

2013 ANNUAL REPORT
CASS SWCD
COVER CROP PY14



CASS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT 2013 ANNUAL REPORT

503 W. 7th Street, Ste 1 Atlantic, Iowa 50022

P:(712) 243-3180

F: (855)223-7140

IOWA WATER QUALITY INITIATIVES COME TO CASS COUNTY

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey announced August 8, 2013 that Water Quality Initiative cost share funds were available to help farmers install nutrient reduction practices. Practices that could be funded were cover crops, no-till or strip-till or using a nitrification inhibitor when applying fertilizer. These funds were available to help farmers take steps this past fall in reducing nutrient losses. Allowing farmers to voluntarily apply science-based conservation practices on the ground at a reduced cost would demonstrate the benefits these practices provide in hopes that farmers will voluntarily incorporate them into their operations.

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it would provide another \$1 mil-
576.7 acres of cover crop planted
crops that people can choose from
The winter hardy grains are best
used for grazing forage. Winter
on corn rotation; fallow or pre-
p stage. Winter kill varieties are
silage. This will provide grazing
crops, please contact your local

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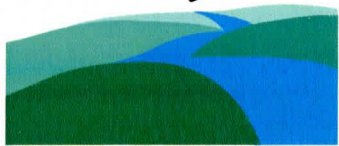
Cover crop field in the Atlantic area.

On October 28, Gov. Terry Brandstad, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey and the Department of Natural Resources Director Chuck Gipp launch the CleanWaterIowa.org website which will serve as a one-stop-shop for conservation practices that everyone can benefit from. Farm, Residential, Urban, City and Industry sections provide information about science-based practices that can be implemented to improve water quality. Please go to <http://www.cleanwateriowa.org> site and see stories about practices at work from around the state.

cleanwater
IOWA
CLEANWATERIOWA.ORG

Cass Soil & Water Conservation District

Curt Behrends Greg Zellmer Ray Wilson Fred Kay Chase Wheatley Tracy Marshall Alan Peterson



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In approximately twelve calendar days, \$1.8 million dollars had been obligated around the state of Iowa for these practices. On August 22, the Iowa Department of Agriculture/Division of Soil Conservation announced it would provide another \$1 million dollars for applications. There were a total of 2576.7 acres of cover crop planted in Cass county. There are many varieties of cover crops that people can choose from when thinking about using it in their farm operations. The winter hardy grains are best used in corn silage or before bean harvest and can be used for grazing forage. Winter hardy legumes are a good fit after corn silage in a corn on corn rotation; fallow or prevented planting going to corn; or in beans at leaf drop stage. Winter kill varieties are best used in fallow or prevented planted acres; or corn silage. This will provide grazing forage for livestock. For more information on cover crops, please contact your local Natural Resources Conservation office.

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Cass Soil & Water Conservation District

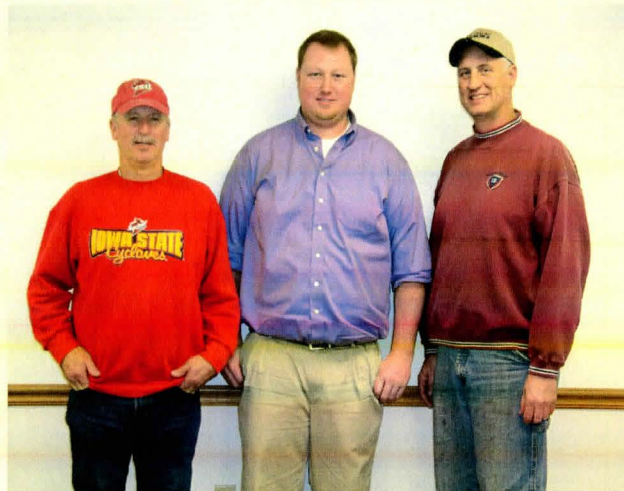
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"The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship is an equal opportunity employer and provider."



SWCD Election Results

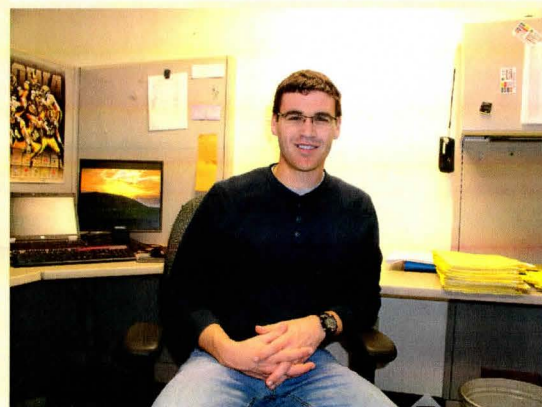
The Soil and Water Conservation District commissioners are the governing body of the local district in Iowa, as delineated in Iowa Code Chapter 161A. This year, there were three seats to fill for the November election. Curt Behrends, Ray Wilson, and Chase Wheatley have been elected to four year terms beginning the 2nd day of January, 2013. Assistant commissioners are also appointed at the District Organizational meeting. Fred Kay and Greg Zellmer continue their terms on board also. Greg Zellmer will serve as Chairman, Ray Wilson will serve as Vice Chairman, Fred Kay, Treasurer.



Ray Wilson, Chase Wheatley, Curt Behrends

New Soil Conservationist Joins Staff

The Cass County NRCS Office would like to welcome a new Soil Conservationist to their staff. Andrew Koehlmoos started in Atlantic in June. Andrew is a recent graduate of South Dakota State where he graduated with a Bachelors of Science in Agronomy. He grew up on a diversified farming operation outside of Paullina, Iowa where he worked with hogs, sheep, corn, soybeans and alfalfa. Andrew hopes to be able to use his farming background to help the producers of Cass County overcome the obstacles they are facing while preserving there land.



Andrew Koehlmoos

ENVIROTHON WORKSHOP



Amanda McNees, Soil Conservationist

The Cass SWCD partners with the Adair SWCD each year to host an Envirothon workshop for schools located in their counties. Presenters on each topic is brought in to help students brush up on information and to ask questions. The Envirothon competition is held each year with Regional competitions starting in March. Bryan Hayes with the DNR Fisheries, Micah Lee with the Cass County Conservation Board, Lindsey Barney, DNR Forester, along with Amanda McNees, NRCS Soil Conservationist all presented information in each subject area. Thanks to the presenters and Adair County Soil and Water Conservation District for partnering together with Cass SWCD to provide this opportunity to students in both counties.



Cass Soil & Water Conservation District

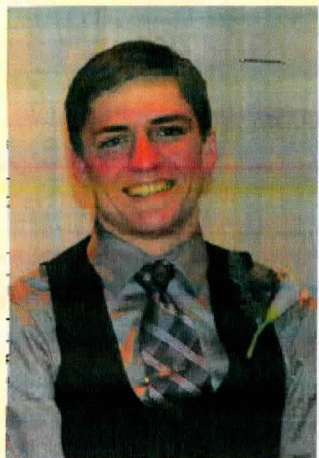
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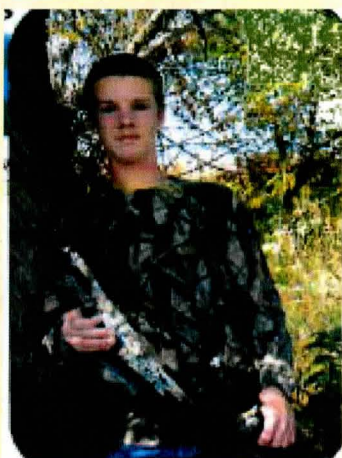
2013 Scholarship Winners



Atlantic Community Schools



Nicholas Olsen



Tyler Fischer

CAM Community Schools



Amber Stender



Tyler Stork

Griswold Community Schools



Nicholas Buchanan

The Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District provides scholarships to area youth in Cass County who are pursuing education in the field of agriculture or natural resources. These funds are raised each year through the tree sales program. Area students are encouraged to contact their guidance counselors or stop by the district office at 503 W. 7th Street, Atlantic for applications.

What Does it Mean to Put Conservation on the Land?

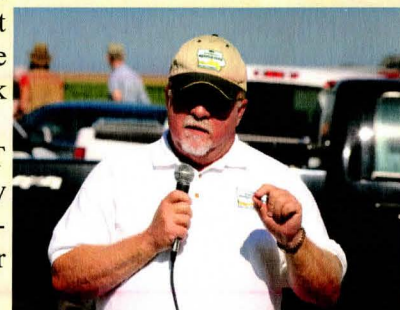
*Provided by: Jim Gillespie, Division Director
Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
Division of Soil Conservation*

I believe that we have some of the best farmers and ranchers in the world right here in Iowa. We also have some of the best soils that make Iowa an agricultural leader. These two things are very important to Iowans and people worldwide. We need to continue to work together to help preserve them.

When using the land for agricultural production, we must have a plan to protect the resources needed to make the operation successful and the land sustainable. When conservation practices are needed, we are here to provide the best technical assistance and financial assistance if available, to put them in place. This will insure that the soil stays healthy and productive and our waters are protected for use by crops, livestock and people. We need to protect the soil from erosion and degradation and prevent sediment and nutrients from reaching the water.

Exemplified by the progress shown at the local, state and federal levels, Iowa has always been a leader in conservation efforts. Now our challenge is that we need to do more. With agriculture always changing, we need to be willing to change with it. Putting conservation on the land should always be one of our biggest priorities as we go forward. We should all be the best stewards of the land and resources that we can be. Conservation should be part of everyone's farm or business plan and we should work together to implement that plan.

Many have heard the new buzz phrase, "CONSERVATION MAY BE VOLUNTARY, BUT IT IS NOT OPTIONAL". I believe that we can achieve soil quality, safe food and clean water by working together voluntarily to put the best conservation practices on the land. For the best assistance in continuing conservation implementation, please contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District.



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POSTER CONTEST



Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company and the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) co-sponsored the Soil and Water Conservation Poster Contest. The Cass SWCD is honored to announce the following winners of the local judging done by the Cass SWCD. 1st Place winners won a movie pass to the Atlantic Theatre, 2nd Place winners received gift certificates from Westside Diner and 3rd Place winners received Crayola marker sets. This year's winners are Danyelle Foresman, Katie York and Bryan York. These winners were also picked at the Regional Level and received \$35 checks from Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance company. Danyelle Foresman has competed in this contest the last two years, and her poster has been selected as a First place winner for her age groups at Regional level both years. Congratulations, Danyelle! Julie Tpekes, Youth Coordinator at the Atlantic Public Library was presented \$50 from the Cass SWCD for administering Danyelle's poster through the Atlantic Public Library. Thanks again to Julie for administering the poster contest at the library. All students grades K-12th grade can compete in the conservation poster contest through their schools.

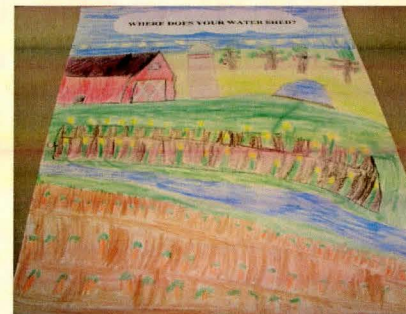
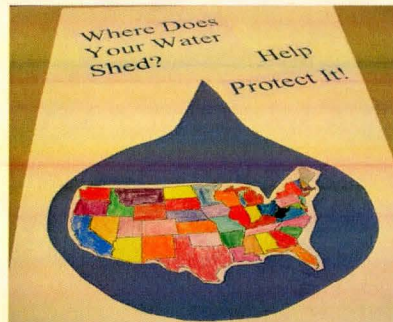
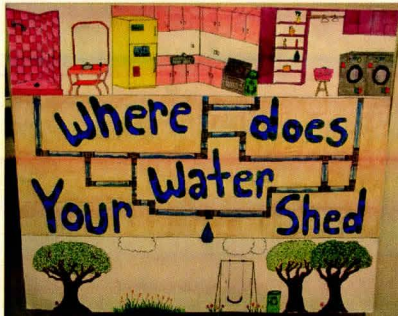
DANYELLE FORESMAN



KATIE YORK



BRYAN YORK



Farm Practices Maintenance

Submitted by Steve Fluckey, State Technician

An important part of any farm operation is proper maintenance of conservation systems. With fields bare, this is the perfect time to review your farm for needed maintenance and repairs, which will help extend the lifespan of terraces, waterways, and ponds. Sediment build-up in terraces can prevent drainage and limit water storage. Soil and crop residue can also accumulate around the intakes preventing water drainage. It is important to clean out any sediment and trash. While cleaning the areas, look for any damages that may have occurred and repair them. Broken terraces can funnel runoff and cause large gullies. Cut and spray any trees that might be on the terrace using approved herbicides. This is also a great chance to reseed any spots where seeding didn't take. Also check your waterways for a build-up of sediment. If reshaping is needed, spring would be the best chance for seed establishment.

Just a reminder, structures/ponds should also be checked, especially around the inlet or intake. Remove any trash or tree limbs that have accumulated. As with terraces or waterways, spot seeding may be needed until vegetation is well established. Trees and shrubs should also be cut and sprayed along the dam. Though it is okay to flash graze your structure, livestock can be harmful and should not be on it all the time. Check all fences and gates to ensure that cattle are mostly excluded.

Taking time to attend this maintenance now could prevent costly problems to conservation systems in the future. If you have questions or need assistance developing a successful maintenance plan, don't hesitate to call your local Natural Resources Conservation Office.

New Commissioner Training

The Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District hosted new commissioner training in Atlantic at the Pizza Ranch on Monday, February 11, 2013. Ten commissioners, in which seven were newly elected commissioners attended. Clare Lindahl, Executive Director with the Conservation Districts of Iowa presented the information for newly elected commissioner. This training gives the new commissioners an overview of the soil and water conservation districts roles and responsibilities. They are also provided information about the need for local soil and water conservation districts. This was a great opportunity for new commissioners to learn about the district and partner agencies that they will work with.

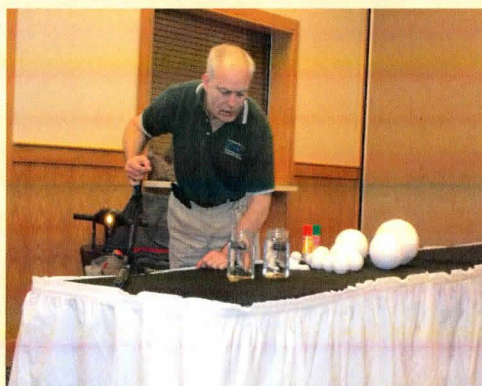


Region 5 Spring Regional Meeting

Partners working together



Spring Regional Commissioner Meetings are a collaboration between Conservation Districts of Iowa, the hosting Soil and Water Conservation District, State Soil Conservation Committee and Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation and partners to bring commissioners, assistant commissioners, partners and current staff, relevant information on soil and water conservation in the state of Iowa. Likewise, they offer an opportunity for Conservation Districts of Iowa and its partners in conservation to learn about the needs of Iowa Commissioners and landowners to increase conservation. This year, the Region 5 Spring meeting was held in Atlantic at the Cass Community Building on February 27, 2013. There were fifty nine people signed in for the meeting. Clare Lindahl, Executive Director and Jim Frederick, CDI Board President conducted the meeting. Clare Lindahl presented information on moving conservation forward in the face of change; The role of Conservation Districts of Iowa & Commissioners. Vince Sitzmann, Field Services Bureau Chief with Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation provided information on the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. Dave Schmidt, local producer from Audubon, spoke about cover crops in his operation on behalf of CDI and Practical Farmers of Iowa. He also had a very good power



Rick Bednarek

point that attendees were able to see photos of the cover crop on his land. Clare Lindahl stated that there were 46 districts that participated in the state cover crop incentive program this past year with IDALS-DSC. Approximately 13,068.48 acres were planted. Jamie Carpenter, ASTC with the NRCS in Atlantic provided a power point on the continuance of the current Farm Bill. He continued to say that sequestration is in effect for the government until a budget is signed. The Cass Soil and Water Conservation district provided lunch for the meeting and the program continued with partner reports from the following agencies; CDI, IDALS-DSC, NRCS and DNR. To end the meeting, the Cass County Soil and

Water Conservation District had Rick Bednarek, NRCS State Soil Scientist conduct a hands on demonstration called a slake test on Soil Quality. Thanks to all who attended the 2013 Region 5 Spring Regional.

Annual Tree Sales

Tree sales are held each year in Cass county. Anyone interested in purchasing trees and shrubs from the SWCD need to order by March 1st of each year. Landowners can apply for assistance through IDALS-DSC for REAP funds to help with installing new windbreaks, tree plantings, etc. Applications taken first come first served till funds are exhausted. For more information stop in the SWCD office at 503 W. 7th Street, Atlantic, Iowa or call us at (712)243-3180.

Cass Soil & Water Conservation District

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Cass County Soil & Water Conservation

Financial Report FY 13

July 1, 2012- June 30, 2013

Revolving Funds

Balance 7/1/12 \$33,867.91
Total Deposits \$26,655.15
Total Expenditures \$30,756.69
Balance 6/30/2013 \$29,766.37

Drill Fund

Balance 7/1/12 \$14,482.81
Total Deposits \$4,825.70
Total Expenditures \$14,397.19
Balance 6/30/13 \$4,911.32

IFIP FY13

Balance 7/1/12 \$166,200.06
Total Obligated \$50,690.04
Total Expended \$115,510.02
Balance 6/30/13 0.00

REAP P FY13

Balance 7/1/12 \$14,153.13
Total Obligated \$9,246.88
Total Expended \$4906.25
Balance 6/30/13 0.00

REAP F/NG FY13

Balance 7/1/12 \$3855.17
Total Obligated \$2355.17
Total Expended \$1,500.00
Balance 6/30/13 \$0.00

Iowa Water Quality Initiative, 2014 Legislative Report

Statewide Practices Cost-Share

In August of 2013, \$2.8 million was made available through all 100 Soil and Water Conservation Districts to help implement conservation practices through the Water Quality Initiative (WQI). After an initial \$1.8 million was offered and subsequently obligated in less than a week, a supplement of \$1 million was added to the fund and this additional funding spoken for within another week.

The strong level of commitment showcased by Iowa farmers volunteering to try something new on their farms to help water quality is a testament to the level of engagement farmers are ready to take on these issues. Over 1,000 farmers committed an additional \$2.8 million in landowner match to help implement these practices for up to 160 acres of cost-shared practice. Some of the applicants used the practice share.

Matt Lechtenberg
Water Quality Initiative
Coordinator

Added

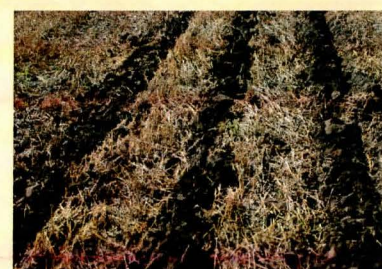
Practice Info

The practices offered through the WQI Statewide initiative were selected in a short time frame and thereby providing a water quality benefit in 20 opportunity to try these practices for the first time.

Offering a portion of WQI funding statewide allowed each county to participate, engaged more farmers and landowners in the process.

Year-end totals of fall established practices through the WQI Statewide cover crops and over 2,000 acres of N inhibitor.

Find out about more Iowa Leaders in Conservation



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IFIP FY13		REAP P FY13		REAP F/NG FY13	
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Total Obligated	\$50,690.04	Total Obligated	\$9,246.88	Total Obligated	\$2355.17
Total Expended	<u>\$115,510.02</u>	Total Expended	<u>\$4906.25</u>	Total Expended	<u>\$1,500.00</u>
Balance 6/30/13	0.00	Balance 6/30/13	0.00	Balance 6/30/13	\$0.00

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The strong level of commitment showcased by Iowa famers volunteering to try something new on their farms to help water quality is a testament to the level of engagement farmers are ready to take on these issues. Over 1,000 farmers committed an additional \$2.8 million in landowner match to help implement these practices. Each landowner or farmer could apply for up to 160 acres of cost-shared practice. Some of the applicants used the practice on more acres than they applied for cost-share.

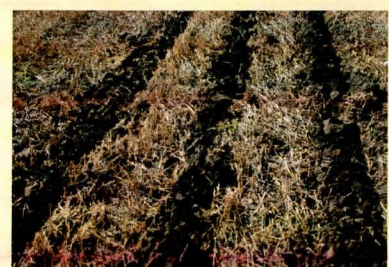
Practice Info

The practices offered through the WQI Statewide initiative were selected because of their ability to be implemented in a short time frame and thereby providing a water quality benefit in 2013. The statewide approach gave farmers an opportunity to try these practices for the first time.

Offering a portion of WQI funding statewide allowed each county to participate. This funding, along with a targeted approach, engaged more farmers and landowners in the process.

Year-end totals of fall established practices through the WQI Statewide cost-share program was over 88,000 acres of cover crops and over 2,000 acres of N inhibitor.

Find out about more Iowa Leaders in Conservation at CleanWaterIowa.org



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NO INTEREST LOAN PROGRAM



Since 1983, the Division of Soil Conservation has been offering No-interest loans through the Iowa Finance Authority. Loans made under this program can be used to fund conservation practices that protect soil and water resources. Examples include terraces, water and sediment control basins, grade stabilization structures and waterways. To apply for these loans, applicants must meet the following requirements: Applicants must own the land where the conservation work will take place, Tracts of land must be over 10 acres with a minimum of \$2,500 of agricultural products sold annually and project must meet NRCS field specifications.

TERMS OF LOANS

- * Up to \$20,000 loaned per borrower
- * Loans set up to be paid back in equal installments over a 10 year period
- * 2% loan fee paid to district prior to issue of financial funds to landowner
- * Security interest will be placed on the land until loan is paid in full
- * Payments due March 1st each year with no penalty for prepayment
- * Loans can be used to fund 100% of the cost up to the loan maximum, and can be used in conjunction with other public funds (EQIP or Iowa Financial Incentive Program funds).

Landowners can sign up for this loan at the Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District office located at 503 W. 7th Street, Ste 1, Atlantic, Iowa.

STATE REVOLVING LOAN PROGRAM

Iowa Finance Authority offers the state revolving loan program to eligible applicants to implement practices for animal feeding operations, waste storage facilities, deep bedded buildings or other roofed manure control structures that provide 100% confinement. Terraces, grade control and sediment control basins, pasture and hay land planting or prescribed grazing, grassed waterways, filter strips, windbreaks are also eligible under this program. The purpose of the loan program is to improve and protect Iowa's water quality. The loan assistance is facilitated through the State Revolving Fund. For more information on this program, please stop by our office. This loan can be used in conjunction with other public funds (EQIP or Iowa Financial Incentive Program funds).

TERMS OF LOANS

- * Loan amounts from \$5,000—\$500,000
- * Terms up to 10 years
- * Can fund up to 100% of eligible project costs
- * 3% fixed interest for life of the loan
- * Applications accepted anytime
- * Available through the lender of your choice
- * Can be used in conjunction with grants/cost share



Landowners can sign up for this loan at the Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District office located at 503 W. 7th Street, Ste 1, Atlantic, Iowa.

No-Till Drill Rental

The Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District has a Great Plains No-Till drill available for rent by landowners in Cass County. If you would like to rent the drill, landowners must make application at the district office and pay a \$50 non-refundable deposit. The rental rate is \$10/acre with the non-refundable deposit applied to your final bill. Delivery and pickup is provided to the landowner by the district drill employee. For more information call the district office at (712)243-3180 or stop by our office located at 503 W. 7th Street, Ste 1, Atlantic, Iowa.

A history Lesson on Soil Conservation

Hugh Hammond Bennett, otherwise known as the “father of soil conservation” was a soil surveyor with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In 1928 Bennett co-wrote a publication, titled, “Soil Erosion: A National Menace” which helped establish scientific credibility about the repercussions of erosion and inspired others to take initiative on the erosion problems within the United States.

In 1937, Bennett was presenting to a congressional subcommittee in Washington D.C. and timed his presentation to coincide perfectly with the arrival of a severe dust storm. As Bennett flung open the window he shouted “Gentleman, get ready because here comes Oklahoma” so the story goes. Soon thereafter the Soil Conservation Service was established as a permanent agency within USDA, with Bennett as its director. This was the first constitutional act in the history of this or any other nation that sought to control and prevent soil erosion, flooding, and other threats to our natural resources. Not long after, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a letter to all the governors recommending that each state adopt their own laws. Iowa’s Governor Wilson adopted the law and by 1940 Iowa’s first Soil and Water District was formed by three townships in Marion County.

Today we have 100 SWCDs in 99 counties, that are represented by 500 Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners. Five nonpartisan Commissioners are elected from each district and are entrusted with many responsibilities including the prevention of excessive soil erosion and conservation of our soil resources. No small task considering Iowa has 36 million acres, 92,300 farms and 25 million acres of crop land. Iowa also ranks number one nationally in the production of corn, soybeans, pork and chicken.

In 1973, the Iowa legislature enacted the cost share program for to help promote conservation. Throughout the past 40 years, over 254 million dollars have been leveraged with funds from private landowners and farmers through the SWCDs to conserve and protect our soil resources. Hundreds of thousands of acres are now protected with no-till and strip till, terraces, waterways, grade stabilization structures, buffers, cover crops, and other practices that save millions of tons of soil from washing off our fields and into our waterways.

Who could have imagined that one man’s passion for soil conservation, along with a little dust in the wind in the 1930’s, could have spurred a conservation ethic that spans the world and touches each and every acre of our farms?

It’s the perfect time for a walk in the woods...

Do you own a timber? Have you ever wondered what kind of trees are in your woodland, or how to attract more woodland wildlife, or even what things you could do to make your woodland better? If so – it is time to call your DNR District Forester. Fall and winter are excellent seasons to walk and assess the condition of woodlands. Your DNR District Forester’s mission is to help you sustainably manage your woodland for the many objectives you may have for it. Common objectives for SW Iowa landowners include: ecosystem restoration, wildlife habitat improvements, hydrology improvements, recreation, and timber production.

The first step in the process is a woodland site visit. Your DNR Forester will walk your woodland with you – helping you formulate goals to mold the Woodland Stewardship Plan around. The second step, a Woodland Stewardship Plan, outlines: 1. your woodland management objectives, 2. the current conditions of your woodland, and 3. a long-term plan for how to reach the objectives you have set for your woodland. State and Federal financial assistance cost-share is available to help woodland owners, like yourself, meet these management objectives. Common cost-share practices include: tree planting, timber stand improvement (thinning), site preparation for natural regeneration, prescribed fire, and invasive species management. Once you have a Woodland Stewardship Plan your DNR Forester and Soil and Water Conservation District officials can assist you with choosing a cost-share practice that will work best for you. If you use cost-share or choose to do the prescribed management on your own – your DNR Forester can assist you with setting up the management projects, finding forestry contractors and many other tasks related to long-term woodland management. Your woodland management questions are just a phone call away. If you live in Monona, Crawford, Carroll, Audubon, Shelby, Harrison, Pottawattamie, Cass, Montgomery, Mills, Fremont, or Page Counties – give Lindsey Barney, DNR District Forester, a call at 712.482.6245 (or e-mail at Lindsey.barney@dnr.iowa.gov).



Cass Soil & Water Conservation District

Curt Behrends Greg Zellmer Ray Wilson Fred Kay Chase Wheatley Tracy Marshall Alan Peterson

On January 17, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) released a new version of the Iowa Corn Suitability Ratings (CSR2) onto the Web Soil Survey. Dr. Lee Burras, Professor of Agronomy at Iowa State University, generated the values from the NRCS National Soils Database. This will be the first revision of the CSRs since its beginning in 1971. CSR2 weighs several factors found in the following equation:

$$CSR2 = S - M - F - W - D \pm E]$$

In the equation, S refers to the taxonomic subgroup class of the soil series. M represents the family particle size class. F is the field conditions of a particular soil map unit. The W factor is the soils capacity to hold water. The D factor represents the soil depth and tolerable rates of soil erosion. Finally, EJ is a correction factor used in certain cases to capture variability in soils not accounted for by the other factors. CSR2 can be a maximum of 100, and minimum of 5. Updates of the CSR2 will occur annually as the National Soils Database is updated.

The Cass Soil and Water Conservation District monthly meetings are held on the Third Tuesday of each month.



Annual Tree Sales

Annual Tree Sales

Tree sales are held each year in Cass county. Anyone interested in purchasing trees and shrubs from the SWCD need to order by March 1st of each year. Landowners can apply for assistance through IDALS-DSC for REAP funds to help with installing new wind-breaks. Applications taken first come first served till funds are exhausted. For more information stop in the SWCD office.

Tree Order Form

Potted Evergreens	Size	Sold As	Number Ordered	Price Each	Total
Black Hills Spruce	2-3'	Each	X	\$25.00	
Black Hills Spruce	3-4'	Each	X	\$30.00	
Black Hills Spruce	5'	Each	X	\$58.00	
Colorado Blue Spruce	2-3'	Each	X	\$25.00	
Colorado Blue Spruce	3-4'	Each	X	\$30.00	
Colorado Blue Spruce	5'	Each	X	\$60.00	
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Norway Spruce	3-4'	Each	X	\$40.00	
Concolor Fir	15-24"	Each	X	\$20.00	
Concolor Fir	5'	Each	X	70.00	
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White Pine	3-4'	Each	X	\$30.00	
White Pine	4-5'	Each	X	\$40.00	
Red Cedar	15-24"	Each	X	18.00	
Bareroot Evergreen Upon Request					

Deciduous Shrubs/Trees	Size	Bundles	Number Ordered	Price Each	Total
Lilac, Common Purple	2'-3'	Transplant	10	\$1.25	
Redosier Dogwood	2-3'	Seedling	25	\$1.00	
American Cranberry	2-3'	Transplant	10	\$2.00	
Other species available upon request					

[illegible]

Order total: _____
Tax: _____
Shipping: _____
Total: _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Remit Payment to: **Cass SWCD**
503 W. 7th Street
Atlantic, Iowa 50022

☐ Check # _____ Receipt # _____
☐ Cash _____ Receipt # _____

***Orders must be placed by March 1, 2014
To ensure availability.***

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is an equal opportunity employer and provider."***

2013 Annual Report

January, 2014

Published by the
Atlantic News Telegraph

Cass County SWCD

Iowa Water Quality Initiatives come to Cass County

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey announced Aug. 8, 2013 that Water Quality Initiative cost share funds were available to help farmers install nutrient reduction practices. Practices that could be funded were cover crops, no-till or strip-till or using a nitrification inhibitor when applying fertilizer. These funds were avail-

Watersee page 2

Pictured is a cover crop field near Atlantic.



The Function of the Conservation District: To take available technical, financial, and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land user.



Inside

Election Results	page 3
Conservation on the land	page 4
Scholarship Winners	page 5
Poster Contest	page 6
Tree Sales	page 9



Inside-New Soil Conservationist Andrew Koehlmoos

Read more on page 3

Cass County Soil & Water Conservation

Financial Report FY 13

July 1, 2012- June 30, 2013

Revolving Funds

Balance 7/1/12	\$33,867.91
Total Deposits	\$26,655.15
Total Expenditures	<u>\$30,756.69</u>
Balance 6/30/2013	\$29,766.37

Drill Fund

Balance 7/1/12	\$14,482.81
Total Deposits	\$4,825.70
Total Expenditures	<u>\$14,397.19</u>
Balance 6/30/13	\$4,911.32

IFIP FY13

Balance 7/1/12	\$166,200.06
Total Obligated	\$50,690.04
Total Expended	<u>\$115,510.02</u>
Balance 6/30/13	0.00

REAP P FY13

Balance 7/1/12	\$14,153.13
Total Obligated	\$9,246.88
Total Expended	<u>\$4,906.25</u>
Balance 6/30/13	0.00

REAP F/NG FY13

Balance 7/1/12	\$3,855.17
Total Obligated	\$2,355.17
Total Expended	<u>\$1,500.00</u>
Balance 6/30/13	\$0.00

CleanWaterIowa.org website launched

On Oct. 28, Gov. Terry Brandstad, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey and the Department of Natural Resources Director Chuck Gipp launch the CleanWaterIowa.org website which will serve as a one-stop-shop for conservation practices that everyone can benefit from. Farm, Residential, Urban, City and Industry sections provide information about science-based practices that can be implemented to improve water quality. Please go to <http://www.cleanwateriowa.org> site and see stories about practices at work from around the state.



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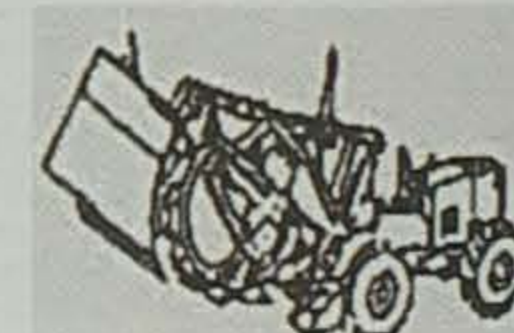
Iowa Water Quality Initiatives come to Cass County

Water From page one

able to help farmers take steps this past fall in reducing nutrient losses. Allowing farmers to voluntarily apply science-based conservation practices on the ground at a reduced cost would demonstrate the benefits these practices provide in hopes that farmers will voluntarily incorporate them into their operations.

In approximately 12 calendar days, \$1.8 million dollars had been obligated around the state of Iowa for these practices. On Aug. 22, the Iowa Department of Agriculture/Division of Soil Conservation announced it would provide another \$1 million dollars for applications. There were a total of 2576.7 acres of cover crop planted in Cass County. There are many varieties of cover crops that people can choose from when thinking about using it in their farm operations. The winter hardy grains are best used in corn silage or before bean harvest and can be used for grazing forage. Winter hardy legumes are a good fit after corn silage in a corn on corn rotation; fallow or pre-vented planting going to corn; or in beans at leaf drop stage. Winter kill varieties are best used in fallow or prevented planted acres; or corn silage. This will provide grazing forage for livestock. For more information on cover crops, please contact your local Natural Resources Conservation office.

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Jerry Eshelman, Owner
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Home 641-343-7929
Cell 641-221-0396

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All Kinds of Dirtwork
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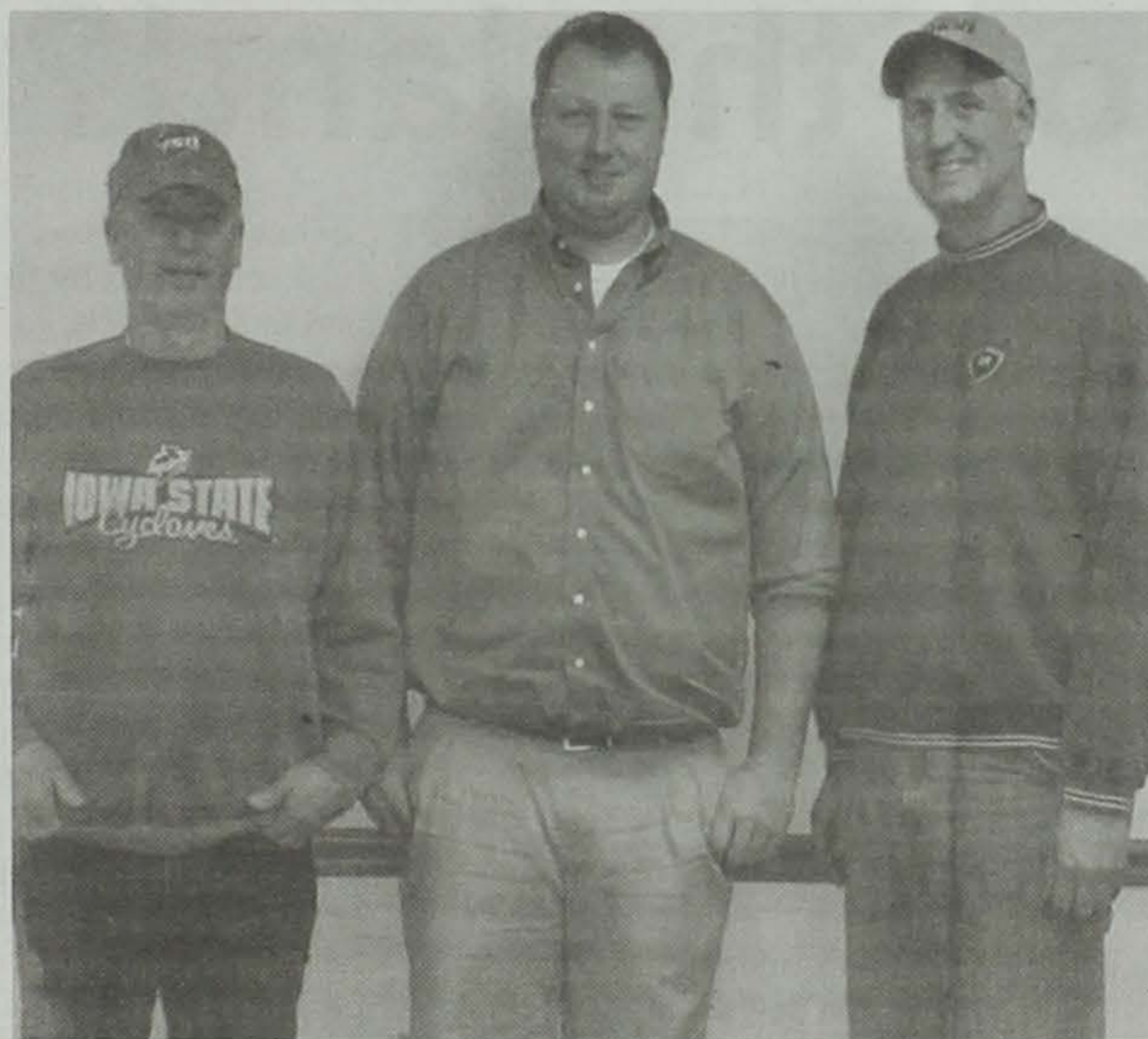


Brian 243-2457 home
249-0314 cell

Chase 249-2025 cell
Travis 249-7115 cell

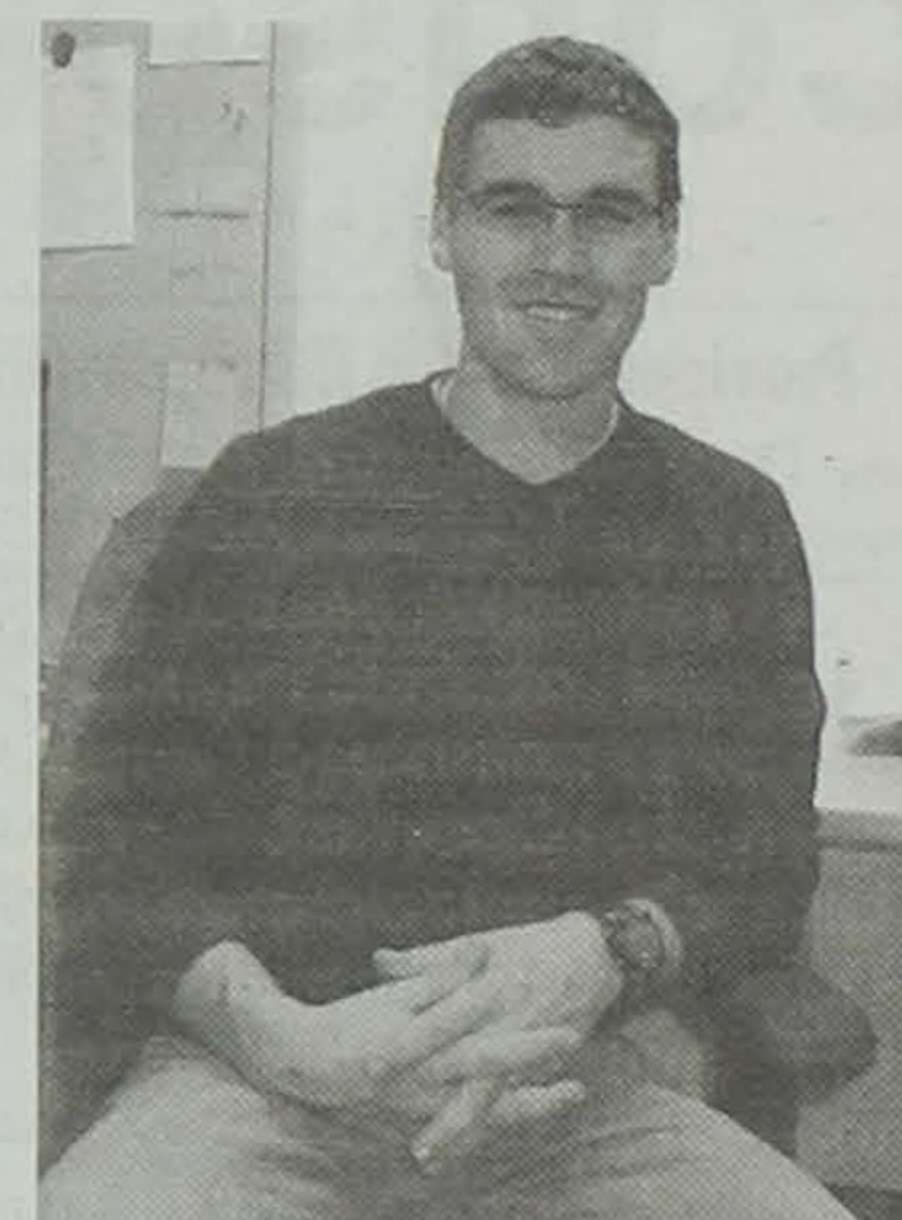
SWCD Election Results

The Soil and Water Conservation District commissioners are the governing body of the local district in Iowa, as delineated in Iowa Code Chapter 161A. This year, there were three seats to fill for the November election. Curt Behrends, Ray Wilson, and Chase Wheatley have been elected to four year terms beginning the 2nd day of January, 2013. Assistant commissioners are also appointed at the District Organizational meeting. Fred Kay and Greg Zellmer continue their terms on board also. Greg Zellmer will serve as Chairman, Ray Wilson will serve as Vice Chairman, Fred Kay, Treasurer.



New Soil Conservationist joins staff

The Cass County NRCS Office would like to welcome a new Soil Conservationist to their staff. Andrew Koehlmoos started in Atlantic in June. Andrew is a recent graduate of South Dakota State where he graduated with a Bachelors of Science in Agronomy. He grew up on a diversified farming operation outside of Paullina, where he worked with hogs, sheep, corn, soybeans and alfalfa. Andrew hopes to be able to use his farming background to help the producers of Cass County overcome the obstacles they are facing while preserving their land.



THANK YOU

The Cass SWCD would like to thank everyone who contributed to the publication of the Annual Report

3M Tiling
Chris Heuton Earthmoving
Eshelman Trenching
Ras Paul Construction
Empire Construction
Custom Seed Service
Stamp Construction
Property Connections
Wickman Chemical

No-Till Drill Rental

The Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District has a Great Plains No-Till drill available for rent by land-owners in Cass County. If you would like to rent the drill, landowners must make application at the district office and pay a \$50 non-refundable deposit. The rental rate is \$10/acre with the non-refundable deposit applied to your final bill. Delivery and pickup is provided to the landowner by the district drill employee. For more information call the district office at (712)243-3180 or stop by our office located at 503 W. 7th Street, Ste 1, Atlantic, Iowa.

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Sales Agent
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Cindy Chester
Sales Agent
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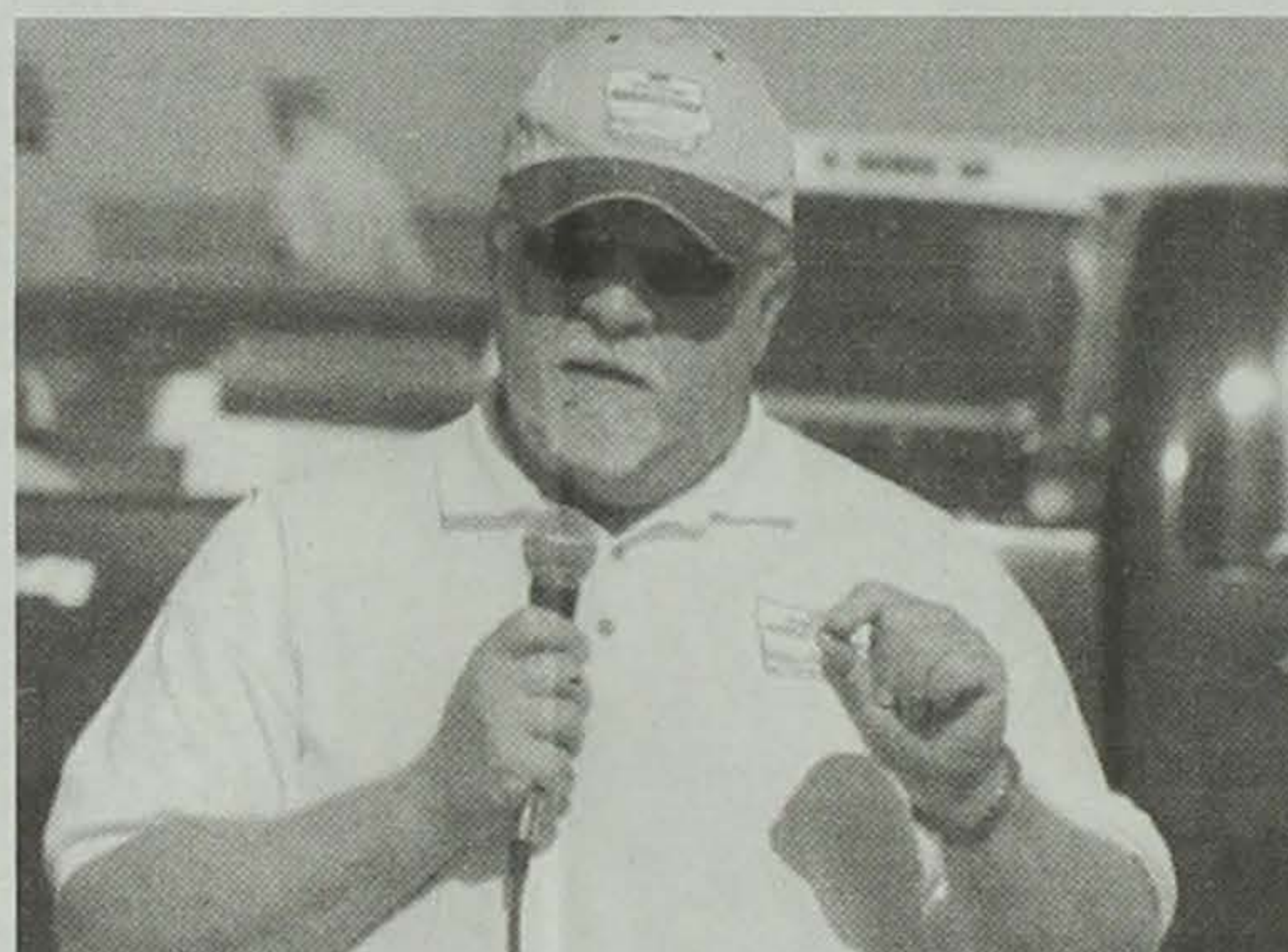
What does it mean to put conservation on the land?

Provided by: Jim Gillespie, Division Director

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-
Division of Soil Conservation

I believe that we have some of the best farmers and ranchers in the world right here in Iowa. We also have some of the best soils that make Iowa an agricultural leader. These two things are very important to Iowans and people worldwide. We need to continue to work together to help preserve them.

When using the land for agricultural production, we must have a plan to protect the resources needed to make the operation successful and the land sustainable. When conservation practices are needed, we are here to provide the best technical assistance and financial assistance if available, to put them in place. This will insure that the soil stays healthy and productive and our waters are pro-



tected for use by crops, livestock and people. We need to protect the soil from erosion and degradation and prevent

sediment and nutrients from reaching the water.

Exemplified by the progress shown at the local, state and federal levels, Iowa has always been a leader in conservation efforts. Now our challenge is that we need to do more. With agriculture always changing, we need to be willing to change with it. Putting conservation on the land should always be one of our biggest priorities as we go forward. We should all be the best stewards of the land and resources that we can be. Conservation should be part of everyone's farm or business plan and we should work together to implement that plan.

Many have heard the new buzz phrase, "Conservation may be voluntary, but it is not optional."

I believe that we can achieve soil quality, safe food and clean water by working together voluntarily to put the best conservation practices on the land. For the best assistance in continuing conservation implementation, please contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District.

No interest loan program

Since 1983, the Division of Soil Conservation has been offering No-interest loans through the Iowa Finance Authority. Loans made under this program can be used to fund conservation practices that protect soil and water resources. Examples include terraces, water and sediment control basins, grade stabilization structures and waterways. To apply for these loans, applicants must meet the following requirements: Applicants must own the land

where the conservation work will take place, Tracts of land must be over 10 acres with a minimum of \$2,500 of agricultural products sold annually and project must meet NRCS field specifications.

Terms of Loans

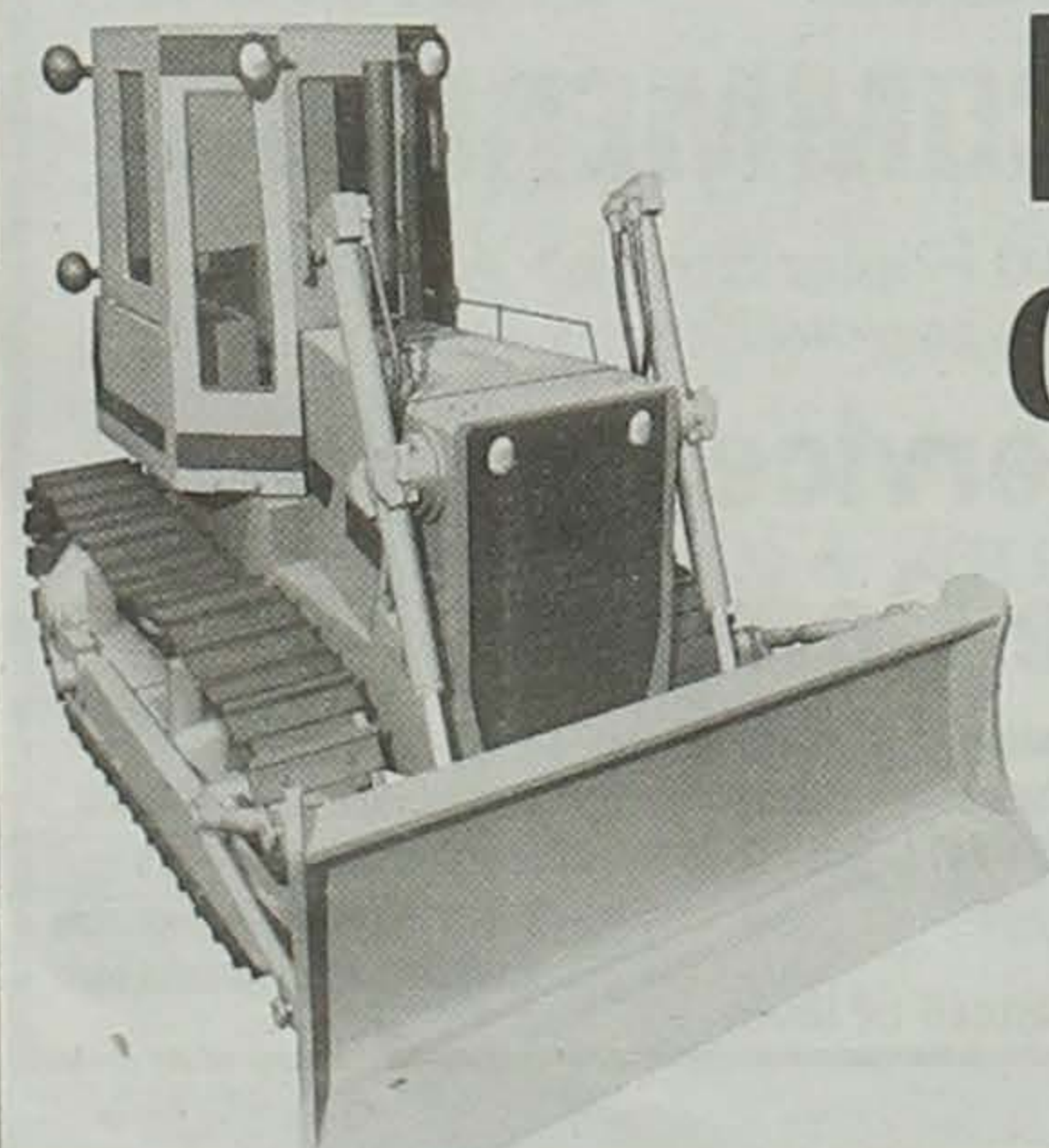
- * Up to \$20,000 loaned per borrower
- * Loans set up to be paid back in equal installments over a 10 year period
- * 2 percent loan fee paid to district prior to issue of financial funds to landowner
- * Security interest will be placed on the land until loan

is paid in full

* Payments due March 1st each year with no penalty for prepayment

* Loans can be used to fund 100 percent of the cost up to the loan maximum, and can be used in conjunction with other public funds (EQIP or Iowa Financial Incentive Program funds).

Landowners can sign up for this loan at the Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District office located at 503 W. 7th Street, Ste 1, Atlantic, Iowa.



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Office: 712-243-3268 • 243-4048**

2013 Scholarship Winners

Atlantic Community School



Nicholas Olsen



Tyler Fischer

CAM Community School



Amber Stender



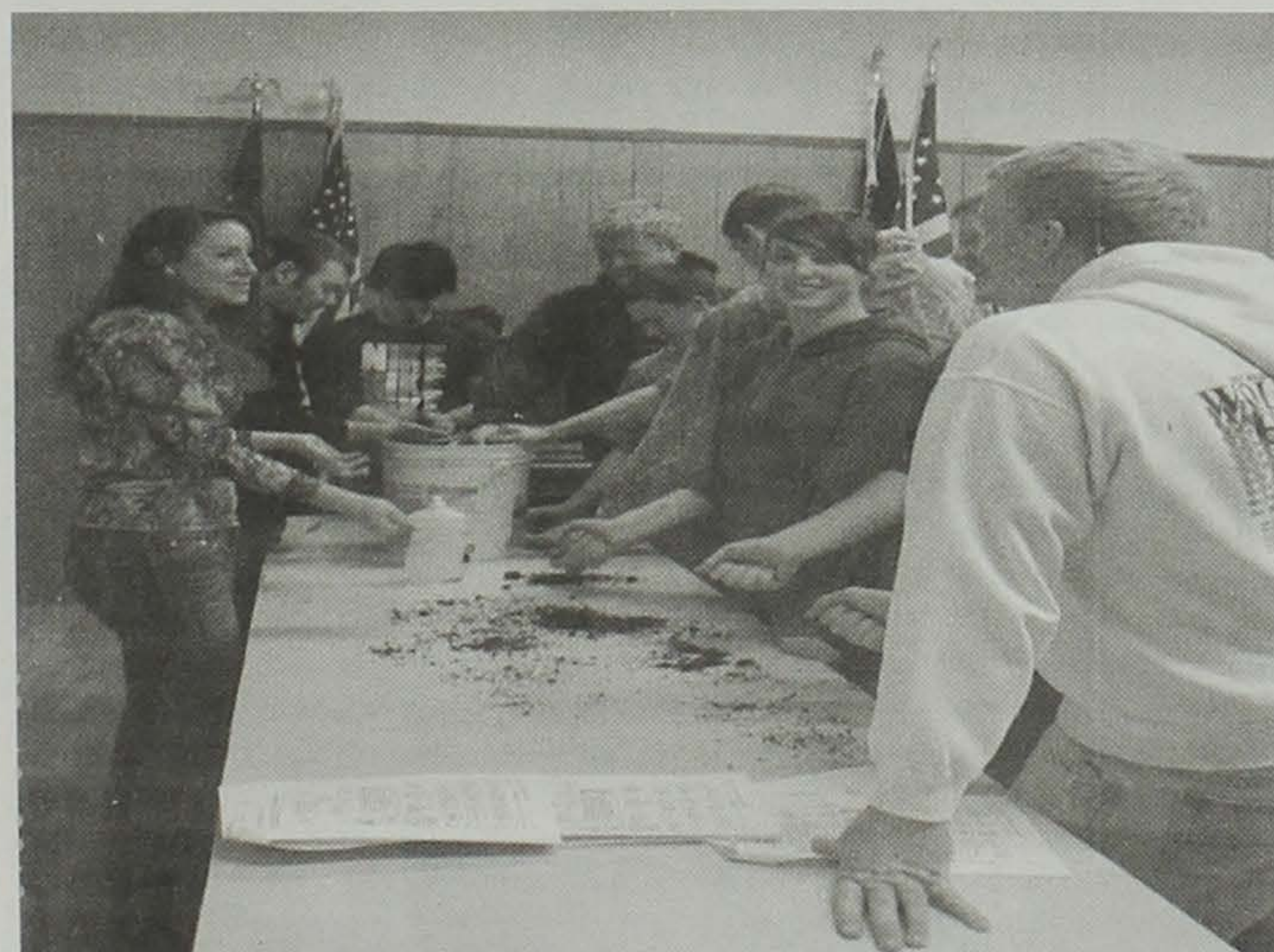
Tyler Stork

Griswold Community School



Ryan Aupperle

Envirothon Workshop



The Cass SWCD partners with the Adair SWCD each year to host an Envirothon workshop for schools located in their counties. Presenters on each topic is brought in to help students brush up on information and to ask questions. The Envirothon competition is held each year with Regional competitions starting in March. Bryan Hayes with the DNR Fisheries, Micah Lee with the Cass County Conservation Board, Lindsey Barney, DNR Forester, along with Amanda McNees, NRCS Soil Conservationist all presented information in each subject area. Thanks to the presenters and Adair County Soil and Water Conservation District for partnering together with Cass SWCD to provide this opportunity to students in both counties.

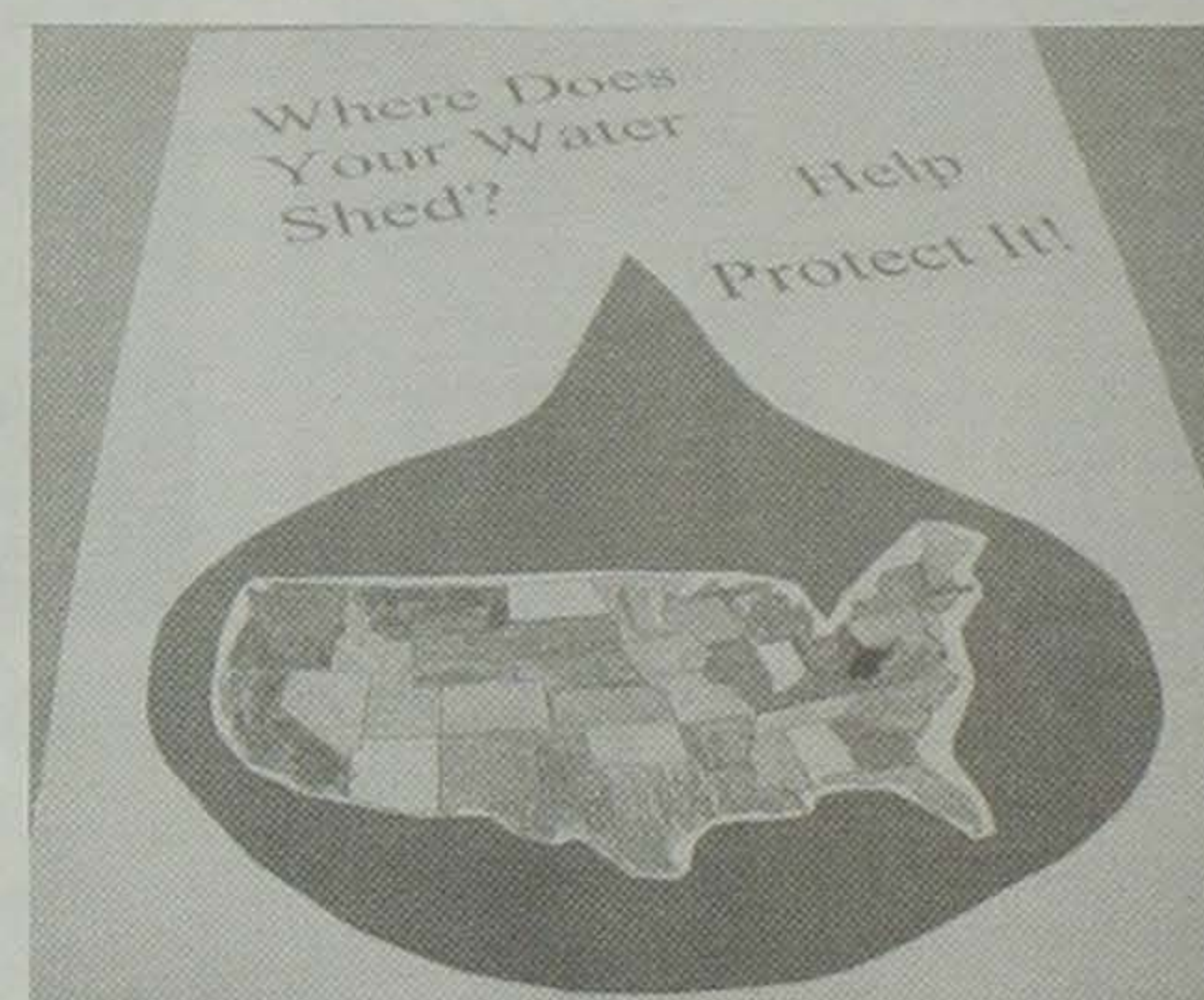
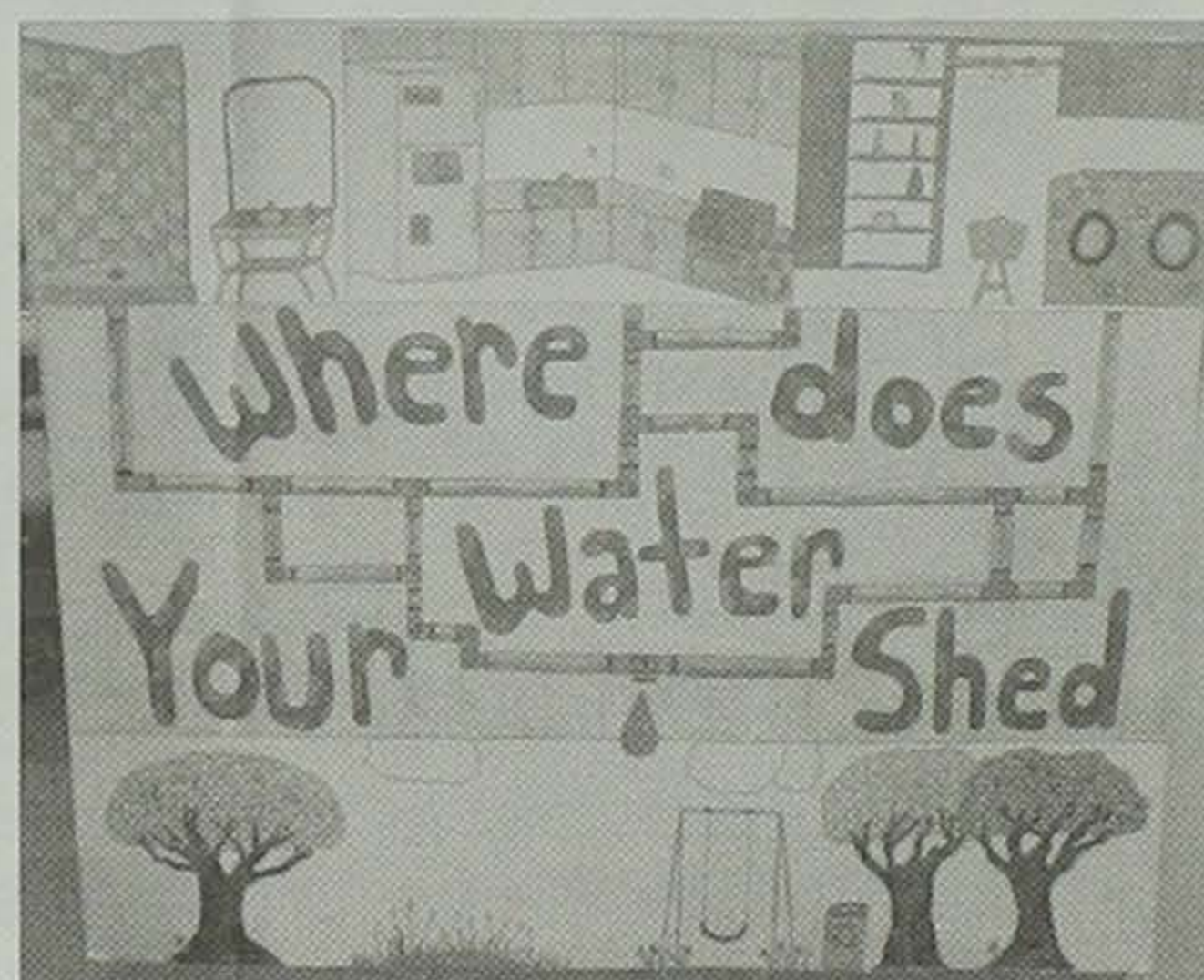
The Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District provides scholarships to area youth in Cass County who are pursuing education in the field of agriculture or natural resources. These funds are raised each year through the tree sales program. Area students are encouraged to contact their guidance counselors or stop by the district office at 503 W. 7th Street, Atlantic for applications.

Poster Contest

Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company and the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) co-sponsored the Soil and Water Conservation Poster Contest. The Cass SWCD is honored to announce the following winners of the local judging done by the Cass SWCD. First place winners won a movie pass to the Atlantic Theatre, second place winners received gift certificates from Westside Diner and third place winners received Crayola marker sets. This year's winners are Danyelle Foresman, Katie York and Bryan York. These winners were also picked at the Regional Level and received \$35 checks from Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance company. Danyelle Foresman has competed in this contest the last two years, and her poster has been selected as a First place winner for her age groups at Regional level both years. Congratulations, Danyelle! Julie Tjpekes, Youth Coordinator at the Atlantic Public Library, was presented \$50 from the Cass SWCD for administering Danyelle's poster through the Atlantic Public Library. Thanks again to Julie for administering the poster contest at the library. All students grades Kindergarten-12th grade can compete in the conservation poster contest through their schools.

Pictured (top left) Danyelle Foresman, (top right) Katie York, and (bottom right) Bryan York.

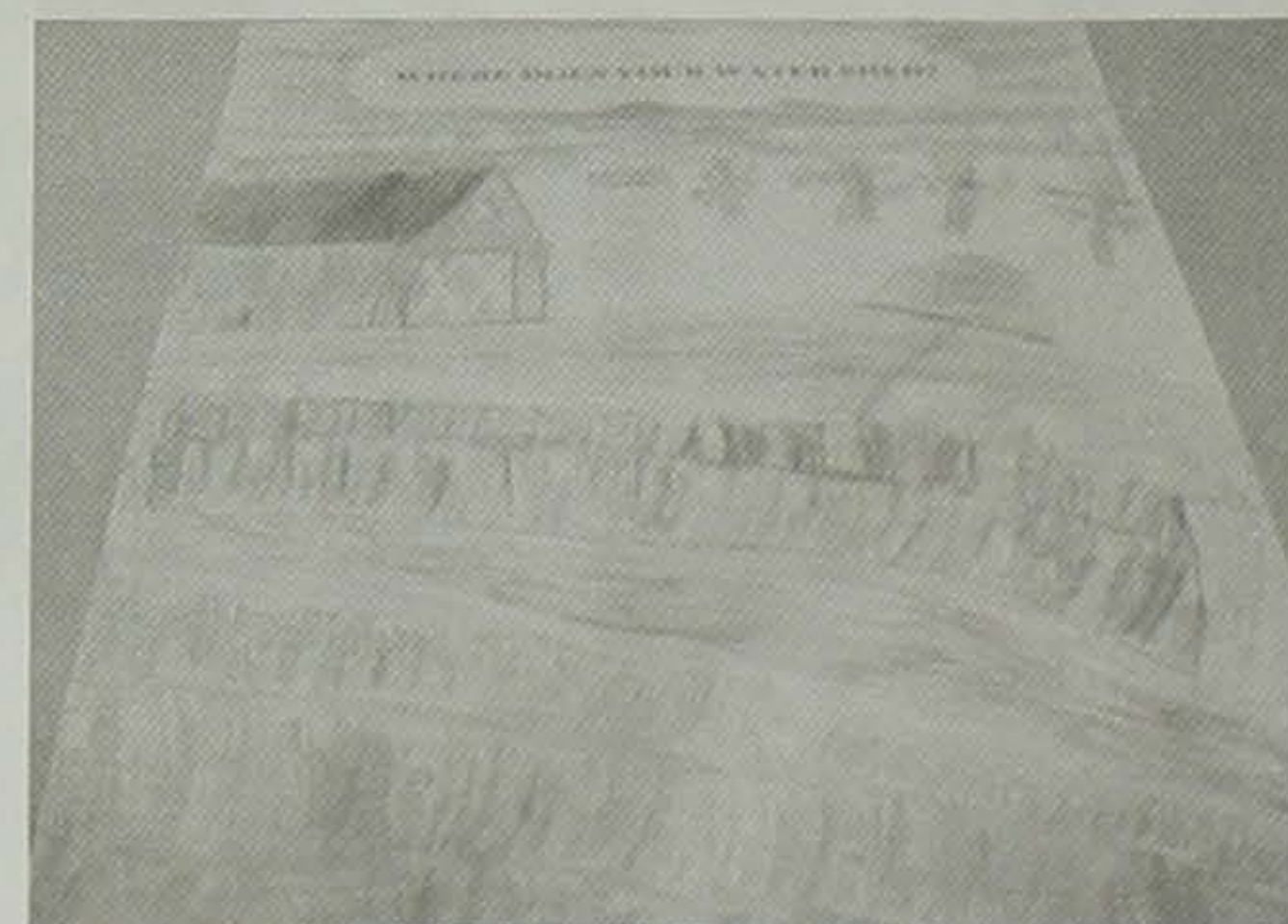
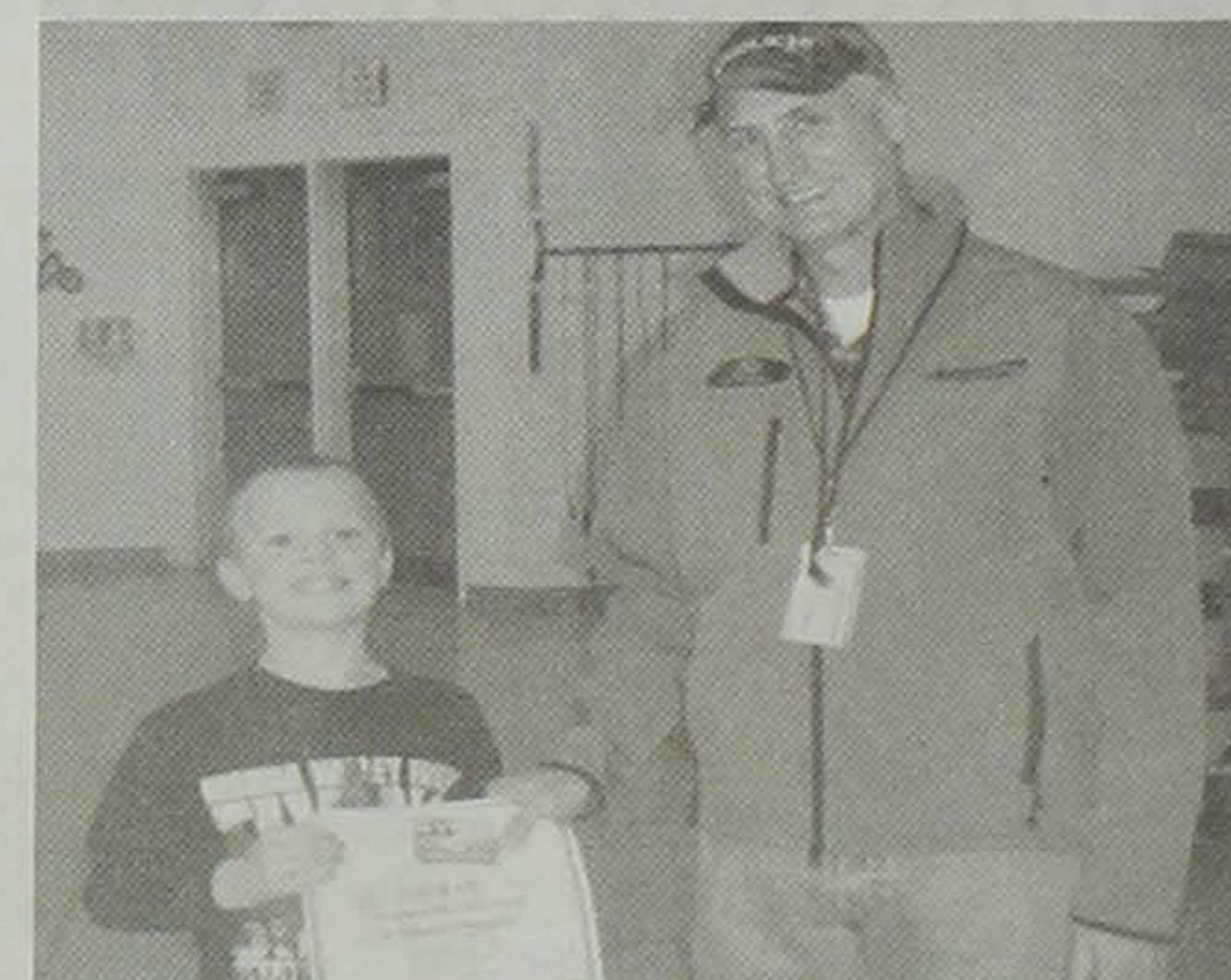
Photos contributed



New Commissioner Training

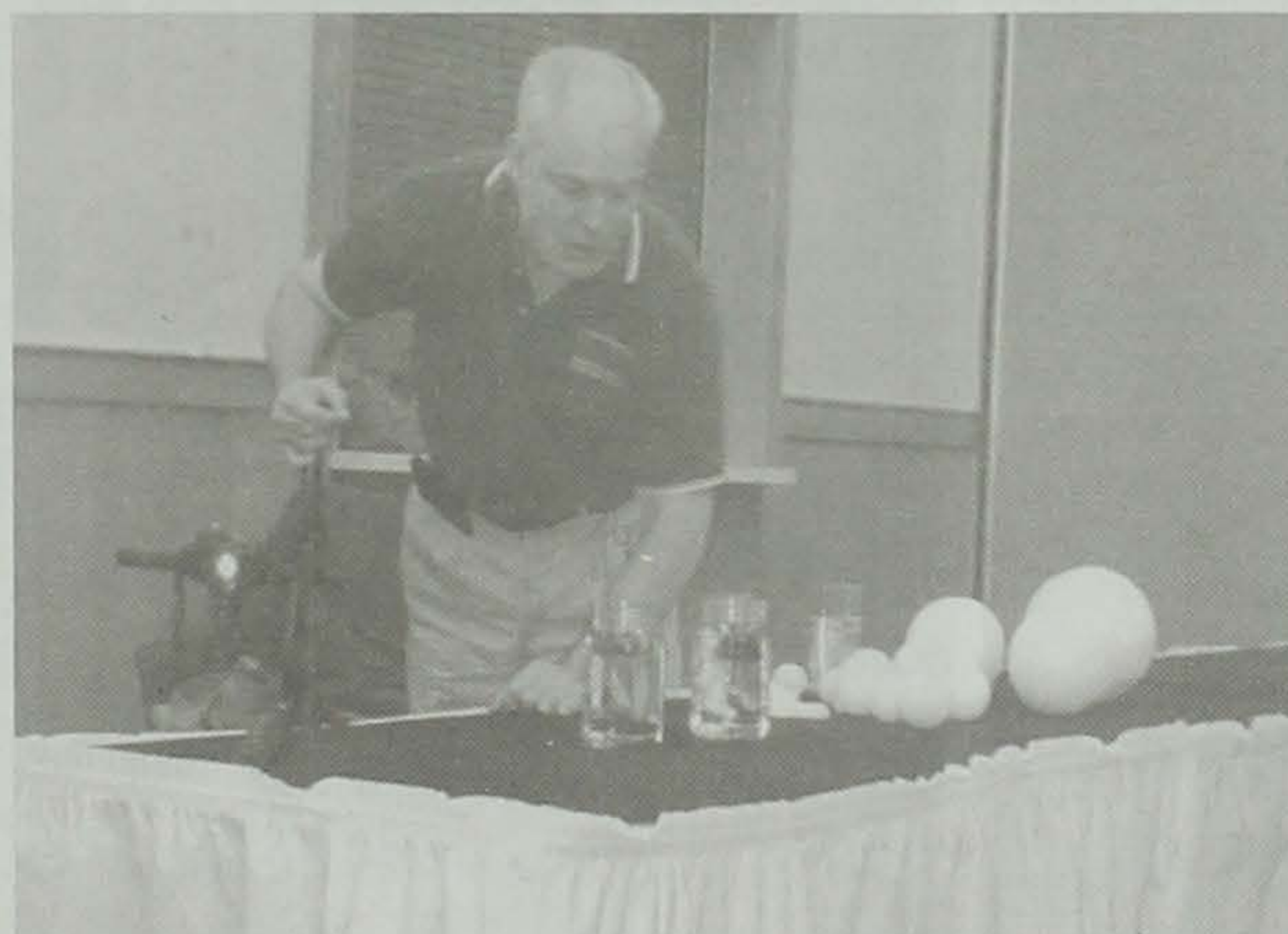


The Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District hosted new commissioner training in Atlantic at the Pizza Ranch on Monday, Feb. 11, 2013. Ten commissioners, in which seven were newly elected commissioners attended. Clare Lindahl, Executive Director with the Conservation Districts of Iowa, presented the information for newly elected commissioner. This training gives the new commissioners an overview of the soil and water conservation districts roles and responsibilities. They are also provided information about the need for local soil and water conservation districts. This was a great opportunity for new commissioners to learn about the district and partner agencies that they will work with.



Region 5 Spring Regional Meeting

Spring Regional Commissioner Meetings are a collaboration between Conservation Districts of Iowa, the hosting Soil and Water Conservation District, State Soil Conservation Committee and Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation and partners to bring commissioners, assistant commissioners, partners and current staff, relevant information on soil and water conservation in the state of Iowa. Likewise, they offer an opportunity for Conservation Districts of Iowa and its partners in conservation to learn about the needs of Iowa Commissioners and landowners to increase conservation. This year, the Region 5 Spring meeting was held in Atlantic at the Cass Community Building on Feb. 27, 2013. There were 59 people signed in for the meeting. Clare Lindahl, Executive Director, and Jim Frederick, CDI Board President, conducted the meeting. Clare Lindahl presented information on moving conservation forward in the face of change; The role of Conservation Districts of Iowa & Commissioners. Vince Sitzmann, Field Services Bureau Chief with Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation provided infor-



mation on the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. Dave Schmidt, local producer from Audubon, spoke about cover crops in his operation on behalf of CDI and Practical Farmers of Iowa. He also had a very good power point that attendees were able to see photos of the cover crop on his land. Clare Lindahl stated that there were 46 districts that participated in the state cover crop incentive program this past year with IDALS-DSC. Approximately 13,068.48 acres were planted. Jamie Carpenter, ASTC with the NRCS in Atlantic, provided a power point on the continuance of the current Farm Bill. He con-

tinued to say that sequestration is in effect for the government until a budget is signed. The Cass Soil and Water Conservation district provided lunch for the meeting and the program continued with partner reports from the following agencies; CDI, IDALS-DSC, NRCS and DNR. To end the meeting, the Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District had Rick Bednarek, NRCS State Soil Scientist, conduct a hands on demonstration called a slake test on Soil Quality. Thanks to all who attended the 2013 Region 5 Spring Regional.

Farm Practices Maintenance

Submitted by Steve Fluckey, State Technician

An important part of any farm operation is proper maintenance of conservation systems. With fields bare, this is the perfect time to review your farm for needed maintenance and repairs, which will help extend the lifespan of terraces, waterways, and ponds. Sediment build-up in terraces can prevent drainage and limit water storage. Soil and crop residue can also accumulate around the intakes preventing water drainage. It is important to clean out any sediment and trash. While cleaning the areas, look for any damages that may have occurred and repair them. Broken terraces can funnel runoff and cause large gullies. Cut and spray any trees that might be on the terrace using approved herbicides. This is also a great chance to reseed any spots where seeding didn't take. Also check your waterways for a build-up of sediment. If reshaping is needed, spring would be the best chance for seed establishment.

Just a reminder, structures/ponds should also be checked, especially around the inlet or intake. Remove any trash or tree limbs that have accumulated. As with terraces or waterways, spot seeding may be needed until vegetation is well established. Trees and shrubs should also be cut and sprayed along the dam. Though it is okay to flash graze your structure, livestock can be harmful and should not be on it all the time. Check all fences and gates to ensure that cattle are mostly excluded.

Taking time to attend this maintenance now could prevent costly problems to conservation systems in the future. If you have questions or need assistance developing a successful maintenance plan, don't hesitate to call your local Natural Resources Conservation Office.



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Iowa Water Quality Initiative, 2014 Legislative Report

Statewide Practices Cost-Share

In August of 2013, \$2.8 million was made available through all 100 Soil and Water Conservation Districts to help implement conservation practices through the Water Quality Initiative (WQI). After an initial \$1.8 million was offered and subsequently obligated in less than a week, a supplement of \$1 million was added to the fund and this additional funding spoken for within another week.

The strong level of commitment showcased by Iowa farmers volunteering to try something new on their farms to help water quality is a testament to the level of engagement farmers are ready to take on these issues. Over 1,000 farmers committed an additional \$2.8 million in landowner match to help implement these practices. Each landowner or farmer could apply for up to 160 acres of cost-shared practice. Some of the applicants used the practice on more acres than they applied for cost-share.

Practice Info

The practices offered through the WQI Statewide initiative were selected because of their ability to be implemented in a short time frame and thereby providing a water quality benefit in 2013. The statewide approach gave farmers an opportunity to try these practices for the first time.

Offering a portion of WQI funding statewide allowed each county to participate. This funding, along with a targeted approach, engaged more farmers and landowners in the process.

Year-end totals of fall established practices through the WQI Statewide cost-share program was over 88,000 acres of cover crops and over 2,000 acres of N inhibitor.

Find out about more Iowa Leaders in Conservation at CleanWaterIowa.org

New Iowa Corn Suitability Ratings Now Available on Web Soil Survey

Provided by: John Hammerly, Soil Scientist

On Jan. 17, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) released a new version of the Iowa Corn Suitability Ratings (CSR2) onto the Web Soil Survey. Dr. Lee Burras, Professor of Agronomy at Iowa State University, generated the values from the NRCS National Soils Database. This will be the first revision of the CSRs since its beginning in 1971. CSR2 weighs several factors found in the following equation: $CSR2 = S - M - F - W - D + EJ$

In the equation, S refers to the taxonomic subgroup class of the soil series. M represents the family particle size class. F is the field conditions of a particular soil map unit. The W factor is the soils capacity to hold water. The D factor represents the soil depth and tolerable rates of soil erosion. Finally, EJ is a correction factor used in certain cases to capture variability in soils not accounted for by the other factors. CSR2 can be a maximum of 100, and minimum of 5. Updates of the CSR2 will occur annually as the National Soils Database is updated.

The Web Soil Survey can be accessed via the World Wide Web at <http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>

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A history lesson on Soil Conservation

Hugh Hammond Bennett, otherwise known as the "father of soil conservation" was a soil surveyor with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In 1928, Bennett co-wrote a publication, titled, "Soil Erosion: A National Menace" which helped establish scientific credibility about the repercussions of erosion and inspired others to take initiative on the erosion problems within the United States.

In 1937, Bennett was presenting to a congressional subcommittee in Washington D.C. and timed his presentation to coincide perfectly with the arrival of a severe dust storm. As Bennett flung open the window he shouted "Gentleman, get ready because here comes Oklahoma" so the story goes. Soon thereafter the Soil Conservation Service was established as a permanent agency within USDA, with Bennett as its director. This was the first constitutional act in the history of this or any other nation that sought to control and prevent soil erosion, flooding, and other threats to our natural resources. Not long after, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a letter to all the governors recommending that each state adopt their own laws. Iowa's Governor Wilson adopted the law and by 1940 Iowa's first Soil and Water District was formed by three townships in Marion County.

Today we have 100 SWCDs in 99 counties, that are represented by 500 Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners. Five nonpartisan Commissioners are elected from each district and are entrusted with many responsibilities including the prevention of excessive soil erosion and conservation of our soil resources. No small task considering Iowa has 36 million acres, 92,300 farms and 25 million acres of crop land. Iowa also ranks number one nationally in the production of corn, soybeans, pork and chicken.

In 1973, the Iowa legislature enacted the cost share program for to help promote conservation. Throughout the past 40 years, over 254 million dollars have been leveraged with funds from private landowners and farmers through the SWCDs to conserve and protect our soil resources. Hundreds of thousands of acres are now protected with no-till and strip till, terraces, waterways, grade stabilization structures, buffers, cover crops, and other practices that save millions of tons of soil from washing off our fields and into our waterways.

Who could have imagined that one man's passion for soil conservation, along with a little dust in the wind in the 1930's, could have spurred a conservation ethic that spans the world and touches each and every acre of our farms?

Annual Tree Sales

Tree sales are held each year in Cass County. Anyone interested in purchasing trees and shrubs from the SWCD need to order by March 1 of each year. Landowners can apply for assistance through IDALS-DSC for REAP funds to help with installing new windbreaks. Applications taken first come first served until funds are exhausted. For more information, stop in the SWCD office at 503 W. 7th Street, Atlantic.

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Tree Order Form

[illegible]

Remit Payment to: Cass SWCD
503 W. 7th Street
Atlantic, Iowa 50022

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*Orders must be placed by March 1, 2014
To ensure availability.*

*"The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
is an equal opportunity employer and provider."*



State Revolving Loan Program

Iowa Finance Authority offers the state revolving loan program to eligible applicants to implement practices for animal feeding operations, waste storage facilities, deep bedded buildings or other roofed manure control structures that provide 100% confinement. Terraces, grade control and sediment control basins, pasture and hay land planting or prescribed grazing, grassed waterways, filter strips, windbreaks are also eligible under this program. The purpose of the loan program is to improve and protect Iowa's water quality. The loan assistance is facilitated through the State Revolving Fund. For more information on this program, please stop by our office. This loan can be used in conjunction with other public funds (EQIP or Iowa Financial Incentive Program funds).

Terms of Loans

- * Loan amounts from \$5,000—\$500,000
- * Terms up to 10 years
- * Can fund up to 100 percent of eligible project costs
- * 3 percent fixed interest for life of the loan
- * Applications accepted anytime
- * Available through the lender of your choice
- * Can be used in conjunction with grants/cost share

Landowners can sign up for this loan at the Cass County Soil and Water Conservation District office located at 503 W. 7th Street, Ste 1, Atlantic, Iowa.

It's the perfect time for a walk in the woods...

Do you own a timber? Have you ever wondered what kind of trees are in your woodland, or how to attract more woodland wildlife, or even what things you could do to make your woodland better? If so – it is time to call your DNR District Forester. Fall and winter are excellent seasons to walk and assess the condition of woodlands. Your DNR District Forester's mission is to help you sustainably manage your woodland for the many objectives you may have for it. Common objectives for SW Iowa landowners include: ecosystem restoration, wildlife habitat improvements, hydrology improvements, recreation, and timber production.

The first step in the process is a woodland site visit.

Your DNR Forester will walk your woodland with you – helping you formulate goals to mold the Woodland Stewardship Plan around. The second step, a Woodland Stewardship Plan, outlines: 1. your woodland management objectives, 2. the current conditions of your woodland, and 3. a long-term plan for how to reach the objectives you have set for your woodland. State and Federal financial assistance cost-share is available to help woodland owners, like yourself, meet these management objectives. Common cost-share practices include: tree planting, timber stand improvement (thinning), site preparation for natural regeneration, prescribed fire, and invasive species management. Once you have a Woodland Stewardship

Plan your DNR Forester and Soil and Water Conservation District officials can assist you with choosing a cost-share practice that will work best for you. If you use cost-share or choose to do the prescribed management on your own – your DNR Forester can assist you with setting up the management projects, finding forestry contractors and many other tasks related to long-term woodland management. Your woodland management questions are just a phone call away. If you live in Monona, Crawford, Carroll, Audubon, Shelby, Harrison, Pottawattamie, Cass, Montgomery, Mills, Fremont, or Page Counties – give Lindsey Barney, DNR District Forester, a call at 712.482.6245 (or e-mail at Lindsey.barney@dnr.iowa.gov).

Annual Iowa Farmers Market Worship to be held Feb. 8

Training for market managers and vendors will be held at First Christian Church in Des Moines

DES MOINES - The 16th Annual Iowa Farmers Market Workshop will be held on Saturday, Feb. 8 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the First Christian Church, 2500 University Ave., in Des Moines. The workshop is

sponsored by the Iowa Farmers Market Association (IFMA) and will provide training and information for farmers market managers and vendors.

The workshop registration fee is \$30 and lunch is included. For more information visit www.iafarmersmarkets.org or contact Barb Ristau, IFMA Treasurer, at 641-456-4811.

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey will welcome attendees and Larry Johnson, who manages the Dane County Farmers Market in Madison, Wisconsin will be the keynote speaker. Johnson's morning presentation will focus on community support for new markets and mar-

ket rules. In the afternoon, Johnson will speak on keeping established markets vibrant and thriving. There will be break-out sessions discussing the topics Johnson is presenting.

Farmers markets continue to grow in popularity as Iowans seek fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables. An Iowa farmers market survey completed for the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship showed that market sales have increased an average of 18 percent per year from 2004 to 2009. It also showed that Iowa markets had \$38.4 million in direct sales in 2009 and a \$71 million impact on Iowa's economy.

To help support the more than 230 farmers markets in Iowa, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship has an Iowa Farmers Market App for both iPhones and Android smartphones. The app allows users to find the farmers market closest to them by using GPS location services or to search for specific farmers markets by city or zip code. Once they have located a market, the user can view the hours of the market, browse a list of vendors and see a phone number and email address of the market manager.

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Amid drought, California agency won't allot water

By JULIET WILLIAMS
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Amid California's most crippling drought of modern times, state officials on Friday announced they will not allocate water to agencies that serve 25 million people and nearly 1 million acres of farmland.

The announcement marks the first time in the 54-year history of the State Water Project that such an action has been taken. State Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin said the action was taken to conserve the little water that remains behind the dams in the state's vast system of reservoirs.

"Simply put, there's not enough water in the system right now for customers to expect any water this season from the project," Cowin said in a statement.

Most of the 29 agencies serving the towns and farms that draw from the State Water Project have other, local sources of water, but those also have been hard-hit by the drought.

The total cut-off of state water deliveries this spring and summer could have a national impact because it will affect farms in one of the nation's richest agricultural belts.

"These actions will protect us all in the long run,"

Cowin said during a news conference that included numerous state and federal officials, including those from wildlife and agricultural agencies.

Friday's action came after Gov. Jerry Brown made an official drought declaration, clearing the way for state and federal agencies to coordinate efforts to preserve water and send it where it is needed most. The governor urged Californians to reduce their water use by 20 percent.

It also reflects the severity of the dry conditions in the nation's most populous state. Officials say 2013 was the state's driest calendar year since records started being kept, and this year is heading in the same direction.

A snow survey on Thursday in the Sierra Nevada, one of the state's key water sources, found the water content in the meager snowpack is just 12 percent of normal. Reservoirs are lower than they were at the same time in 1977, which is one of the two previous driest water years on record.

State officials say 17 rural communities are in danger of a severe water shortage within four months. Wells are running dry or reservoirs are nearly empty in some communities. Others have long-running problems that predate the drought.

The timing for Friday's historic announcement was important: State water officials typically announce they are raising the water allotment on Feb. 1, but this year's winter has been so dry they wanted to ensure they could

keep the remaining water behind the dams. The announcement also will give farmers more time to determine what crops they will plant this year and in what quantities.

Farmers and ranchers throughout the state already have felt the drought's impact, tearing out orchards, fallowing fields and trucking in alfalfa to feed cattle on withered range land.

At the same time, many cities have ordered severe cut-backs in water use.

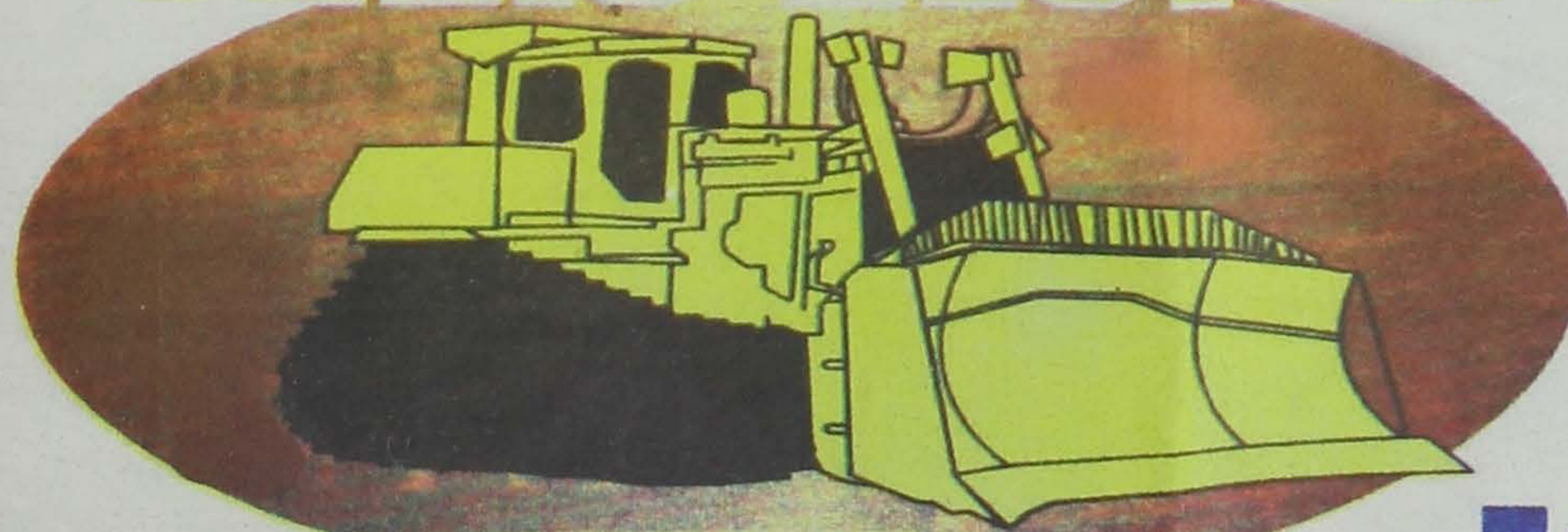
With many of the state's rivers reduced to a trickle, fish populations also are being affected. Eggs in salmon-spawning beds of the American River near Sacramento were sacrificed after upstream releases from Folsom Dam were severely cut back.

The drought is highlighting the traditional tensions between the groups that claim the state's limited water for their own priorities — farmers, city residents and conservationists.

Chuck Bonham, director of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, urged everyone to come together during the water crisis.

"This is not about picking between delta smelt and long-fin smelt and chinook salmon, and it's not about picking between fish and farms or people and the environment," he said. "It is about really hard decisions on a real-time basis where we may have to accept some impact now to avoid much greater impact later."

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Oil companies donate land for prairie chicken plan

HOUSTON (AP) — Five oil and gas companies have pledged to give 1.5 million acres of land in five states for conservation of lesser prairie chicken habitat as part of an effort to prevent the bird from being federally protected as a threatened species.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department said in a statement Friday this represents the first enrollment in the so-called "range-wide plan" developed by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and state wildlife agencies in Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and

Texas.

The lesser prairie chicken lives in the plains of these five states. Its numbers have dwindled in recent years from fewer than 45,000 in December 2012 when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service first proposed enlisting the bird under the Endangered Species Act to fewer than 18,000 in the most recent survey. Drought and loss of habitat are blamed for the decline. The federal agency is to rule on the bird's status on March 30.

Oil and gas drilling have boomed and ranching is prolific in the bird's habitat.

Those industries fear a listing could make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to operate.

Continental Resources, Devon Energy, Apache Corp., Occidental Oil and Gas Corporation and Samson Resources are the first companies to enroll acreage in the plan.

"We believe this plan offers the best, most comprehensive approach available to conserve the lesser prairie chicken and its habitat, while providing some assurance for participating companies so we can continue to do business," said Ben Shepperd,

president of the Permian Basin Petroleum Association, which represents the oil and gas industry in West Texas and parts of New Mexico.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service are also extending landowners a conservation deal. Under that agreement, landowners who preserve habitat would not be liable for dead birds found in the conservation areas, even in the event the chicken receives federal protection.

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