering. A proposal was written in 1986 for the restoration of the sharp-tailed grouse. In 1995 and 1996 sharp-tailed grouse were released in Monona County. A group numbering 25-30 birds was reported in the vicinity. Ed states, "the release of additional birds is critical for increasing the existing numbers and providing genetic diversity to the Iowa population." It is unlikely that the sharp-tailed grouse will become widely abundant, but a native species has been returned to an area where it once flourished.

Suzanne Hickey, Loess Hills Protection Specialist with the

(Continued on page 4)

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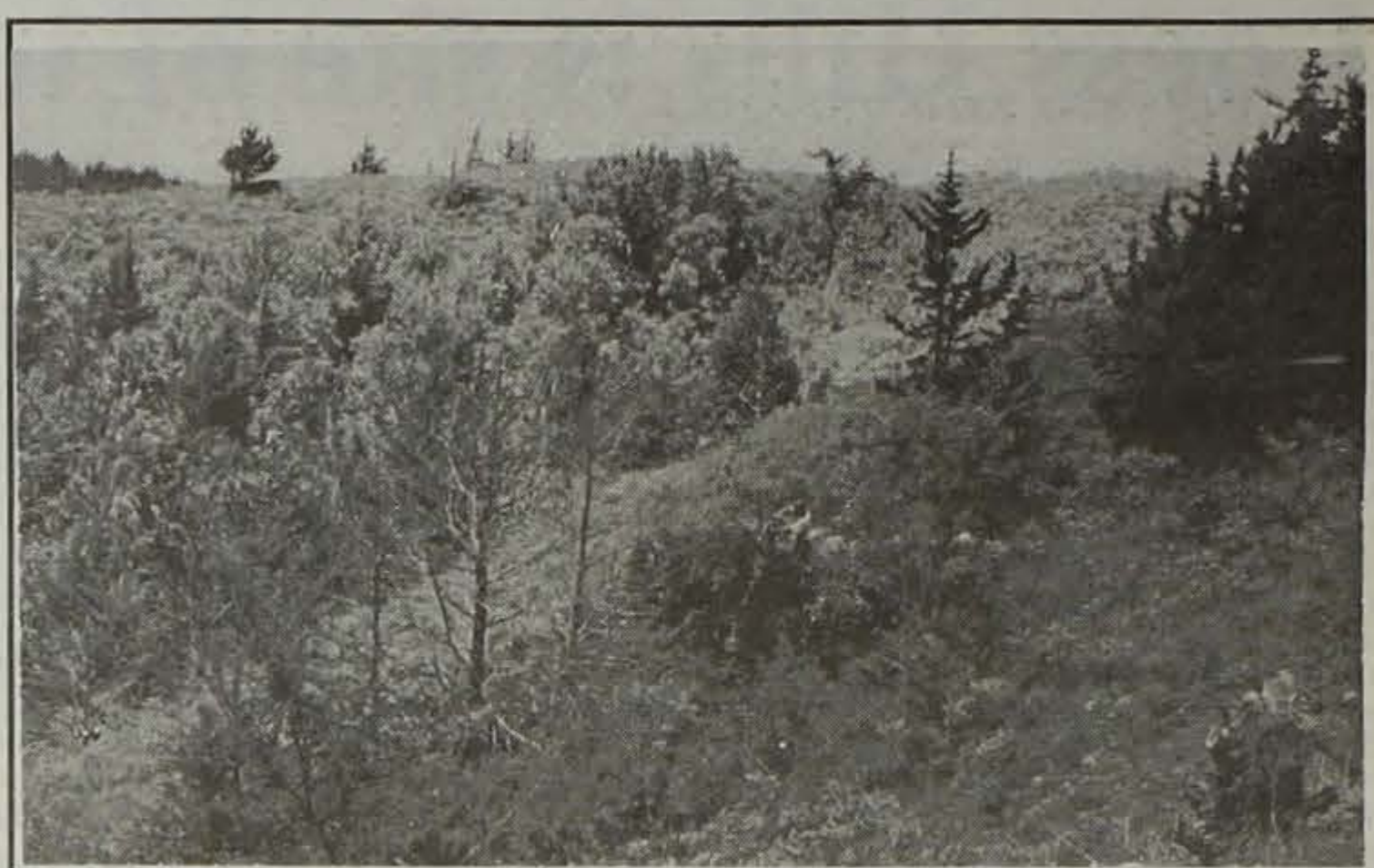
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Chad Graeve, Park Ranger at Hitchcock Nature Area, "We are fortunate to have the largest concentration of mixed grass prairie in the U.S. within the Loess Hills."



Members of the stewardship crew (partnership with Loess Alliance and Iowa Nature Conservancy) are removing trees on prairie owned by Ron and Barb Schaefer

## Several take part in Loess Hills Training

(Continued from page 3)

the group to sites where efforts are being done to improve the integrity of the Loess Hills. The first site we visited is owned by Ron and Barb Schaefer and located in East Lewis 27, just off of Highway 275 south of Council Bluffs. Ron and Barb live in Omaha and purchased this land to have a nature area where they can go to on the weekends. Their interest is to enhance the prairies on their

land. The major invader species is trees. Due to the intense labor involved, it is a slow process for individuals. The Iowa Nature Conservancy has showed their commitment in the project by working with the Loess Hills Alliance to provide labor. The Loess Hills Alliance funds the Stewardship Crew. This crew consists of 10-12 members, with their primary duty removing woody vegetation from the prairies. The crew will continue to work at numerous sites

throughout the summer. The other site visited was Folsom Point Preserve located in southern Pottawattamie County and northern Mills County. The Iowa Nature Conservancy acquired the property in 1999.

This 281-acre preserve protects one of the best examples of the southern Loess Hills prairie. Prior to acquisition by the Conservancy, the site was slated for housing development and mining. "Unfortunately we didn't get the land prior to soil being excavated and causing erosion. We placed silt fences in the worst areas and hopefully the area will recover over time," states Suzanne.

Everyone in attendance left the training session with a better understanding of the Loess Hills. The hikes through the areas enabled the group to see these areas up close and personal.

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# Pottawattamie County develops written policies

## Land Treatment & Terrace Removal Policy

With all the new development going on in Pottawattamie County and more terraces being removed, it was decided to have a written land treatment and terrace removal policy. This has been developed in conjunction with the IDALS-DSC Iowa Code section 161A.42, Council Bluffs Community Development, and Pottawattamie County Planning and Zoning. The written land treatment & terrace removal policy is effective for East & West Pottawattamie SWCDs.

## Land Treatment Policy

The landowner will complete an Affidavit of Compliance (SWCD-LDAR-1). This form must be signed and filed with the respective Soil Conservation District in Pottawattamie County before any land disturbing activity is initiated. In addition to the affidavit, a copy of the plat, aerial photo and brief written description of the land disturbing activity will be provided to the District for approval of soil erosion control plans.

## Soil Loss Limits

**Agricultural and horticultural lands:** Maximum rates of soil erosion permitted for these lands are the average annual soil loss expressed in tons per acre per year, varying from one to five tons depending upon the soil type.

## Nonagricultural lands

(Including public parks, urban lands, industrial parks, airports, public and private recreation lands, roads, streets, highways, and other public lands): The maximum rate of erosion permitted for these lands is an average annual soil loss of five tons per acre per year leaving the site. Construction sites (including

housing developments, shopping centers, industrial park developments, commercial building sites, highways, drainage channels, floodways, water impoundment structures and other similar projects): Maximum rate of soil erosion permitted on such land is 5 tons per acre per year leaving the site.

## General Guidelines for Land Treatment

The following practices that contribute to good urban and rural land conservation have been identified to help reduce soil erosion and sedimentation concerns before they become a soil loss complaint.

1. Prepare a conservation plan as an integral part of the subdivision or site plan.

2. Steep slopes, waterways and flood plain land should be considered for park and other open-space uses.

3. Save natural grass, shrubs, and trees wherever possible. These enhance the beauty of the subdivision, which increases the dollar value and helps control erosion.

4. Orient the development to the site so that minimum land grading and other site preparation is required.

5. Phase development in workable units in order to reduce soil exposure and damages during the construction period rather than breaking up large tracts of land

simultaneously.

6. Plan for the safe disposal of increased water runoff caused by rooftops, pavement, & straightened waterways.

7. Topsoil should be stockpiled and used later on areas to be stabilized by permanent vegetation.

8. Exposed & eroded areas should be established in temporary vegetation if not built on within 21 days. This seeding should be done immediately following rough grading.

9. Permanent vegetation should be established immediately upon completion of final grading on all areas where this is applicable.

10. Mulch, temporary diversions, contour furrows, terraces & other remedial conservation practices should be used where appropriate for erosion control.

11. Where appropriate, temporary or permanent sediment basins should be constructed near the lower reaches of drainageways. The exact location & design can be determined when detailed site plans are completed.

12. In developments, the developer will include a requirement for erosion control in all purchase contracts for the lots. Each homebuilder will be required to control erosion from the lot during construction activities.

13. Multiple phases will be

contingent on the previous phase(s) having all the proposed conservation practices implemented and satisfactorily controlling erosion.

14. Large projects done in phases will be looked on more favorably.

## 161A.64 Erosion control plans required for certain projects

1. If a political subdivision has adopted a sediment control ordinance which the commissioners and the political subdivision jointly agree is at least as equally effective as the commissioners' rules in preventing erosion from exceeding the established soil loss limits, the commissioners and the political subdivision shall execute an agreement under chapter 28E allowing an agency authorized by the political subdivision to receive and file an affidavit from a person, prior to initiating a land disturbing activity in that subdivision, stating that the proposed activity will not exceed the established soil loss limits.

A copy of the affidavit shall be mailed to the district as a part of the terms of the agreement. The affidavit shall be in a form prescribed by the department and made available by the district.

2. Prior to initiating a land disturbing activity in a political subdivision which has not adopted sediment control ordinances as described in subsection 1, a person engaged in the land disturbing activity shall file a signed affidavit with the soil and water conservation district that the project will not exceed the soil loss limits. The

affidavit shall be in a form prescribed by the department and made available by the district.

3. For the purposes of this section, "land disturbing activity" means a land change such as the tilling, clearing, grading, excavating, transporting or filling of land which may result in soil erosion from water or wind and the movement of sediment and sediment related pollutants into the water of the state or onto lands in the state but does not include the following: (Note: You still need to fill out the Affidavit of Compliance even if you are in one of these categories. The SWCD will determine if you are exempt.)

A. Tilling, planting or harvesting of agricultural, horticultural or forest crops.

B. Preparation for single-family residences separately built unless in conjunction with multiple construction in subdivision development.

C. Minor activities such as home gardens, landscaping, repairs and maintenance work.

D. Surface or deep mining.

E. Installation of public utility lines and connections, fence posts, sign posts, telephone poles, electric poles and other kinds of posts or poles.

F. Septic tanks and drainage fields unless they are to serve a building whose construction is a land disturbing activity.

G. Construction and repair of the tracks, right of way, bridges, communication facilities and other related structures of a railroad.

H. Emergency work to protect

(Continued on page 6)

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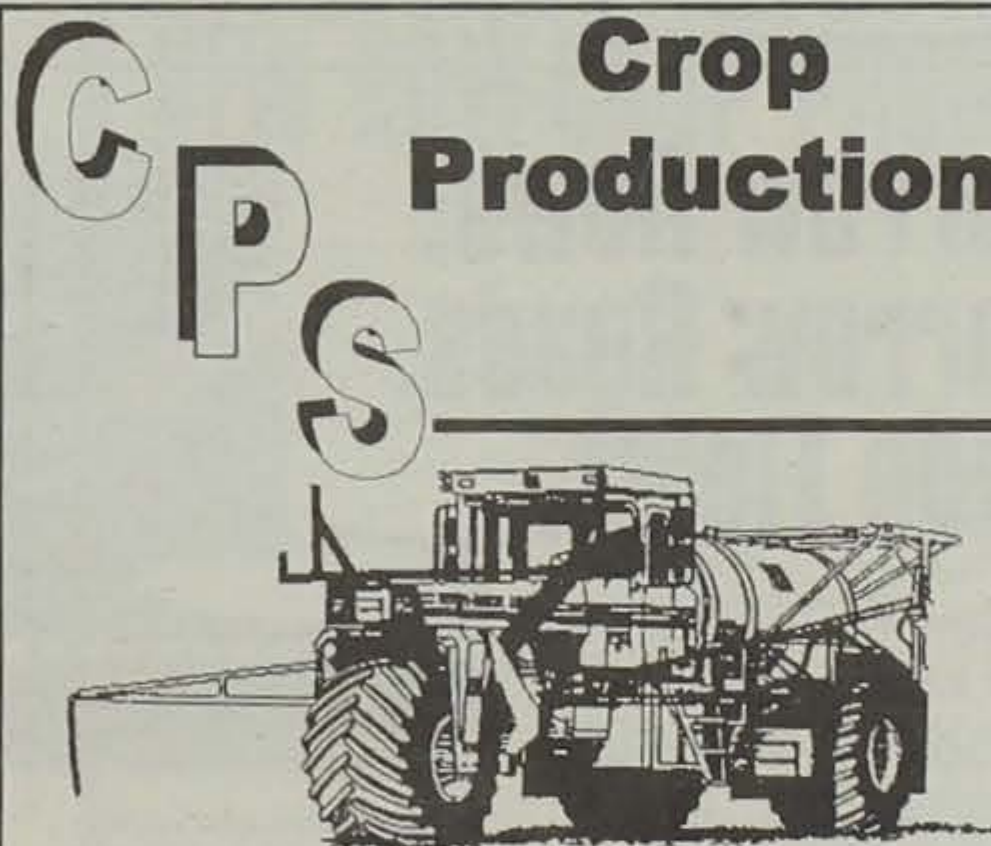
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# Pott. County spells out land treatment, terrace removal policies

(continued from page 5)  
life or property.

I. Disturbed land areas of less than twenty-five thousand square feet unless a political subdivision by ordinance established a smaller exception or establishes conditions for this exception.

J. The construction, relocation, alteration or maintenance of public roads by a public body.

4. If the agency authorized under subsection 1 determines that a land disturbing activity is not being conducted in compliance with the soil loss limits, it shall file a written and signed complaint with the soil and water conservation district commissioners. The complaining shall have the same effect and validity as a complaint filed by an owner or occupant of land being damaged by sediment pursuant to section 161A.47.

If the affidavit is filed with the district of the political

subdivision, the commissioners may proceed on their own complaint. The soil and water conservation district commissioners may issue an administrative order as provided in that section to the person conducting the land disturbing activity.

5. The City of Council Bluffs will "police" activities within the City limits. Pottawattamie County Planning & Zoning should be "policing" activities outside city limits.

## Terrace Removal Policy

A) Applications to remove terraces need to be in writing with the legal description, plat, aerial photo locating terraces, estimate of footage to be removed, explanation of why the terraces are being removed and what will be done during construction as well as in the end product to control soil erosion in a manner equal to or greater than that provided by the terraces.

B) To prevent delays, applicant may wish to attend commissioners meeting to present request for terrace removal and address any questions the commissioners may have.

C) The commissioners will try to have an answer for the applicant within 40 days of application being made. (West Pott. SWCD meets the second to the last Wednesday of each month. East Pott. SWCD meets the third Tuesday of each month.) The applicant will be notified of the commissioners' decision in writing. The 40 days may be extended if more information is needed.

D) 100 percent of all cost-share received will be paid back before any terraces are removed and regardless of what the final product is. In special circum-

stances, the commissioners may approve the removal of a small portion of terrace prior to cost-share payback.

E) If any portion of a terrace is removed, cost-share will be paid back on the entire terrace.

F) In situations where there may be many future owners (i.e. housing developments) all cost-share on all terraces will be repaid, even if they are not removed at the current time.

G) Erosion has to be controlled during construction as described under Land Treatment Policy: Soil Loss Limits.

H) The final product will provide equal or better protection to the soil than the terraces.

I) Disturbed ground will not be left bare for longer than 21 days. Seeding should be completed immediately after final grading. If building delays prevent final grading activities a cover crop such as oats or rye grass should be established.

J) The commissioners have the right at any time to deny the request to remove terraces.

Part of this permit requires developers to have a written plan that identifies potential sources of pollution. In addition, the plan shall describe and ensure the implementation of practices that will be used to reduce pollutant discharge from the property. The plan can be developed by the engineering firm and/or with assistance from the local Soil and Water Conservation office.

Pottawattamie Planning and Zoning and the City of Council Bluffs have West Pottawattamie SWCD approve Erosion Control Plans/Land Disturbing Affidavit for development in West Pottawattamie SWCD. Other

towns within Pottawattamie County are encouraged to seek technical assistance from respective SWCD prior to land disturbing activities. Most erosion control problems can be solved ahead of time with a little planning and preparation. Iowa Department of Natural Resources: National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit No. 2 Developing Pollution Prevention Plans and Best Management Practices Guide Copies of these documents can

be obtained from the West Pottawattamie SWCD or IA DNR.

If you have any questions about the NPDES contact the DNR at: Iowa Department of Natural Resources Environmental Protection Division Wastewater Permits Section 502 E. 9th ST Des Moines, IA 50319-0034 515-281-7017

by : Tracy Bruun  
West Pott. SWCD Administrative Assistant

## Workshop attracts participants

More than twenty-five people from across SW Iowa took part in the IOWATER workshop held at the Big Grove Country Inn on June 1.

The group spent part of the day in Farm Creek taking water samples and learning how to conduct a variety of IOWATER monitoring tests. Those tests included: Macroinvertebrate identification; measuring water clarity and velocity; and chemical tests including nitrate, nitrite and pH tests.

The workshop also covered data reporting using the IOWATER website, IOWATER teambuilding and communication, and data presentation. In addition to the training, workshop participants received all the necessary equipment to conduct Level I water testing.

Participants also enjoyed the atmosphere and food of

Oakland's Big Grove Country Inn.

IOWATER is a statewide citizen water quality monitoring network organized by a broad coalition of Iowa groups, both government and private. Iowans interested in protecting the state's waterways will participate in on-site training workshops related to water testing, site assessment, and communications and teambuilding; and receive testing equipment, written support materials and ongoing technical assistance.

For more information about IOWATER and upcoming workshops call Rich Leopold at 515-281-3252.

(For an additional story and photos on IoWater training see pages 9 and 10)

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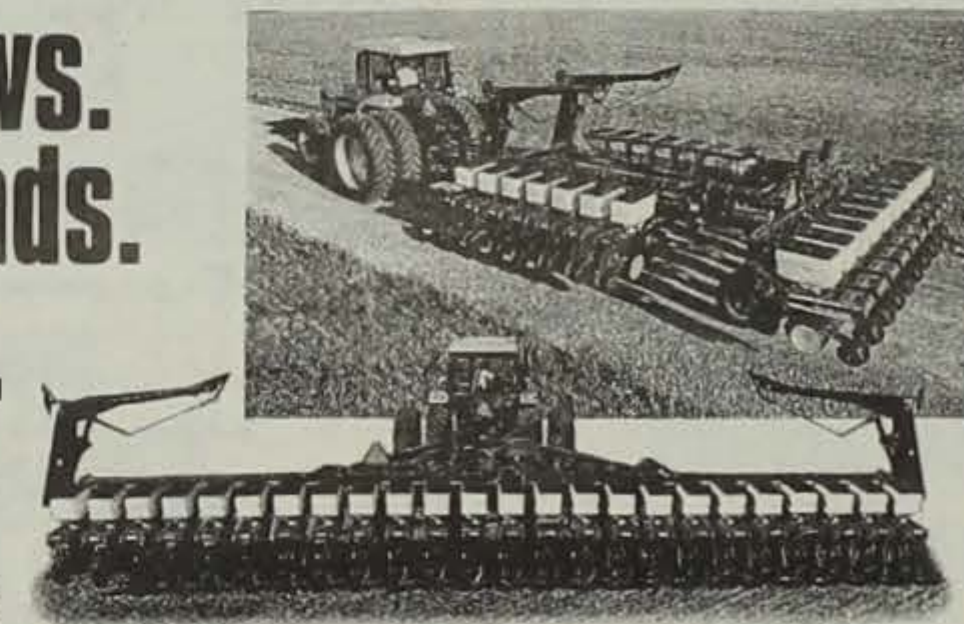
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### Celebration held at Wallace Research Farm near Oakland

A celebration was held recently at the Wallace Research Center at the Armstrong Farm near Oakland in June. The mortgage has been paid on the facility (More on the ceremony on page 8). In photo above, participants chat as they line up for free burgers, beans, chips and lemonade.

In photo at right, visitors enjoy touring the permanent soil pit, one of the many features of the farm.

Visitors could also take tours of the many on-going research projects on the farm and visit with Iowa State University experts who attended the special field day and ceremony at the farm.



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NEW HOLLAND

## Native plant is useful, as well as decorative

by Michelle D. Zimmerman  
East Pottawattamie County  
Resource Planner

### More Than a Pretty Flower - Purple Coneflower (Echinacea)

Purple coneflowers can be found in most prairies in the United States.

These native flowers are found in clumps from early summer to mid-autumn. Their bronze cone-shaped centers and drooping purple daisy-like petals make them easy to find.

The purple coneflower's foliage is comprised of coarse, saw toothed, dark green leaves. This perennial grows from two to four feet tall.

For the Native American Indians purple coneflowers were at one time used to treat

snakebites, scurvy, and other ailments. The nickname given to the purple coneflower was Indian root or scurvy root.

Several substances have been found, by researchers, that can help fight viruses. Dried roots from the purple coneflowers are used in combating colds, flu, and other infections.

Purple coneflowers are magnets for birds, butterflies, and bees. Bees and butterflies seek out its nectar, while finches love to feast on the dried seeds. Purple coneflowers are drought-tolerant and thrive in very sunny spots once established.

If you have a chance why not plant purple coneflowers in your backyard and enhance the diversification of wildlife.

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# Wallace Foundation burns farm mortgage in June

by Joyce Bohnker

The Wallace Foundation reached an important milestone this summer. It paid off the mortgage on the farm and is now owned free and clear.

To celebrate, a picnic and mortgage burning ceremony, were held at the end of June.

Guests were given tours of the facility and the ongoing research projects before the picnic. After the burgers, beans, potato chips, lemonade and bars, there were a few speakers. Allison Fawkes, agriculture representative for Senator Tom Harkin, spoke on the Senator's behalf.

She said efforts were being made to enhance conservation incentives in the 2002 Farm Bill. "We don't believe farmers should have to choose between conservation and extra income," she said.

The plan would be voluntary and would include those already doing conservation work as well as those who are just beginning

to take extra steps to conserve their resources.

She said the plan would give incentives according to the level of conservation. It would involve three tiers with the first tier involving a minimum level of conservation and a maximum payment of \$15,000. It would include practices such as nutrient management and terraces.

The second tier would have a maximum payment of \$35,000 and would include a systems approach to conservation.

The third tier of the plan would provide a maximum payment of \$50,000 and would include a total conservation plan involving all resources.

"The Senator feels it is very important that the next farm bill takes an approach to emphasize conservation," Fawkes said.

The program included three letters from Iowa State University dignitaries who were unable to come to the ceremony, but offered their congratulations including the dean of agricul-

ture, the interim executive associate dean and Mark Honeyman who is in charge of all research farms in Iowa.

Lyle Asell, acting interim director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, was present at the ceremony.

He said, "Conservation and the protection of the environment is going to be an increasingly important part of agriculture."

Asell said that Governor Vilsack was highly involved in conservation as chair of the Natural Resources Committee of the National Governor's Association. He foresees greater efforts in protecting resources on private lands.

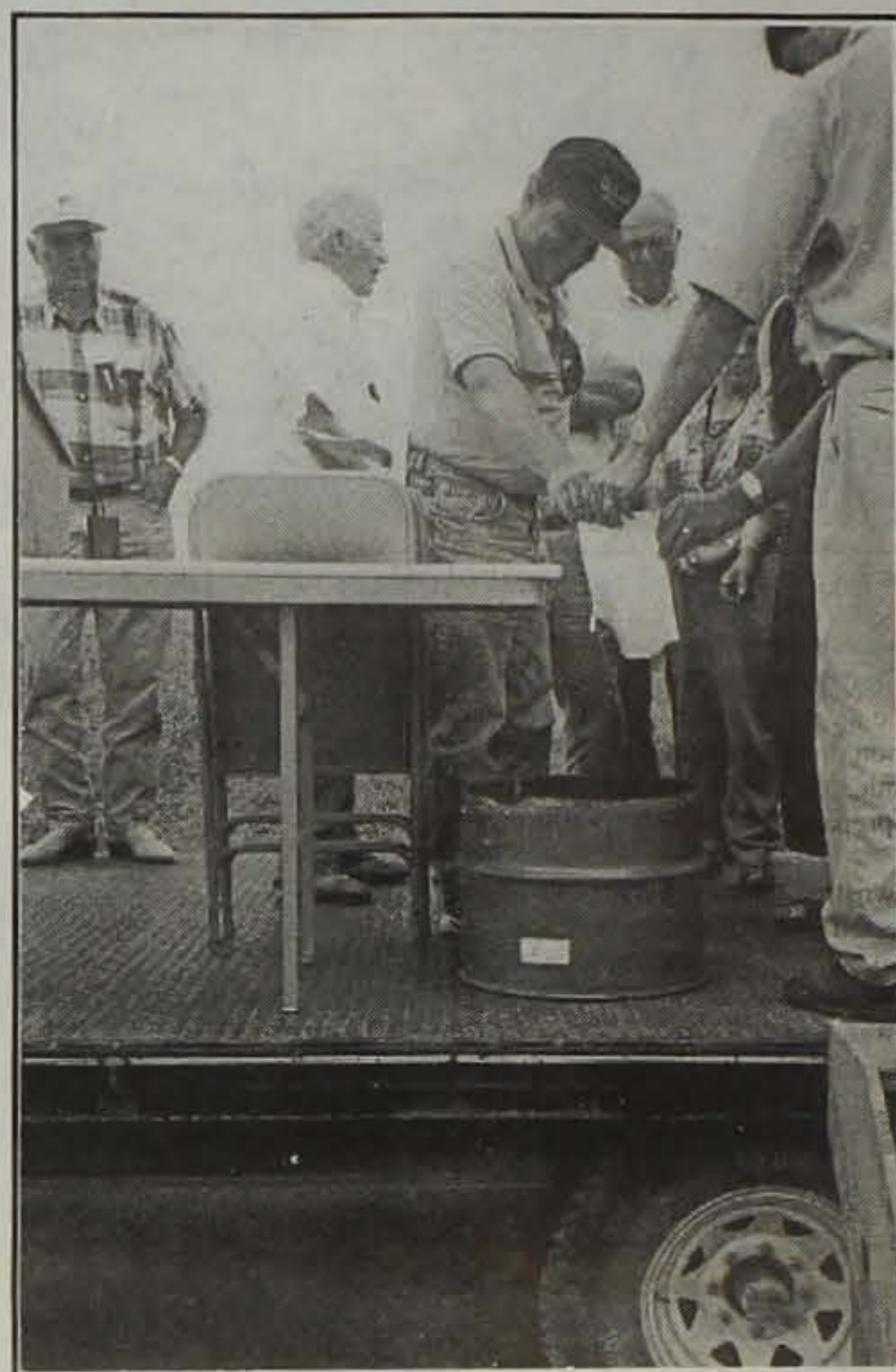
Stan Johnson, vice provost for Extension at Iowa State University was also on hand for the mortgage burning. "It's been a pleasure to watch how it (the research farm project) has grown," he said.

Johnson said the focus has shifted several times to keep up with the times. "First it was ag technology, then value added agriculture, then rural community development, then resource management with community development."

He added, "We look forward to working with you and learning with you how to make agriculture an attractive option in the future."

Rod Backhaus, president of the Wallace Foundation, commented on the 1,500 people who have been a part of the Wallace Foundation in some way.

He then asked various members of the board to come forward and burn the mortgage one page at a time.



The mortgage goes up in flames as several members of the Wallace Foundation Board take turns burning several different pages of the document. The facility is now owned free and clear.



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# Water quality training session attracts volunteers

by Joyce Bohnker

Why are a group of adults wading in creek water looking for bugs on a hot June afternoon?

It's not a sudden reversion to childhood. In fact its a group of volunteers who are taking part in an IOWATER workshop. The workshops train individuals who then volunteer to monitor a creek in their neighborhood.

The East Pottawattamie Soil and Water Conservation District sponsored a workshop in June near Oakland.

The workshop included both indoor class work and outdoor field work. After learning some of the basics in the morning session, the group trooped outside, pulled on their waders and prepared to get wet.

Downstream, volunteers collected water and judged its visual clarity as well as some habitat assessment, turbidity and water temperature analysis. The participants were also given equipment with which to judge the amount of dissolved oxygen, pH, nitrate and phosphate.

A group also went upstream to find bugs. The ugly creatures in water also known as benthic macroinvertebrates are good indicators of water quality according to IOWATER coordinator Rich Leopold.

Leopold explained to the group that the ugly little creatures are sensitive to pollution.

A healthy count of them indicates a healthy water supply. Not many of them around and it may be that the reverse is true. He cautioned, however, that the test is to be done only occasionally because too much testing can actually affect their numbers.

IOWATER began in May of 1998 as a cooperative effort of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, The Iowa division of the Izaak Walton League, Iowa Environmental Council, Iowa Farm Bureau, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the University of Iowa Hygienic Laboratory.

A group got together to design a manual. States with similar programs helped including Missouri, Ohio and Illinois. The first edition was printed in August of 1999.

The group received additional funding support from The US Environmental Protection Agency and from the Sportfish Restoration Fund.

The first general registration IOWATER workshop took place in August of 1999 at Springbrook State Park outside

of Guthrie Center. The response was overwhelming and a second workshop was scheduled in October of the same year.

There were 17 workshops scheduled to be held across Iowa this year, including the one in East Pottawattamie.

IOWATER's mission is to protect and improve Iowa's water quality by establishing and supporting a statewide volunteer monitoring program.

The goal of IOWATER is to provide training levels adequate to the need of the volunteers. Leopold said he would accommodate a group of fifth graders testing once a year as well as retired professionals testing once a week and every level of volunteer in between.

The participants at the Oakland training were a good example. Some were professionals who work with the environment on a daily basis.

Others were volunteers and concerned citizens who hoped to monitor a creek near their homes to check on pollution.

More training sessions will be planned for next year if interest continues. Contact IOWATER if you are interested in attending a session near you in the coming months.



In photo above, IOWATER Workshop participants crowd around a net, checking it for tiny bugs. The group was gathered at a stream near Oakland, on a hot day in June. A good number of bugs can indicate a healthy, unpolluted stream.

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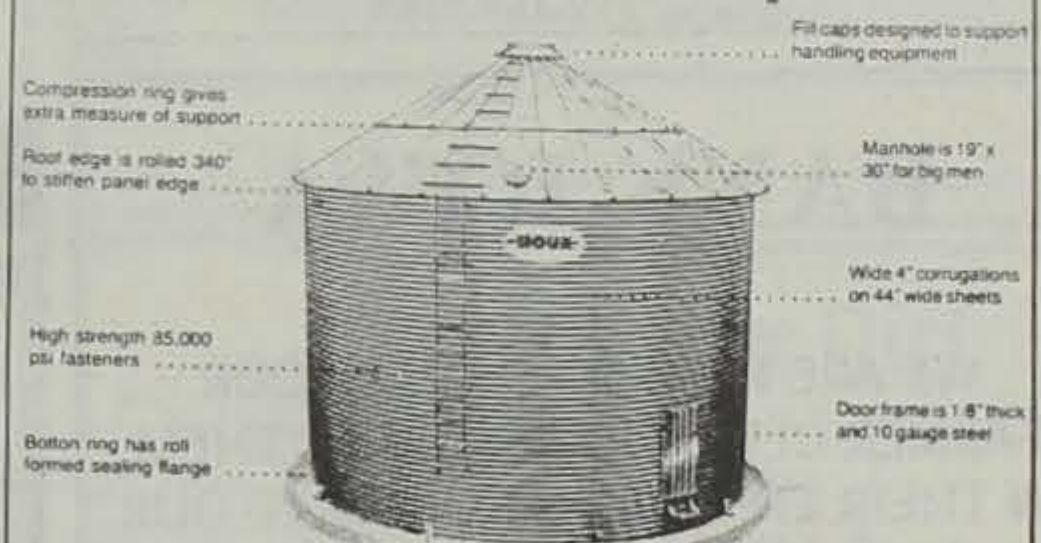
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In top left photo, Diane Forrestal and Liz Bisbee check their water sample for small bugs. In lower left photo, Dan Bieker strains the water through his net. In photo at top right Russ Kurth, District Conservationist in Harrison County, checks on his equipment as he tries to monitor water clarity. In lower right photo, a group lines the banks of the stream checking their tubes for water clarity. They were all participants in an IOWATER Workshop held near Oakland in June.



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## Field Day held at Hammit farm near Portsmouth

by Joyce Bohner

This spring Bill Hammit did something he hasn't done for a while, he dusted off his tillage equipment and took it into his cornfield.

Hammit, however, had not abandoned his conservationist principles, he was tilling in the name of scientific research.

The idea was a nitrogen demonstration comparing different types of tillage and nitrogen rates. The test also included a test of nitrogen timing.

Hammit put in a 120 foot strip of fall anhydrous, fall anhydrous with n-serve, spring anhydrous and liquid 28 percent with agratane.

With each strip one half was no-tilled and the other half tilled.

Hammit said he volunteered for the experiment after the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Iowa State University Extension Service had a brainstorming session last winter on ways that might get more operators to start using no-till again.

"Extension agreed to do most of the work," he said. "I just had to put the nitrogen on."

For a while this spring, Hammit almost had to cancel the field day. He was afraid the corn was going to dry up in the field before it ever had a chance.

A timely rain saved the experiment and the corn was green and healthy on demonstration day.

Preliminary test results were available, but not very conclusive.

Extension specialists Gary Guge and Carroll Olson explained some of the confusing numbers as due to the inconsistencies in small sample testing.

The field will continue to be monitored until harvest and the final results may give a more accurate account of the affect tillage and nitrogen applications have on each other and on yield.



A large group of farmers attending a field day at Bill Hammit's farm in Harrison County listen as speaker Gary Guge explains some of the results.



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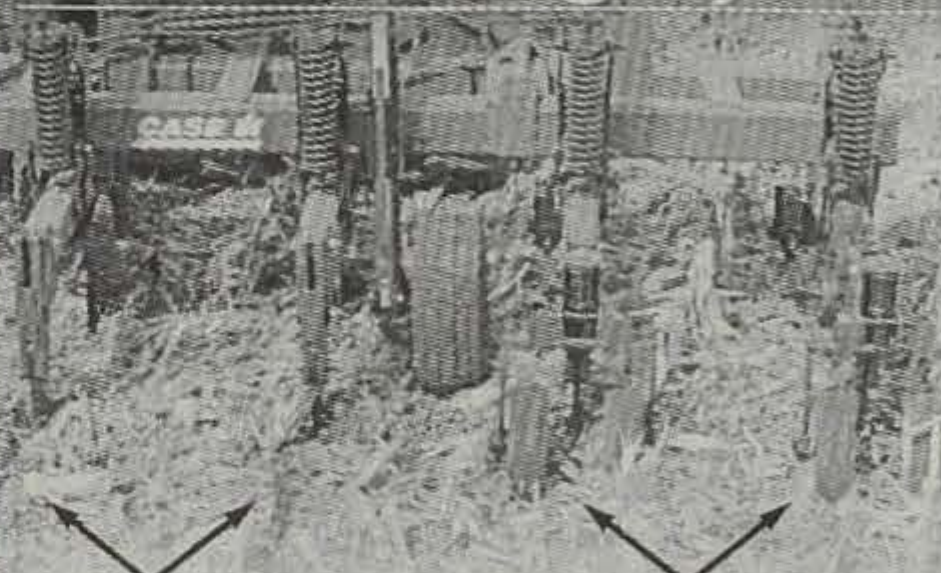
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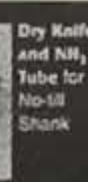
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## Kerr enjoys agriculture

## “Absentee” owner very involved in land

by Joyce Bohnker

It is not uncommon for businessmen who live in town to buy a tract of land as an investment. They buy it, find a cash rent tenant and collect the payments. It is seldom that these landowners take an active interest in the land.

Larry Kerr of Underwood is the exception. Kerr owns two separate tracts of land in Harrison County. The plumbing contractor bought the land as an investment property and also has a chance to return to his agricultural roots.

Instead of leaving everything to his tenant, however, Kerr became involved. He even agreed to a cost-share rental agreement instead of cash rent.

He builds about half of his own terraces and maintains all of them.

“I enjoy doing it,” he said. “I have the equipment as part of the plumbing business, so that makes it easier.”

Both pieces of land Kerr bought had been owned by the Federal Land Bank and were in need of a lot of work.

“I’d been looking around down here (In Pottawattamie County), but nothing ever jelled. A friend

told me about the first piece I bought in Harrison County. It was right at the edge of the Loess Hills with a lot of turkey and deer around.”

Kerr bought it and soon went to work on it.

Between the two pieces of land, he has put in one dam and three 638’s (a smaller structure that still holds a lot of water, very similar to a dam.)

He has put in many, many terraces. Many without cost share. “I often just ask the NRCS crew to come and stake them out and then I just go take care of it,” he said.

Kerr feels pretty proficient when it comes to building a terrace these days, but he admits he didn’t start out that way.

“It takes a little while to learn how to do it right. There’s kind of a trick to it. My first ones weren’t so good, but now I can do it pretty quickly.”

He did a lot of other clean-up on his land as well as terraces and ponds.

“I got most of the clean-up work done the first year. I’ve owned it for about 12 years now. I didn’t take out any timber unless it was in bad shape and needed to come out,” Kerr said. Like all farmers and landown-

ers, he has occasionally been frustrated by government red tape and regulations, but overall he has been happy with the NRCS office in Harrison County. “I enjoy working with Russ, Konda and Gayland (Harrison County personnel), they’ve always been real helpful. They want that government money used for conservation, like it’s supposed to be.”

Kerr has put a small portion of his land in the Conservation Reserve Program and has seeded both native grasses and timber. He fenced off his four acres or so of native grasses so the cattle couldn’t get into it.

“It took a while to get that stuff going, but it’s got a pretty good stand now.”

The land was rich in wildlife when he purchased it and Kerr has tried to enhance, not diminish, the wildlife habitat available. Although not an avid hunter himself, he has taken some relatives to enjoy the hunting on his property. “I guess I think it’s more fun to watch them than it is to shoot them,” he admits.

Larry and his wife, Bonnie, have three daughters, Lynette, Theresa and Laura. Laura still lives at home with her parents.

Kerr admits he spends a lot of time up on the land, but he hopes it will benefit his family in the end.

Conservation makes sense to him. “Why do you want to let your farm wash down the creek and silt in your neighbor’s terraces? It doesn’t make sense to me. Take advantage of 50 percent cost share,” he said.

He added, “Improvements don’t cost anything. Sooner or later you’ll get your money back.”

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## Poster winners

By Konda Slagle

Each year, the Harrison Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) holds a conservation poster contest for 5th and 6th grade students in the county.

One hundred ninety students from Woodbine, Logan-Magnolia, West Harrison, and Missouri Valley Community Schools participated.

Tammy Landon of Logan won first place. Alisha King and Krista Utman, both West Harrison students received second and third place honors, respectively. Babetta Lucke, Harrison SWCD chairperson, presented all of the girls their awards.

Tammy's poster was sent on to regional competition where it won first place. Her poster has now been sent on to the state competition. She will receive her monetary regional award later in the year.

Tammy is the daughter of Steve and Deb Landon of Missouri Valley, Alisha is the daughter of Karol and Rozanne King of Mondamin, and Krista is the daughter of Gary and Rita Utman of Modale.



Babetta Lucke and Tammy Landon

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Babetta Lucke, Persia - (712)488-7837  
Zane McBride, Logan - (712)644-2839  
Anita Methner, Logan - (712)648-2159  
Everette Wohlers, Mo. Valley - (712)642-2034

### Appointed Commissioners:

Linda Herman, Pisgah - (712)456-2838  
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Secretary/Treasurer - Konda Slagle (712)644-2210  
Co-Treasurer - David Christensen  
Vice-Chairperson - Anita Methner  
Chairperson - Babetta Lucke



Alisha King, second place, Babetta Lucke and Krista Utman, third place; Harrison County SWCD poster contest.

## SWCD awards scholarship

by Konda Slagle

Jake Heim of Logan was recently selected to receive the Third Annual Soil and Water Conservation District Scholarship Award of \$150.

Harrison SWCD Commissioners present this award each year to an applicant selected by the scholarship committee. The applicant must be planning to pursue higher education in a agriculture-related field.

Jake is the son of Jay and Sharon Heim. His father operates the family farm, and his mother is a substitute teacher for local schools, as well as helping on the farm.

As a student at Logan-Magnolia High School, Jake was involved in band, football, golf, weight training, wrestling and the science club. He was also a member of the National Honor Society.

He is a member of the Logan Christian Church and Mondamin Baptist Church Youth Group and is active in the church affairs. He is also a member of the Magnolia Hillbillies 4-H Club where he has held the position of Vice-president and President.

In his application, he stated, "My future plans include

receiving a degree in animal science and agronomy. I want to explore my career opportunities in these fields but eventually plan to return to the production of agriculture on my own farm. I have also been thinking about going on to vet school. My career goals are compatible because farming involves all of these things."

Jake has worked on the family farm, a local tree farm, and for various neighboring farmers. All of these jobs have reinforced his love of the farming atmosphere.

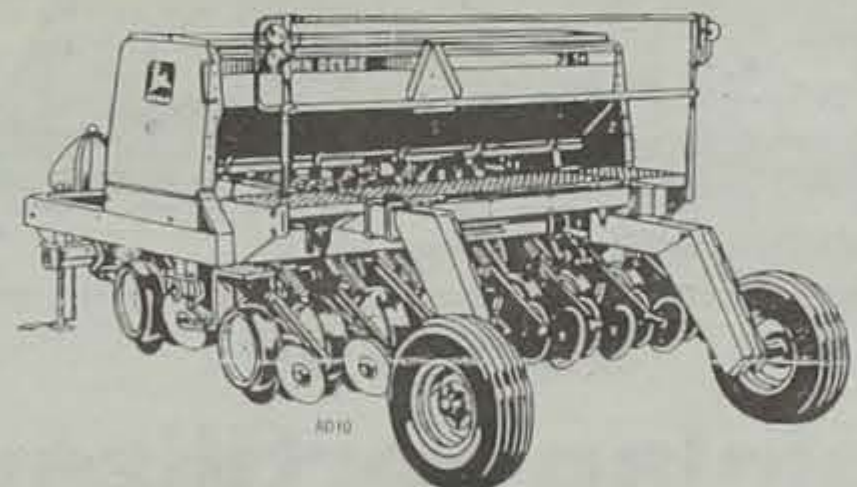
Jake has been accepted at Iowa State University in Ames.

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# Nelson enjoys new work with native plants

by Joyce Bohnker

Adrian Nelson went from pounding nails in roofs to planting seeds in the ground when he made a career move a couple of years back.

From construction work to plants may be a big step, but for Nelson it kept him outside, provided relief for his roofer's knees and allowed him to get back to his farming roots.

Nelson is now planting native grasses in Shelby County. "I was always interested in the prairie," he said. "I live only a couple of miles from 20 acres of native prairie."

The interest led him to plant a few acres of his own to native grasses and forbs. Then he opened a nursery and began obtaining plants for others to buy. "My knees were getting to bad to keep up the roofing and I knew I couldn't stand to work indoors all the time," he said.

"I started out trying to sell only plants that were native to Shelby County, but I had to expand a little," he explains.

His work and his interest in Pheasants Forever put him in close contact with Bryce Schaben, the roadside manager for Shelby County. Schaben was

finding it difficult to meet all the demand for native grass planting in the county.

Nelson decided to invest some money in a drill and open a sideline business. "This year I did quite a bit through NRCS programs and some for Pheasants Forever."

He likes to see as many CRP acres as possible go to native grasses. "We need to get more grasses in for wildlife. Waterways, headlands, buffer strips, filter strips, they all work great when planted to native grasses."

Most of Nelson's customers purchased their seed from Schaben who then delivered it to Nelson. The most common mixture for Shelby County plantings is Big Bluestem, Indian Grass and Switchgrass.

By the end of July, Nelson was

servicing his drill and putting it away for the season. But he still had to tend his own small nursery business as well as stop to enjoy his own wildflowers.

The nursery business is another exciting challenge for Nelson. "I have 43 varieties of prairie flowers including cone flowers, rattlesnake master, asters and prairie smoke," he said. He also has seven kinds of plants native to woodlands and a few varieties of trees native to Iowa.

On his own land, Nelson has been amazed at his wildflower patch. Planted four years ago, he and his wife, Linda, are still seeing new plants each spring.

"The first year, it was just a weed patch. The second year we started seeing some Black-eyed Susans. The third year there were even more Susans and some cone flowers. This is the fourth year and there is still new stuff showing up," he said.

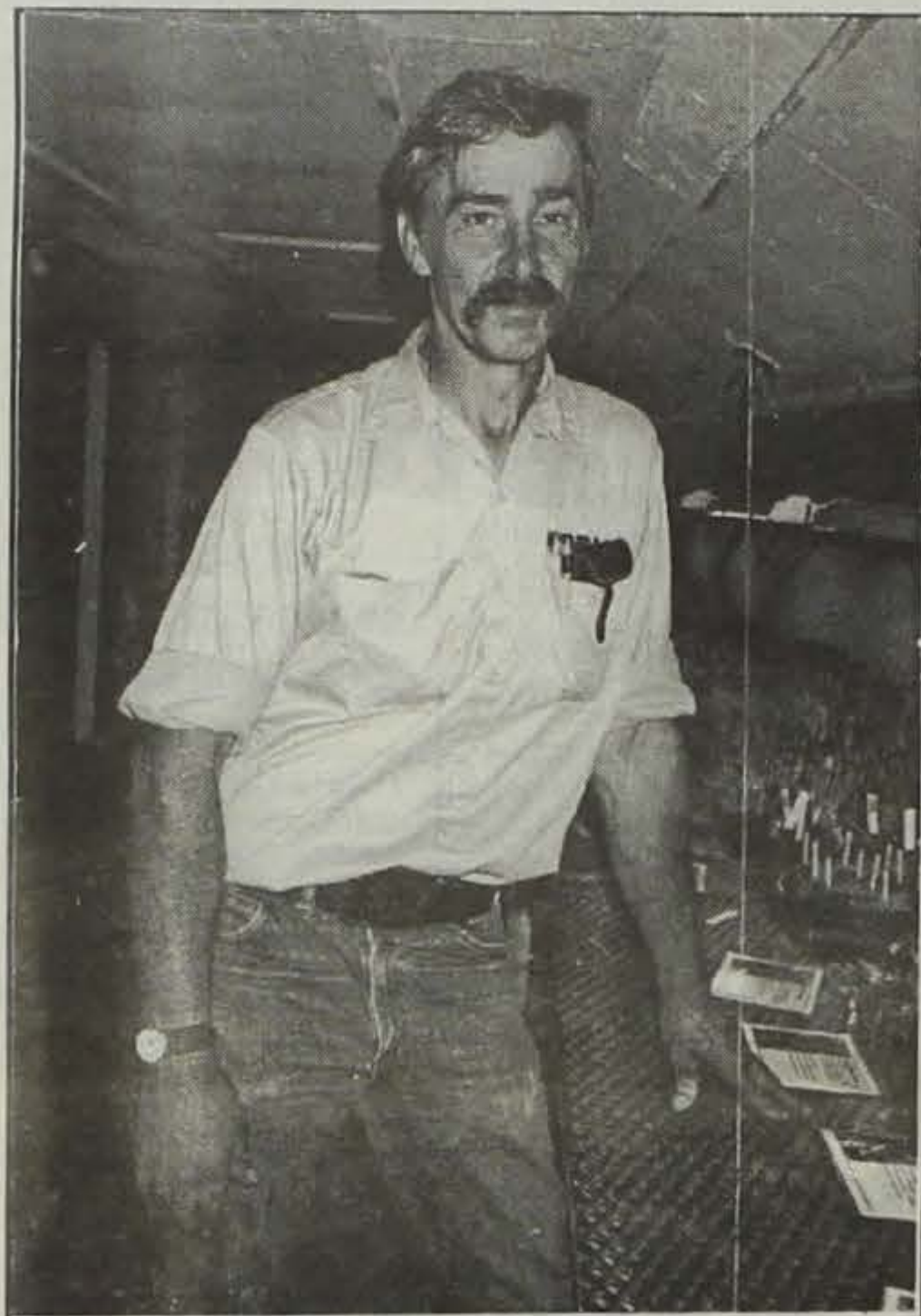
He encourages everyone not to give up on native plantings. He said some plants can be very difficult to get established, but once established can be extremely easy to maintain. "Prairie Smoke has to be babied the first year, but once it's established, you just let it go," he said.

Nelson has always liked plants and is enjoying his new career. He said he came by his gift with plants naturally.

"My Mom had a green thumb and I guess I picked it up from her. I can't make flowers do what she did, but I have fun at it."

He is always buying books to further his knowledge of plants and wildlife. Reading about commercial landscaping, led him to his own source for the plants he sells.

Nelson is pleased with his new career. He can do work he enjoys that also helps the environment and wildlife in Shelby County.



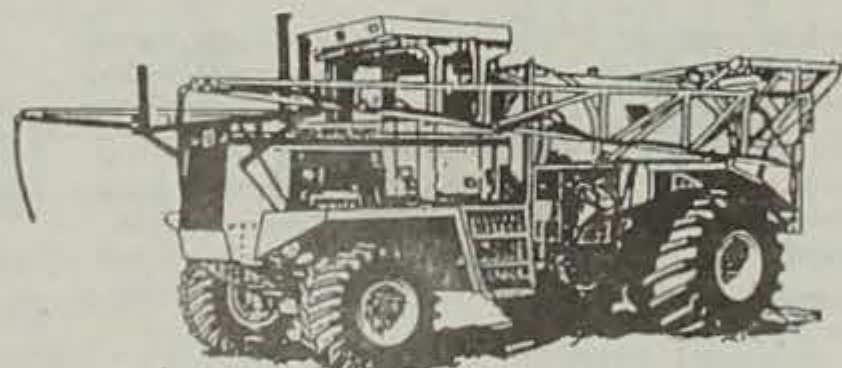
Adrian Nelson in his greenhouse



Adrian Nelson shows his own restored prairie which was a riot of color this June as many prairie flowers were in bloom

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# New park ranger enjoys "home town" advantage

by Joyce Bohner

Most of us love to take advantage of our parks. Whether they're national, state or county parks, we enjoy swimming, boating, hiking, picnicking or just relaxing in the great outdoors.

Seldom, however, do we give a thought to the workers and park managers who work behind the scenes, making sure that the park is available for everyone to appreciate.

Michelle Anderson, park manager at the Prairie Rose State Park in Shelby County, doesn't really mind if people don't notice her work. As long as people can enjoy the park, she believes she's just doing her job.

Anderson is a Harlan native who feels fortunate to have been placed by the Department of Natural Resources in a park so near home.

"Usually you have to move across the state," she said. "It's kind of nice that I got to come back to where I grew up and where my parents still live."

Anderson attended Iowa State University with a major in agricultural science and an emphasis on environmental science.

"At first I didn't know for sure what I wanted to do. I just knew I wanted a job that would let me be outside."

Then between her freshman and sophomore years of college,

she got a summer job at the very park she now manages and she knew she had found her vocation.

She continued to work there over the summers and graduated from ISU in 1999. She worked briefly in Crawford County as a naturalist before being hired full time by the Iowa DNR.

Anderson lives in a residence at the park. Her work involves a little bit of everything.

"My main job is to keep everything in working order and to ensure that the public has a safe, clean place to come and recreate," she said.

She supervises four seasonal employees who help keep the grass mowed and the trees trimmed.

"I, unfortunately, end up doing a lot of paperwork in the office," she said. Still, she does get out to meet the public and makes rounds to ensure that the park rules are enforced.

"I really like meeting people from all over different areas of the country. Some people are local people who come every year and some are just passing through," she said.

Summers are especially busy in the park, but Anderson found there was still plenty to do in the

winter as well. "We still have fishing, cross country skiing, equipment maintenance and training," she said.

In summer and winter she can work out plans for implementing the Ecomanagement plans for the park. The DNR designs the plan which seeks to return the park, as much as possible, to what it used to be. Forested lands are returned to forest and prairie back to prairie.

This spring she helped organize the burning of 25 acres of grass to help establish native prairie. She oversees tree plantings and helps ensure that native grass plantings have a good shot at getting established.

She and the DNR work together to discuss where trees should be planted and what would be the best spot for buildings.

The park is a wildlife refuge with no hunting allowed. It is Anderson's job to see that this rule is followed and to oversee exceptions that might occur when a wounded deer runs into the park, followed by the hunters who shot it.

Helping the wildlife is also a part of her job and she has, on occasion, had to catch a goose with fishing line wrapped around

it or do other rescue work.

"Most of the time we just let the animals be," she said. "Everyone is welcome here."

The most frustrating aspect of the job for Anderson is the occasional acts of vandalism that take place in the park. "It can be very aggravating," she said. "You work hard to provide a safe, clean place for people to come and it only takes one

person to make you look bad."

Vandalism can range from a broken mirror in the public bathroom facilities to a broken branch off a tree. "I helped plant some of those trees when I worked here in college," she said.

Still, the vandals are in the minority and Anderson enjoys her work and the people who enjoy the park.



Michelle Anderson with Prairie Rose State Park in the background.

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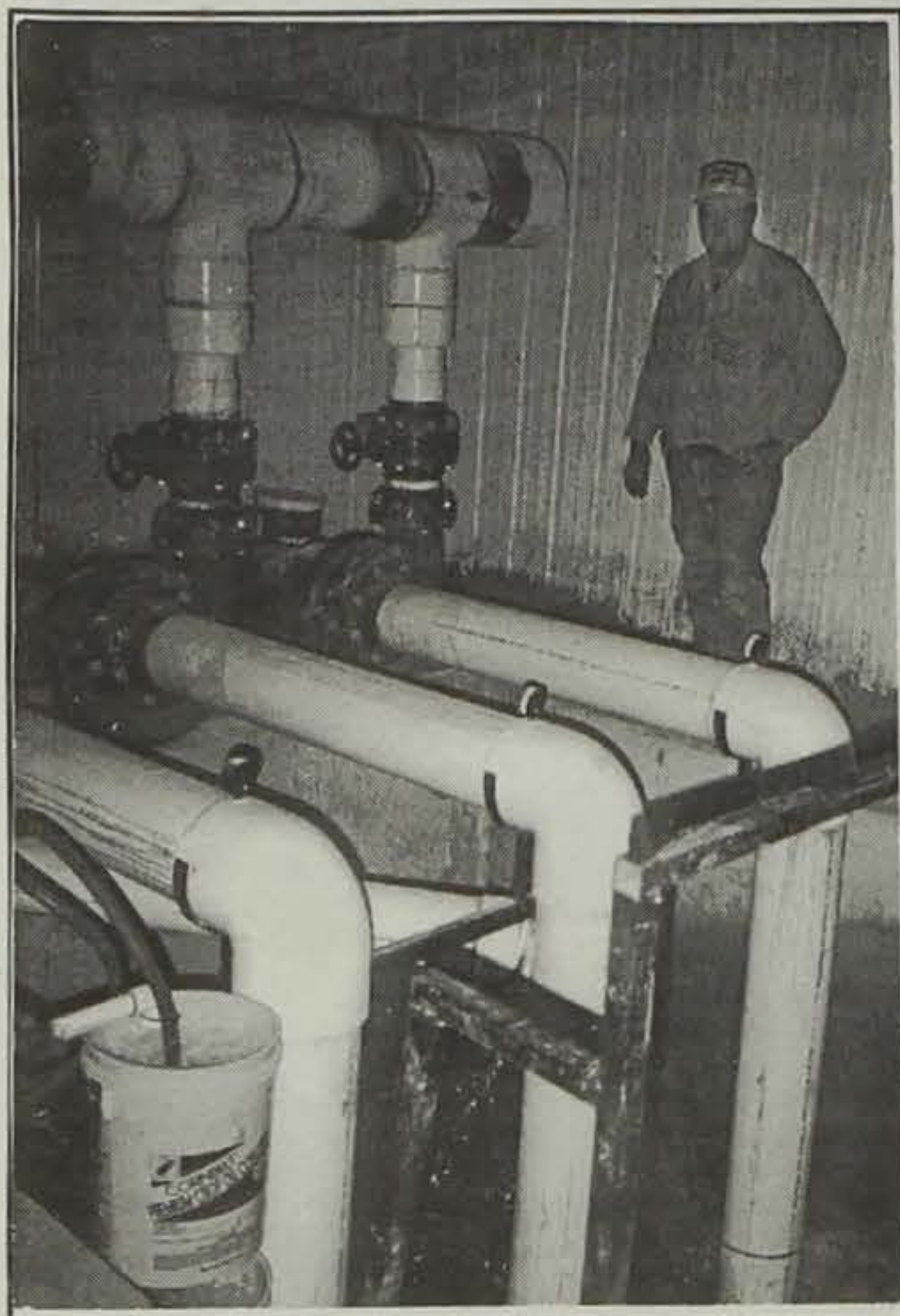
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Chuck Ehlers, a rural Manning farmer shows some of the pipes and equipment needed to raise fish indoors in tanks. He and his partner in Loess Hills Aquaculture hope to see more fish raised in this area.

## Hope to make Iowa the Fish State

# Partners take on aquaculture challenge

by Joyce Bohnker

Ahh! Iowa. Known for its corn, soybeans, pork, beef and fish production. Wait a minute. Fish?

If Chuck Ehlers and Jim Blankman have their way, western Iowa will soon be known for its walleye production as well as pork and beef. The two are partners in Loess Hills Aquaculture and they both hope they are in on the ground floor of a new opportunity for Iowa farmers.

Ehlers is a farmer who lives just outside of Manning on the eastern edge of Crawford County. Blankman works for a co-op in Manning.

Ehlers became interested in the idea of fish about seven years ago. Up until then his farming operation was strictly the traditional sort: corn, soybeans and pork.

"I was looking for the opportunity to diversify. I knew the demand for fish was growing constantly."

The health benefits of fish and seafoods have been touted by experts for years. But alarm bells have been sounded about the dangers of mercury and other pollutants in our oceans and lakes.

Ehlers could see the demand for farm-raised fish would only increase. "Aquaculture has been done in China for many, many years. I saw no reason why we couldn't do it here, he said.

There have been challenges along the way and Ehlers says there is still a lot to be done before a fish confinement building is as common as a hog one.

"Fish production is now at the stage where beef and pork production were in the 1930s," he said. "But people in the

Midwest are used to growing livestock and we can do it with fish."

The long term goal of Loess Hills Aquaculture is to be a reliable supplier of pellet-trained walleye fingerlings to area farmers. The farmers would raise the fingerlings up to the one and one-half pound size. They would then be returned to Manning where the partners hope to set up a processing facility.

The farmers who raise the fish would all belong to a co-op so they wouldn't begin undercutting each other's profits.

The partners admit they have a ways to go before they meet that goal. The business got its first fish in June of 1998. So far they have purchased fingerlings themselves and are pellet-training them. Ehlers and another nearby farmer Jim Ferneding have finishing units on their farms. Currently a meat market in Arcadia is processing the fish.

The hatchery was just set up last spring and they hope to hatch their first fish next spring. Blankman was pleased with the thought of hatching their own fish. "These fish will never eat anything but pellets, so we shouldn't have the death loss we get from pellet training."

Also the indoor nursery with controlled lighting and temperature will make it possible to breed fish all year long and keep a steady supply available.

Supply is the key to many markets, Ehlers said. "Grocery stores and restaurants are all clamoring for fresh fish, but they want to have a steady supply available year-round."

When they reach the stage of having fingerlings available for farmers to finish, the partners

will be looking for more to join their co-op.

The drawback, of course, is the initial investment. Farmers will need a large building, equipped with water tanks as well as circulation systems such as CO2 strippers and other equipment not in the current lexicon of the typical farmer.

Yet Ehlers believes the initial investment shouldn't be much more than a high tech hog confinement building and he is looking to cut the costs. "We're trying to get the costs of our system down all the time. DEBA (a local manufacturing firm) is looking into making some of our equipment."

Blankman agreed, "As we go along, we'll be able to cheapen things up."

Farmers will also have to adjust their thinking a little to raise fish. For hog farmers used to seeing three to four pounds a week in gain, it may take a while to get used to the idea of feeding a walleye for 11 months to get that pound and a half gain.

Ehlers said the idea will be to set up a system that involves 12 tanks so farmers can have walleye ready to sell every month. The bright side is a relatively small space can hold a lot of fish.

In Ehlers' and Ferneding's finishing systems, the chores usually can be done in about 45 minutes, including feeding the fish and skimming the tanks.

Blankman and Ehlers receive a lot of help from Iowa State University which has conducted research on aquaculture and its potential to help diversify Iowa agriculture.

They are hoping researchers will eventually make it possible

(Continued on page 17)

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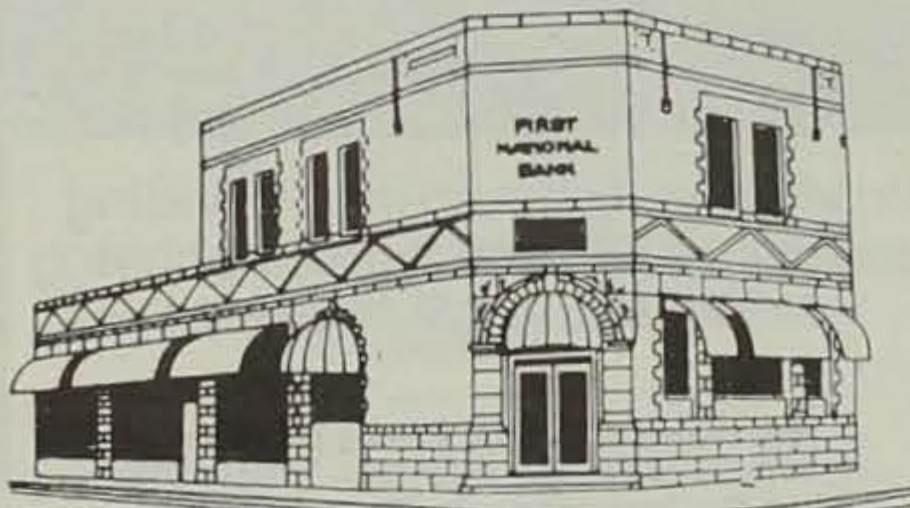
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## Manning partners raise fish

(Continued from page 16)

for the food pellets, which are currently made of fish meal, to be switched to a soy protein that will bring a value-added aspect to a crop already being produced in the area.

For the time being, however, they are content to use the food pellets already proven to be successful.

Other diversification ideas have come and gone before. But Ehlers believes fish have a real future.

"The demand is already there. We don't have to go out there

and create a market for fish. And many restaurant customers are asking if the fish is farm-raised before ordering because of the pollution concerns," he said.

He said their immediate goals are to supply area restaurants and to set up an internet market where fresh fish can be sent by overnight delivery.

But the possibilities seem endless. "There's a lot of interest there. It just takes time to get it set up right. We're being very cautious," he said.

It will take a while before Iowa is known as the "fish state."



## Fish tales

In photo at left, one of Jim Ferneding's daughter's does the fish chores, skimming the tanks. Chores do not take a long time in their system. In top right photo are Chuck Ehlers and Jim Blankman, partners in Loess Hills Aquaculture. In photo at right, tiny Walleye swim around in a tank. The fish take about 11 months to raise from fingerling to market size fish.



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# Swanson has long-standing interest in conservation

by Joyce Bohner

Harold Swanson was born and raised in Minnesota. He worked out west, then in Minnesota and Iowa. He had a long, distinguished career as the founder and head of the agriculture department of Iowa Western Community College in Council Bluffs.

He and his wife now live in Glenwood. So only a few of his 73 years were spent living and working in Crawford County, yet he returns many times during the summer months to faithfully tend his land in the rolling hills between Denison and Schleswig.

Why does this "absentee" landlord spend so much time returning to land he only farmed himself for seven years? Agriculture is in Swanson's blood and he has an undying interest in merging good economic practices with good conservation practices.

Swanson grew up in Minnesota and graduated from the University of Minnesota. He first went to work in the western part of the United States, doing early work with fertilizer.

"We were in wheat country. It was dry land and we did irrigation and very heavy fertilizer. We would put 300 pounds of nitrogen on it," he said. "We raised good crops, but the irrigation messed up the water

table and the high concentrations of nitrogen were causing health problems in young children and problems with the livestock."

A conservation ethic was born in Swanson. He took a job with Walnut Grove, a cooperative out of Minnesota and found himself assigned to Crawford County, Iowa.

It was then that he and his wife purchased land. However his time in Crawford County was relatively short. Walnut Grove merged with another company and he was left without a job.

He was soon picked to start the agriculture department at Iowa Western. He began that job in 1970 and continued it until his retirement in 1994.

"My work there is what I'm most proud of," he said. "Out of about 500 students I had over the years, I would say 300 to 400 became farmers. Others went on to work in ag businesses. I have quite a few bankers."

Swanson said his program concentrated on farm management and agricultural marketing.

Working at Iowa Western, as well as his own farm in Crawford County, refined his interest in conservation.

"There was a bad drought in the 1970s," he said. "1976 was the year chisels were coming in. I bought a chisel, put the shanks

38 inches apart and 16 inches deep. I put a trench through the farm, giving a terrace effect every 38 inches. I put fertilizer in the bottom of the trench and started planting. I gave it no more than one disking and no more than one hour ahead of planting. The moisture moved laterally through the soil and I had perfect germination within a few days."

Swanson harvested 100 bushel per acre corn that year when many of his neighbors got only 55.

He has never been afraid to experiment. His first experience with buffers strips came through the college.

He wanted to farm some acres the campus owned to give the students practical experience. He started the farm in 1975, but the campus would not give him permission to put permanent structures on the land, so terraces were out.

"We decided to put in buffer strips. We used alfalfa strips that were 75 feet wide. That's when I really saw how valuable buffer strips were," he said.

He added, "We saw some heavy rains, but any washing effect was gone by 30 feet. We could also use the alfalfa for our cattle program."

Swanson put his own land into the Conservation Reserve Program in 1988. When it came out a few years ago, he left buffer strips in when putting the land back in production.

He also added some additional buffers and planted them to native grasses. He is watching his native grasses carefully and still struggling to get some of them established, but he hopes they will soon provide some needed shelter for pheasants and other wildlife.

"The buffer strips planted to switchgrass should be ideal for that," he said.

Swanson doesn't just hire his tenant to maintain his strips. He drives up himself many times during the summer to work on controlling weeds and establishing the plants.

Good conservation ideas extend to more than just crops. Swanson has carefully designed hog units to sit below a terrace and on the flat spot of a hill.

The units were designed to be inexpensive and easy to maintain. They are also environmentally-sound.

Swanson likes to think about a solution to a problem and then put it into action. He isn't afraid of a little hard work. He seeded his terraces himself using a coffee can with a small hole drilled in the bottom for a planter. Walking them himself, he believes helped save on the expensive seed and still established an excellent stand.

Another example of ingenuity put to use is the rod weeder. While working out west, Swanson had a lot of experience

with using a rod weeder to control weeds and create a dust mulch to help preserve moisture.

He didn't think that would be of much use on the different soils and slopes of Iowa, but he found that a real flat, shallow cultivation can achieve the same effect in dry conditions. "Going deep is a sure mistake," he said.

Swanson may be retired from Iowa Western, but his lifelong interest in farming remains. He not only continues to maintain his own farmland, he also takes an interest in helping others.

He belongs to an organization which pairs young people who wish to get started in farming with older farmers who wish to retire, but would like to see their land stay in the hands of a small family farmer.

It's a cause he believes in, having trained so many young farmers himself. He knows how important agriculture is to the future. Swanson's legacy to farming will live on.



Harold Swanson looks out over the land he bought in Crawford County many years ago. He also built the environmentally planned hog facility on his property and takes an active interest in it today.

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# Schreiber tackles planting trees

by Joyce Bohnker

Up until last year, Bob Schreiber of Ricketts had more experience bulldozing trees than getting them to grow. As a contractor, Schreiber has had to take out a large number of trees in his career.

Of course, most of these were necessary, but sometimes the waste of wood bothered him. Then almost two years ago, he had an opportunity to get involved in growing trees and he jumped at it.

He and his wife, Lana, live on a farmstead just north of the small Crawford County community of Ricketts. Behind their house is a small rolling pasture with a creek running through it.

The land was going to waste and earning little income for years. When Schreiber heard about the opportunity to plant trees under the Conservation Reserve Program's pasture riparian program, he was interested.

"I read a little about it and I talked to Kathy Schneider of the NRCS office in Denison," Schreiber said. "She was real helpful. She talked to the foresters about the best trees to plant. She helped lay it out. She even came out and helped plant the trees."

The income from the property was a big incentive for Schreiber, but he also liked the idea of creating a spot for wildlife and nature.

"My wife and I really enjoy being outside with trees and plants," he said. "This looked like a good deal and a heck of a challenge."

Schreiber was determined to get a good stand of trees so he planted more than the minimum required. In the end, 17 acres of pasture on his 80-acre farm were planted with 4,000 trees and 2,200 shrubs. The whole area was planted in the spring of 1999.

The wetland part was planted with black willow, hybrid poplar, maple, green ash, swamp white oak and a few bald cypress.

Upland, he planted white ash, black walnut, red oak, white oak and black cherry. "I wanted variety. I planted a couple clusters for birds and wildlife including some Norway spruce and a little white pine," he said.

Planting was the easy part, as Schreiber soon discovered. He soon realized he was going to earn the annual payment he received for his trees, at least the first few years.

"We had some timely rains after we planted that helped the trees get a good start," he said. "But then came the weeds."

Schreiber is used to hard work. After leaving farming in 1984 following years of bad prices

and huge losses in the cattle market, he began working for local contractors building terraces, dams and other earthwork.

Then in 1993, with his own Cat, he started Schreiber Dozer, a one-man operation he continues today.

He works hard at his business, but he admits the hard physical labor of pulling and spading weeds is sometime wearying.

"At the end of last year we had a super problem with giant foxtail. How the trees survived, I'll never know because when it started going down, it took the trees with it."

There was nothing he could do last fall once the foxtail had gotten a hold.

Early this spring, he was down at the pasture pulling apart the dead brown weeds and trying to uncover the small trees underneath.

The foxtail turned out to be a blessing in disguise, though, as Schreiber later discovered. After the early timely rains in the spring after he planted, suddenly there was little moisture to be had.

The dead foxtail, however, provided a mulch for the growing trees and actually kept them from drying up as much as they might have otherwise.

But just in case he thought he was home free with his weed problem taken care of, Mother Nature had another little "gift"

in store for him. Thistles. The bane of every pasture.

If thistles are a blessing in disguise, Schreiber reckons he hasn't penetrated their disguise yet.

"I'm down there all the time with a spade. I've tried hard to keep them from going to seed," he said. "It's been real spotted. Some areas aren't too bad and some areas are thick with them."

He added, "It's been a real learning experience. Some days it's rather painful to an old body."

Although Schreiber recently invested in a small lumber saw (for other purposes) and jokes that nobody told him trees took so long to grow, he knows that others will reap the real benefits of his labor.

"I planted a lot of hardwoods," he said. "Somebody, sometime could harvest some lumber from there. Although I'll never see it."

What Schreiber has seen however, is a stunning 95 percent survival rate among his trees.

Schneider credits Schreiber's hard work with his success rate. "He didn't just plant them and forget them," she said. "He really has put an effort into getting them going."

The trees are well-rooted and growing astoundingly well for only their second year. Schreiber credits only "amazing good luck," but Schneider and the state forester both feel that his hard work had a lot to do with it.



Bob and Lana Schreiber show off the tiny seedlings in their pasture. They have an amazingly good stand for the first year. Due to fortunate weather in the spring of 1999 and a lot of hard work on Bob's part to keep the weeds down.

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Jay Ford, Crawford County District Conservationist, presents Dewey and Sharon Reis with the District's Cooperator of the Year award for the 1999 Goodyear/NACD Conservation Awards Program

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## Soil is foundation of our existence

by Dale J. Ceolla,  
Assistant State Soil Scientist,  
NRCS, Des Moines

"I conceive that land belongs to a vast family - of which many are dead, few are living and countless numbers are unborn." Nigerian Chieftain.

**SOIL** - This thin veneer that we call soil provides the foundation for our existence. Without it, humanity would wither and ultimately perish, as evidenced by historical records of past civilizations. In order to appreciate the importance of the land beneath our feet, perhaps we should think of the soil resources of Iowa as our family, friend, and neighbor. If you give thought to this, soils are much the same as the people that mantle our state. Do you know Ida, Floyd, Marshall, Marcus, or Clyde?

Each has unique personalities, behaves differently under various circumstances, looks different, has different capabilities and limitations, is suited for a particular task, and ultimately is a product of external factors acting upon that individual.

Each had different degrees of vulnerability from external forces that can exhaust and deplete the

potential contribution to our society.

Each requires varying amounts of care in order to remain productive and flourish. Some work day and night producing food and fiber. Others provide us with scenic vantage points and food and shelter for wildlife, while languishing beneath the shade of majestic oaks, overlooking lush bottom lands bordering streams and rivers.

We are the caretakers of this precious resource.

They may be your neighbors, however, these are only a few of the almost 11,000 unique individual soils that are spread out across every acre of land in Iowa. This detailed census of Iowa's heritage, is the most extensive science based and field verified inventory of natural resources information ever collected by soil scientists. The state of Iowa contains about 3.6 million soil delineations or separations that provide us with information used to

inventory the health and evaluate needed treatment to sustain productivity. The soils of Iowa are a collection of diverse individuals, spread out across the state. Iowans are blessed with some of the most productive soils in the world. In Iowa, 18.5 million acres or 52 percent of the soils under cultivation are classified as prime farmland. Iowa ranks third in the nation in percentage of prime farmland. This natural community that we call soil, is interrelated with all natural components of our environment.

The similarity of Iowa's people and soil resources are the ingredients of our heritage and ultimate destiny. If we care for our soil resource as a member of our heritage and ultimate destiny. If we care for our soil resource as a member of our family, our community, we will flourish. If we abuse our soil resources as past civilizations have, our destiny is uncertain.



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Scott Pape, Scott's son, Brandon and Dane Pape show off the waterway installed in the spring of 1999 on the Kathryn Johnson farm near Logan, IA, which is managed by Thien Farm Management. This waterway is 3,700 ft. long and 50 ft. wide. The 4.2 acres are under a CRP contract with an annual rental rate of \$156 per acre per year for 10 years. The total installation cost for shaping, tile and seed was \$8,140. The owner's cost, after 50 percent cost share, was \$4,070. Now, with additional incentives of a \$420 sign up bonus plus a \$3,256 practice incentive payment, the owner's cost would be \$394. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office. Hurry! Additional incentives are good only through Sept. 30, 2000.

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