

---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.



November 2020
Volume 2, Number 2

CDI EXECUTIVE BOARD:

President: Dennis A. Carney
Vice-President: April Burch
Secretary: Jeri Thornsberry
Treasurer: Angela Rosol
Past President: Alex Schmidt

CDI OFFICE STAFF:

Executive Director: John Whitaker
Program Manager: Carlee Sabus
Office Manager: Brenda Shannon
Communications Coordinator: Joe Hayes

Office Phone: 515-289-8300
Office Address:
315 East 5th Street, Suite #134
Des Moines, IA. 50309
Website: <https://cdiowa.org>

From: CDI President Dennis Carney

2020 certainly continues to be a memorable year. I hope this issue of *Connections* finds you healthy, safe, and finished with harvest and your needed fall work. Your **CDI Board of Directors finished judging our delayed 2020 poster contest** this past week. (See page 4.) In addition, we are in discussions about **how to inform our legislators of CDI's priorities** when we are unable to host our traditional day at the Capitol.

It is my hope that the **five-year planning process** in your district is progressing and that input garnered through the process will help move your district forward. Also, I would ask one last time, if your district hasn't already done so, to **please consider a gift to the [CDI Scholarship Fund](#)**. We will be sending out information on our 2021 scholarship program in the near future and we need to know what funds are available.

Updated Commissioner Handbook Available Soon

A committee of your CDI Board of Directors is finalizing a complete revision of the ***Soil and Water Conservation Commissioner Handbook***. This document will be available to the districts in December. It can be used as an orientation guide for newly elected commissioners and a refresher for current commissioners. The committee has reorganized information, removed some redundancies, updated links to other sources, and made the document easier to use. We will also post the handbook on the CDI website when completed. **Have a safe and happy Thanksgiving!**

S.T.A.R. program now shares front page access on the CDI website



This month, CDI Program Manager Carlee Sabus introduced **an easy way for producers and district commissioners to learn about – and join! – the new S.T.A.R. program**. “We created the [STAR webpage](#) to make sure that information about the program can be easily accessed for interested farmers. We are also very excited to have an [online STAR Field Form](#) that farmers can easily fill out right on our website! It was designed to make the STAR program easy and accessible for our farmers. **It is a free tool to help push conservation forward in Iowa** – so please check out our new webpage and sign up for STAR today!” S.T.A.R. is currently entering a pilot stage in southeast Iowa, with the goal of a statewide roll-out in 2021.

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

“Check out our website!” We see or hear that often when we are looking for a particular product and most of the time it is a good way to find out all the good things about a product. It may not be the best way to find out if there are any issues with the product. We are proud of our website at CDI, even though we sometimes need to make sure we have all the information up to date. A new feature on the website is the [section devoted to S.T.A.R.](#)

In the S.T.A.R. section, you will find useful information about the program as well as an online, fillable field form. **The online field form is easy and simple to use and we would encourage you to enter a field even if you are not within the pilot area.** The field form gives you an opportunity to really think about the practices you use. If you do not perform any tillage practices in the fall, then you fall no-till and that is good for conservation. If in the same field, you do not perform any tillage in the spring, that is also good for conservation and is more points for that field. **All the practices on the field form affect good conservation and water quality improvement.** Most of the practices are positive but we do have the ones which are not good and those are negative points. In the future, we plan to enhance the online form so that it is interactive. This will give producers the opportunity to learn more about conservation by explaining the benefits of each practice.

Also on the website you will find the [announcement for the 2021 scholarship](#) and will soon find the announcement for the 2021 poster contest. We are trying to go back to more normal operation for both contests and at least for the scholarship, we can. The poster contest will depend greatly on when students are able to be together again. We sincerely hope that by the beginning of the new year, students can be spending some time in their respective classrooms.

So as the saying goes now, [“Check out our website!”](#)

Jack Boyer honored as “Farmer of the Year”

Farming with the Mind of an Engineer



Jack Boyer, “Farmer of the Year”

Special from “Field to Market”

Jack Boyer, out-going Vice President of the Conservation Districts of Iowa, was recently honored as the **“2020 Farmer of the Year”** by Washington, D.C.-based “Field to Market” – recognized for his outstanding conservation efforts on his farm and leadership in advancing sustainable agriculture. An agricultural engineer by training, **Jack brings an analytical mind to his farm operation**, dedicating himself to conducting on-farm research and implementing innovative practices which have dramatically improved his soil health. The Farmer of the Year Award celebrates Jack’s innovation and commitment to implementing conservation across his operation and beyond, as he advocates for soil health practices and shares learnings from his research with other producers and non-operating landowners. “I’ve been involved in agriculture all

my life, and my second interest was in engineering,” explains Jack. “My engineering career with John Deere brought me to Iowa. Being raised as a farmer helped prepare me to be an engineer and in turn, I was able to use that engineering training and apply it to my farming practices.” [For an in-depth ‘must read’ profile of Jack Boyer, click here.](#)

Getting the word out during a challenging year

‘Cover Crop Champions’ work to share the benefits of conservation

In a year challenging us in so many ways, the important work done by CDI to help promote conservation practices in Iowa in 2020 plowed ahead (‘no-tilled’ ahead?), including participation in the [“Cover Crops Champion”](#) program. A busy late winter/early spring gave way to a slowdown of in-field and in-person activity in the program because of COVID. But CDI Executive Director John Whitaker emphasizes the progress made and the good things accomplished. **“When you look at the number of people who were potentially reached with information on cover crops, the program was quite successful,”** says Whitaker. “Yes, the watershed coordinators who were involved did have to change how they did outreach – but it worked.”

CDI coordinated with 12 Iowa watershed coordinators – “Cover Crop Champions” who receive small grants to pay the cost of their travel, time, and various expenses as they share their expertise and passion for cover crops with farmers in their region.

Communication emphasized reaching ‘middle adopters’ – farmers and landowners ‘willing to learn more but have yet to adopt’ cover crops – through emails, direct phone contacts, published articles and CDI-produced brochure mailings. Yet only three in-person field days occurred due to COVID restrictions, along with two virtual field days. “When the pandemic first hit, there was a general shut down of all events,” says Whitaker. “People were just not as willing to attend face-to-face meetings even though they would be outdoors.” Although the Cover Crops Champion program is on pause for 2021, **Whitaker says promoting the conservation strategy will continue.** “We learned that we may need to alter our approach. One watershed coordinator trained certified farm

managers on the benefits of cover crops for soil health and they can be a great influence since over 50% of Iowa farmland is rented.”



“Cover Crop Champion” Lee Tesdell

For one Cover Crop Champion, the goal of soil health and water quality means nursing the ground his family has owned since 1884. Lee Tesdell enters the Fall in his 9th year of managing cover crops on 60 acres of his Century Farm in Polk County. Tesdell was active in the Cover Crops Champion program for the last two years, and was a featured landowner in a [12-minute PBS News Hour Weekend video](#) that focused on the benefits and challenges of sustainable agriculture practices in Iowa. Tesdell partners with his tenant farmer to plant different mixes of seed each year as covers crops. “We’re pretty happy with it,” says Tesdell. **“I like that we have living roots everywhere.** The advantage there is that with those roots and that biomass, my topsoil is going to stay in place and not erode with the wind and rain.” Tesdell’s long-term goal is to encourage cooperation between local

governments and producers. “What I envision down the road in the Four-Mile Creek Watershed is **an alliance between the city of Des Moines, the city of Ankeny and farmers and the landowners** in the upper reaches to work much more seriously on cover crops and other conservation measures.”

Madison Conley named CDI Five-Year Planner for NW Iowa

As the newest team member at the Conservation Districts of Iowa, Madison Conley says **she has the science of sustainability down pat** – but learning to weave through all these strange government alphabet acronyms may take a little practice. Madison recently joined the “Five-Year Planners” team at CDI, responsible for helping lead districts in NW Iowa through the Iowa code-mandated updating of their 5-year “Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plan”.

“I’m a people person, and I really enjoy working with others,” says Madison. **“I’m excited to meet people around northwest parts of Iowa and hear their concerns,** help get those on paper and address them with the community. It’s going to be a collective effort to get these plans done and I’m really excited to work with people who want to complete that with me.” Madison, a native of South Elgin, IL, is a recent graduate from the University of Iowa, studying “Environmental Policy and Planning”, with a keen interest in sustainability and leadership. **“I’m so lucky to have this job because it aligns perfectly with my studies.** Sustainability is huge for me – but figuring out all how the government inter-relationships work is a bit of a challenge!” The educational background and passion for her work that Madison brings to her new role will well-serve the districts of NW Iowa.



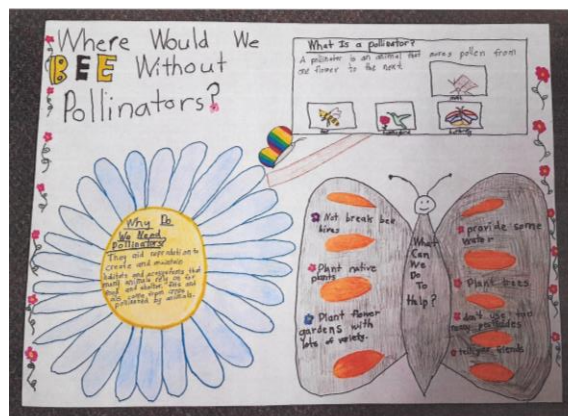
*Madison Conley
NW Iowa Planner*

BEE ready: CDI Poster Finalists Head for National Contest!

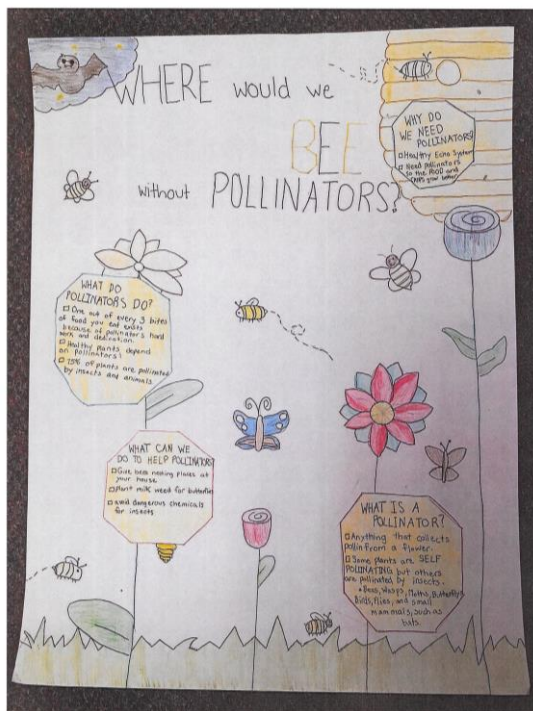
CDI Regional Directors recently selected the winning entries for the 2020 “CDI Poster Contest” – a difficult selection to make from among the many quality entries, including two tiebreaker votes. Youth statewide entered their ideas for promoting this year’s theme: **“Where would we BEE without Pollinators?”** The board chose one state winner from each of the five grade categories from regional winners. ([Click here to view full page views of each entry.](#)) The five state winning posters will be sent to the NACD-sponsored national poster contest for consideration for a national award. Thank you to all our Iowa youth poster artists! Well done.



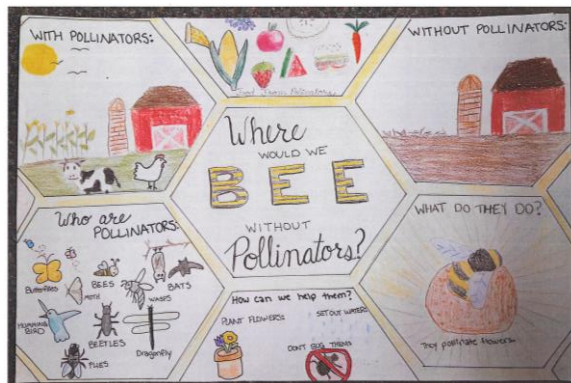
K-1 Calvin Tiedeman, Hull, IA



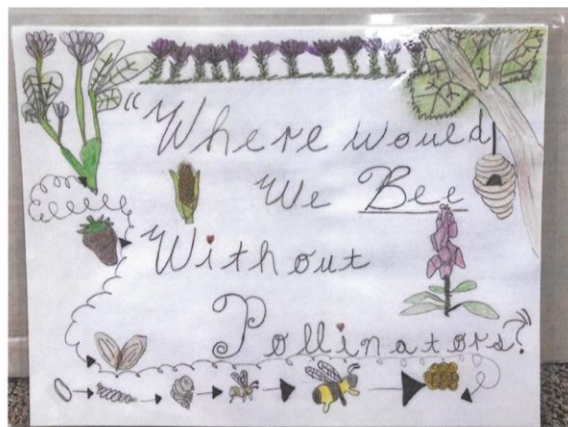
2-3 Rylee Hoogland, Maurice, IA



4-6 Annabelle Koele & Ava Postma, Sioux Center, IA



7-9 Alyce Brummel, Hull, IA



10-12 Emma Martin, Tripoli, IA