

Report on the
National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) 2016 Legislative Fly - In
March 14 & 15, Washington D.C.

March 17, 2016

Dear CDI Board,

Thank you for allowing me to represent you in Washington D.C. and for affording me another inspiring trip to our nation's Capitol!

I arrived in Washington D.C. on Monday, March 14th, just in time to drop my bags at the Capitol Skyline Hotel, get changed and meet Kurt and Alex in the lobby to go over the legislative folders I had prepared for our visits before we headed to the Agri-Pulse Panel and Reception.

The panel was titled, *Farm to Fork Politics: How sustainability is reframing food* and the panelists included Chris Policinski, President and CEO of Land O' Lakes, Inc.; Dave White, Co-Founder and Partner of the 9B Group; Rod Snyder, President of Field to Market and Gregg Halverson, President of Black Gold Farms. The panel was moderated by Sara Wyant, President and Founder of Agri-Pulse Communications. The discussion stemmed from the fairly recent movement in which people have become more interested in how their food is produced. This customer interest is driving food suppliers to request "sustainably" grown products so they can meet this customer demand. Many think Walmart and others will be the ones to spark the scale up of conservation by requesting "sustainably" produced items for their customers. Much discussion occurred on the need for agriculture to do a better job at telling the story of the good things going on - the ability of America's producers to provide healthy, diverse and inexpensive food and the conservation practices and technologies being adopted. For me, the discussion became most interesting when it came to defining "sustainability". Most on the panel did not want to define "sustainability" using one matrix but rather share information and resources with producers that allow them to continuously improve. Dave White shared concerns with the prolificacy of multiple definitions of "sustainability" and suggested bringing cohesion and commonalities to a definition if we can't agree upon one standard. I have concerns that we may have already reached the farmers willing to continuously improve and adopt new conservation on their operations and that in order to reach that next group of farmers who are not adopting we may need to provide a more structured, set path to being "sustainable".

At the evening reception that followed the panel, we saw some fellow Iowans with the Iowa Soybean Association among others. We visited with folks from many other states. I met two women from American Agri-Women. I shared with them that that I wanted to put together a list of women speakers in agriculture and conservation. They said they had a list of speakers like this and I got their cards so I could obtain the list and add it to the information I compile. I also met Ben Nuelle, Farm News Reporter with Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network. He received the Done Award which recognizes and encourages excellence in reporting agriculture.

We finished the day with dinner at Chuck Grassley's favorite restaurant, the Monocle, where they serve an Iowa Pork Chop!

Tim Palmer,
Alex Schmidt &
Kurt Simon on
the way to a
legislative visit.



Iowan Ben
Nuelle won the
Done Award
for excellence
in agriculture
journalism.

We started off National Agriculture Day, Tuesday, March 15th, with an NACD Breakfast and Meeting. NACD gave us well designed materials, strategic advice about messaging to use during our legislative visits and as always, inspiration! NACD does much for us and I am always reminded of that at these events.

Alex went to a legislative coffee that was occurring simultaneously and got face time with Representative Young, Representative Loeb sack, Senator Grassley and staffers. We also got to see Senator Ernst and Congressman King.

We sat down and met with the legislative staff of Senator Grassley and Ernst and Congressman Loeb sack, Young and King. The staff plays an integral role and relationships with them are important. You never know, the staffer you meet with this year may be on the ballot, the chair of the Agriculture Committee or Chief of NRCS in years to come! All the staff seemed most interested in having us assist them in getting the legislators to conservation activities in Iowa.

We started off the legislative visits with a reminder about the importance of agriculture to Iowa and the world, the impact agriculture has on our natural resources and the science based solutions and effective partnership we have to address these resource concerns. We had pictures of the commissioners from each Congresspersons home county and Representative Young knew one of his commissioners!



Visiting with Senator Ernst at a reception

Our main points included:

- The importance of support for Conservation Operations (CO) which includes Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). CTA funds are what Iowa uses to employ NRCS field staff and support District and State employees with computers, vehicles, etc. These funds also support partnership agreements that allows for the hiring of District employees an example being our Farm Bill agreement. These funds are not part of the Farm Bill rather are allocated annually so legislators need to be alerted annually of our needs for these monies.
- The importance of conservation programs within the Farm Bill such as CRP, EQIP and others. We don't want the Farm Bill opened up and cut. It took a long time to get a Farm Bill and it is a great bill that took its fair share of cuts during its development. The Farm Bill is vital to helping Iowa address resource concerns and reach nutrient reduction goals. Particularly with the current commodity prices, farmers will need support now more than ever to implement conservation practices. We also started the conversation about the next Farm Bill which made everyone twitch a little! Ha Ha! We have to start advocating for the protection of conservation programs in the next Farm Bill now.
- We requested support for the 319 program and PL-566 Watershed Structures. We shared the successes of Iowa's NRCS, 319, Water Quality Initiative and state cost share programs.



Our Iowa team
with Representative Young

After our last visit we attended the NACD Legislative Reception. I visited with our NRCS Regional Conservationist, Kevin Wickey, NRCS Assistant Chief Kirk Hanlin, NACD staff and leadership among others.

Handwritten thank you notes to our legislators, their staff and others will go out promptly.

If you were at the Spring Regional Commissioner Meetings you saw Bob Lynch, CDI President, show a slide with a quote he particularly liked and I thought of it often during this trip, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together". Our ability to accomplish great things increases as we work together. Look at what a board of commissioners can accomplish over one alone, what the partnership in a field office does every day, what CDI and 500 commissioners can create and implement, what NACD and 3,000 commissioners can do!

We are really on the right track with our plans to expand our communications efforts. It was brought up by panelists, legislators and many other during our visit. It was brought up so much it became an inside joke between Alex and I. He and I would start strategizing about ideas to better our communication and then the next meeting we were in the same ideas we were just talking about would come up! It was almost spooky! I look forward to working with the CDI legislative committee, Iowa's commissioners, our partners and our new Congressional staffer friends to get our senators and representatives out to see the great work we are helping farmers accomplish!

With thanks,

Clare Lindahl, Executive Director, Conservation Districts of Iowa

clare.lindahl@cdiowa.org | 515.289.8300



Alex asks, "If only it were all permeable!". Alex's ability to speak to the urban - agriculture dynamic was crucial during our legislative visits!



What do you all think?
Senator Clare Lindahl?



NRCS Iowa State Conservationist Kurt Simon speaks with Assistant Chief of NRCS Kirk Hanlin. Kurt has great knowledge and passion for conservation.