

---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

Greetings all! Less than a month remains until our **first-ever virtual CDI annual business meeting**. The Board of Directors, staff, and I will certainly miss the opportunity to visit with you in-person this year. Our concern for the safety of all necessitates that we try something new.

Invitations to participate in the August 10 meeting via Zoom have been sent. Commissioners will need to register for the annual business meeting prior to August 10; register early!

What: Conservation Districts of Iowa Annual Business Meeting.

When: Aug 10, 2020 09:00 AM Central Time

[Click to register for CDI 2020 Iowa Annual Business Meeting](#)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

We plan to make our Zoom meeting interesting, informative, and about three hours in length. We will review financials, report on resolutions, meet CDI's 17 staff members, learn about Iowa S.T.A.R. and several other programs, elect officers for the upcoming year, and receive reports from our partner agencies. This Zoom meeting is a great opportunity for those of you who have not been able, for understandable reasons, to participate in recent business meetings. By participating, you will have a say in how Iowa districts can influence soil health and water quality for the year ahead.

Please make every effort to participate this year; we want to tell the story of how CDI is working for you and supporting natural resource stewardship in Iowa. **See you on August 10, 2020!**

Reminder: Make your voice count!

**Please send in your resolutions ballot by July 31st
to the CDI office.**

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

Every once in a while, something needs to be fixed. In this case, something needed to be corrected. Farmers and conservation contractors understand this since equipment breaks down and needs to be fixed, the sooner the better. In the past, non-partisan nominations were required to be turned in to the local County Auditor or Commissioner of Elections, sixty-nine days prior to the general election. The idea behind this was that since these offices do not appear on the primary election ballot, there is not a need for the advance filing. Recently, that changed, and all nominations were required to be filed before the primary election. This caused a lot of confusion but hopefully all Soil and Water Conservation Commissioners who are seeking re-election filed their nomination papers on time. This did create a conflict within the Iowa Code so the Legislature corrected this during the last session. As I said, it needed to be corrected and that was taken care of. Bottom line is that **if you did not file your papers on time or if you know of someone who wanted to file but missed that March deadline, the new deadline is August 26th.**

The REAP program has been very successful in helping SWCDs apply more conservation on the ground whether it was through tree planting or soil conservation structure work. Last year, the CDI Board of Directors offered a resolution to the Commissioners for the renewal of REAP which was set to expire in 2021. This resolution overwhelmingly passed during the pre-meeting voting at the local level. We were not successful in having REAP permanently extended but we were able to get a two-year extension which means that **we have another shot at making this permanent.**

We have received word that the **Private Lands Program** which we manage through a contract with the Iowa DNR, has received additional funding through the NRCS. This additional funding will not expand the program but will extend the years in which we can offer it. This program has been very successful in offering staff help to NRCS to help plan and inspect CRP as well as help the Iowa DNR do needed work on acres enrolled in the habitat access program. We currently have nine staff working through this grant, five who work as Private Lands Wildlife Specialists and four Wetland Easement Team Specialists.

Bringing our brand up to date for changing times

CDI introduces new logo



An updated logo was approved by the CDI Board of Directors in June and is officially our “new look”. Des Moines graphic designer Hillary Fieldsend designed the new logo. “My goal while designing the updated logo was to create a simple, clean icon that clearly shows the Iowa landscape,” Fieldsend says. “The logo represents the mission of CDI – *inform, educate and lead Iowans through our local soil and water conservation districts to promote conservation of natural resources.* The colors chosen are modern and bright, making this simple design stand out.” CDI President Dennis Carney says Fieldsend’s design perfectly captures the spirit of CDI: “I greatly appreciate how the design suggests Iowa’s beautiful rolling landscape and the promise of a bright horizon ahead.” All CDI collateral material is currently making the transition to the new branding.

Q&A with Carlee Sabus, new Program Director for CDI



Program Manager Carlee Sabus

Carlee Sabus, water quality specialist for CDI since 2018, was recently promoted to Program Manager by the CDI Board of Directors. In the following Q&A, Carlee gives us a look ahead for CDI programs.

You are in your third year with CDI and have been deeply involved in every aspect of its mission. What are your goals as our new “Program Manager”?

My goals for CDI are to continue increasing the success of our programs and events. In the last two years that I have been here we have increased our attendance every year at the Annual Conference, as well as had record number of teams sign up to participate at our Envirothon event this year.

What has given you the most satisfaction in your role at CDI?

I think the most satisfying thing has been seeing the growth and success in our programs, as well as adding new ones like our Planning Coordinators and STAR.

Could you review for us the principal programs you’ll be responsible for managing?

My main focus will be on the S.T.A.R. program, I will also be in charge of handling Envirothon and the Annual Conference.

S.T.A.R. – “Saving Tomorrow’s Agricultural Resources” – will be new in Iowa. What is the timeline for its introduction? (See article, page 4)

Our goal for STAR is to begin the pilot program and get interested farmers signed up before harvest this year.

Currently, this is a difficult time for organizations trying to make longer-term plans; it’s “week by week”. How do you think this current crisis may affect CDI programs moving ahead?

Personally, I think the only affect CDI will deal with is adapting to this new “normal”; we are working on finding ways to continue our efforts and programs digitally. While it is a difficult time, we have fantastic staff at CDI and have high hopes we can continue to the success and growth in our programs.

Finally, given this is a challenging time, what are you most looking forward to in the year ahead?

I’m really looking forward to seeing our pilot program for S.T.A.R. implemented, it is such a great program for conservation in agriculture and I think it will be a wonderful resource for farmers who are new to the conservation game, and farmers that already do conservation but want to do more. It is so important to CDI to get conservation on the ground to protect our resources as well as support Iowa’s agricultural landscape, we have a great team working on this program and we can’t wait to get it rolling out. If you are interested in this program, or want to learn more about it, please feel free to contact me at carlee@cdiowa.org.

CDI-sponsored pilot program works to promote conservation

S.T.A.R. = Saving Tomorrow's Agricultural Resources

S.T.A.R. is an exciting new program developed by soil and water conservation professionals that offers farm operators and landowners a simple, free, and confidential tool to evaluate their conservation land management practices. The goal of S.T.A.R. – “Saving Tomorrow’s Agricultural Resources” – is to encourage the continued adoption of conservation practices and recognize farmers for their commitment to sustainability. From improved nutrient management, to cover crops, to edge-of-field water treatment and even crop rotation or inclusion of livestock, a suite of practices can result in a rating of between one and five stars!



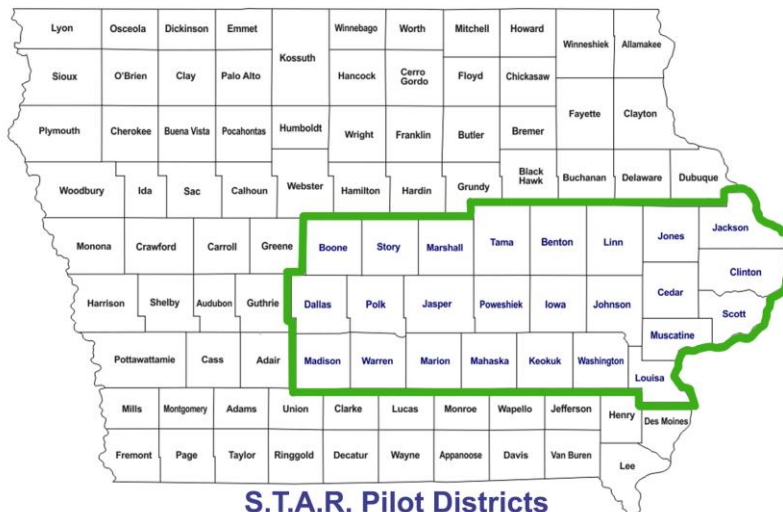
According to CDI Program Manager Carlee Sabus, the principal goals of the S.T.A.R. program are twofold: natural resource improvement and market ‘pull’ for sustainably produced farm products. The program – still in its start-up phase – offers participants not just healthier land, but benefits they can take to market. “We know conservation practices offer an economic benefit with an increase in farm income,” says Sabus. “There is also an awareness that the market demand for crops grown sustainably is increasing. And for landowners leasing their land, they can secure tenants who’ll manage the land in an environmentally responsible way.”

Sabus explains the process involves farmers filling out a form detailing farming practices, which is used to evaluate their operation and assign a five-star rating they display in their field. The more stars, the more conservation practices employed. “Even a one-star rating is excellent,” says Sabus. “It means this farmer is engaged in soil health and water quality practices that benefit the land. The more practices used, the more stars they can display. The goal is to increase a sustainability ethic across Iowa, and offer a demonstrable way to increase land value by implementing these practices.” The program was developed by the Champaign County Illinois Soil and Water Conservation District.

“CDI will give producers \$100 for each field that’s signed up, to a maximum of \$1,000,” says Sabus. “Of course, we would take more than 10 fields in their respective districts and a producer may sign up more than one field.”

CDI formed both a Steering Committee and a Science Committee to oversee the program. Most members of the Steering Committee are elected Soil and Water Conservation Commissioners; the Science Committee is comprised of experts in nutrient management and water quality and they will develop an evaluation system to determine which practices will be most beneficial and best support the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

Sabus says CDI is currently preparing for the S.T.A.R. rollout this fall, working to sign up interested landowners and producers.



S.T.A.R. Pilot Districts