

---CONSERVATION DISTRICTS OF IOWA (CDI)---

CONNECTIONS

The Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) informs, educates, and leads Iowans through our local soil and water conservation districts to promote conservation of natural resources.



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From: CDI President Dennis Carney

A belated Happy New Year to everyone.

John Whitaker, Alex Schmidt, Kurt Simon and I attended a NACD Midwest regional meeting in St Louis early in January. State association officers and executives from eight states attended and had a chance to learn about and discuss current projects and issues. We were able to visit at length with representatives from Illinois and Missouri about our S.T.A.R. program.

Please make plans to attend CDI's Legislative Day on February 26th. It is your opportunity to tell legislators about what you do and why it is so important. We need to show our support for REAP, continued conservation funding, and weigh in on the IWLL debate.

Your district office will be very busy with the CRP general signup over the next six weeks. Across Iowa there are 325,000 CRP acres and 17,000 contracts that will expire in 2020. As commissioners we need to support our office staffs and do all we can to encourage participation in the CRP program.

Just released: "Introducing the Conservation Partnership Memorandum of Agreement Process for 2020"

[Watch this recently released video](#) to learn how the new M.O.A. formalizes a successful partnership to advance the protection and enhancement of Iowa lands.

Save the Date! Partnership Day February 26, 2020

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

I attended the North Central NACD Region meeting in St Louis and one of the board members mentioned something that I have wondered about in the past: why don't we just call 'conservation tillage' tillage? When producers go out to perform this action in the fall or spring, they do not say they are doing conservation tillage, they say they are chisel plowing, or disking, or ripping. I particularly like the last one – they are *ripping* their soil!

Purdue University has a long running study of soil compaction where they compare the actual pressure it takes to penetrate the soil in an area that a 20-ton grain cart passes over. They look at compaction in an area a) deep tilled with subsoil equipment, b) no deep tillage but planted to cover crops, or c) nothing is done (control site); they then use a penetrometer to determine which method has more compaction the following spring. What they found was that cover crops did a better job of eliminating compaction than deep-till subsoil equipment. Many producers will tell us that this just doesn't sound reasonable; but quite simply, where there are cover crops there is soil structure and where there is soil structure, small soil particles do not move into the gaps and pores in the root canals.

There are quite a few lessons in this study about tillage and cover crops for us, and maybe about no-till as well. Is deep tillage just a waste of time and energy? Maybe? Will no-till without cover crops lead to compaction problems? Is this why we see a yield drag for the first few years with no-till? Why have I not prioritize getting the cover crops planted in the fall?

But the main question I have been thinking about since then is this: is it time to drop the term 'conservation tillage'? Are we just helping ourselves feel better about tillage? My Dad bought a deep tillage subsoil machine in the early 1990s even though most of our operation was no-till. The machine covered 15 feet, so it worked out well to operate it on strips that covered half of the planter width (12 30"-rows is 30 feet). When we harvested using 6-row equipment we could directly compare yields between the subsoiled and not-subsoiled part of the field. The yield results were that the operation did not pay for the fuel to operate the tractor let alone pay for the equipment or time spent. It was conservation tillage, but it was not worth the cost. I learned a lot from my dad. When not to pick a fight was not one of those lessons. I believe it is time to drop the term 'conservation tillage'.

Apply today for the '2020 Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance Iowa Watershed Award'!

It's the beginning of a new year, which means it's time for IAWA and our partners to select the 2020 Iowa Watershed Coordinator of the Year and Circle of Excellence awards. The Iowa Watershed Awards aims to recognize the good work done by water quality project coordinators in our state. The awards also provide funding for both the watershed project and the professional development of the project coordinator. The Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance (IAWA), in collaboration with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and Conservation Districts of Iowa, created the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance Iowa Watershed Awards to honor watershed coordinators for the important work they do every day to improve Iowa's water quality. Sponsored by IAWA, the award will recognize up to five honorees, with each receiving funding for their local watershed program and for their own professional development. [Click here](#) to see the winners from 2019 and learn more about their projects.

Applications are being accepted until January 21, 2020. Please follow this link to apply: [Iowa Watershed Awards Application](#).

NACD President Palmer applauds Federal Support of Conservation Programs in Funding Bills

By Sara Kangas
River Cities' Reader

Congress approved two funding packages for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations on Thursday, December 19, which will improve conservation delivery across the United States. "NACD applauds Congress for their work to strengthen funding for conservation programs," NACD President Tim Palmer said. "These bills allocate additional funding needed across the country to provide both the staff and financial assistance essential to the nation's nearly 3,000 conservation districts and the landowners and operators they support." The two spending bills improve funding levels for Conservation Operations at \$829 million — a \$10 million increase from last year — which includes funding for conservation technical-assistance programs. "Not only do these increases in programmatic funding enable more capacity across America's vast landscapes, but they also help to improve our nation's watershed infrastructure," Palmer said. "We look forward to seeing the results of these implemented programs across the nation." [Read the complete article here.](#)



CDI awarded renewal of Cover Crop Champion grant

CDI Executive Director John Whitaker announced that CDI received renewal of the "Cover Crop Champion" grant through the National Wildlife Federation. "Our application this year is different from previous years in that we will work directly with watershed coordinators to set up 12 field days promoting cover crops to 'middle adopters'", Whitaker said. "Our intent is to increase the number of producers willing to try cover crops, and part of our method will be direct mailings to targeted producers in the cooperating watersheds. In an era when our email inboxes are so cluttered with spam that we tend to delete things *en mass*, a personally addressed letter in the mail can gain attention."

Growing Organic Expertise in Iowa

Sing up now for February Workshop Series!



The Iowa Organic Association (IOA) and regional partners have developed a program to provide the information, tools and resources needed for agriculture service providers and consultants to support farmers interested in organic transition, diversification and expansion. This full-day workshop will provide information from organic experts and presented resources about the National Organic Program, organic certification and transition, organic standards and production practices and insight into current organic market trends and demands.

We are seeking a diverse audience that includes NRCS, Extension, IDALS, FSA, SWCD, RC&D, County Conservation, crop insurance agents, farm lenders, farming organizations, farmers, agriculture educators and students, and others interested in learning more about organic opportunities. Last October we reached 65 participants at four different workshops in Atlantic, Calmar, Cedar Rapids and Webster City.

As the organic market continues to grow, Iowa producers, landowners and businesses are looking for opportunities to participate in this movement. Access to technical expertise and resources to support those interested in organic transition or expansion is necessary to help Iowa producers meet the growing consumer demand for organic products and practices.

To register, visit <https://www.iowaorganic.org/calendar> or call 515-608-8622. There is a \$20 fee to participate, and lunch will be included. The dates for the February workshop are:

- Tuesday, Feb 4 -- Mason City Public Library, Mason City
- Thursday, Feb 6 -- Oakwood Road Community Center, Ames
- Tuesday, Feb 11 -- Fairfield Public Library, Fairfield
- Tuesday, Feb 18 -- Council Bluffs Public Library, Council Bluff

Women, Land & Legacy of Southwest Iowa Annual Conference

The Women, Land & Legacy of Southwest Iowa planning committee has set the date for its annual conference, "Women Gaining Ground". It will be held at Glenwood High School on Saturday, March 7, 2020. Women, Land & Legacy (WLL) is an education and outreach program designed to empower women. Programming is developed through a leadership team made up of USDA representatives and local farm women. The committee strives to bring relevant information, speakers and resources to the area to help women bring positive change to their communities. WLL of Southwest Iowa serves Fremont, Mills, Montgomery, Page and Pottawattamie counties. Three events are hosted each year, in addition to the Women Gaining Ground conference. To be added to the mailing list, or for more information, please contact Fremont County Extension at 712-374-2351, or Mills County Soil and Water Conservation District at 712-624-8606, ext. 3. Information is also available at the Women, Land & Legacy [Facebook page](#).