

---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: Outgoing CDI President Dennis Carney

Thank you to all commissioners, staff, partners, presenters, award winners, and guests for participating in the Conservation Districts of Iowa 75th annual business meeting and conference held on August 23-24. The Board of Directors, in collaboration with staff, made the decision early on to expand upon our 2020 conference. Thus, in 2021 CDI offered two days of learning opportunities in a virtual format; we are pleased with attendance and participation. The conference featured excellent presentations. In addition, our extensive conference program that was sent a week prior to the conference will be reviewed and then available on the CDI website.

It has been my great pleasure to serve as your association president for the past two years. I retired from farming in the fall of 2019 and was therefore able to put more time into the position than would have been possible previously. I am pleased with the accomplishments achieved by the board, officers, and excellent staff during a global pandemic. We updated the employees' handbook, completely rewrote the commissioner handbook, cleaned up our resolutions files, funded our scholarship program, held virtual meetings with our representatives and senators, held our poster contests, ran a virtual Envirothon, and held two annual meetings.

A personal thank you to John Whitaker, who is a friend, a true professional, and a huge asset to conservation efforts in Iowa. Thank you for your resource conservation work on your farms, in your communities, in your districts, and in area watersheds. I will remain active in CDI as your past-president and look forward to seeing you all in person.

WHAT'S MISSING?

(Your District's news could be featured in Connections!)

Please contact joe@cdiowa.org

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

Thank you to everyone who attended the virtual CDI annual conference. We all realize that a virtual setting is not the best way to hold discussions on important topics, but it did work well and discussion on resolutions and other topics. We recorded the webinar sessions and are currently working to post them to the CDI website. It is a little bit tricky trying to gather the recordings for the cloud server we used.

CDI is one of the sponsors of the Drake University Soil Conference – “[Our Soils: Our Future](#)” – and through that sponsorship, SWCD commissioners receive a \$25 discount on the registration fee. The conference is currently scheduled for September 15th but may need to move to a different date due to covid. This would be great learning opportunity for any commissioner wanting to increase their soil health knowledge.

We are expanding the *Saving Tomorrows Agricultural Resources (S.T.A.R.)* statewide. **We received a two grant from the Walton Family Foundation for the expansion.** We will also begin regular communication with participating producers. Another part of the grant is working with farm managers to study the feasibility of using S.T.A.R. as a conservation lease tool. Instead of prescriptively describing each conservation practice that a producer is required to use on leased land, the lease could simply require that the producer achieve a certain S.T.A.R. rating, such as ‘3 Stars’. For more information, please contact CDI Program Manager Carlee Sabus at: carlee@cdiowa.org Additional information can also be found on the CDI website.

CDI Annual Conference Resolution Results

Of six resolutions discussed and voted upon by participating Iowa SWCD commissioners during the August 23rd business meeting, the following two received the necessary 60% majority approval:

Resolution: Allow Location Flexibility for Multi-year State Cost Shared Cover Crops

Action: CDI supports IDALS rewriting the policy on multi-year cover crop contracts to read “Multi-year contracts should be on the same ground and the same number of acres each year of the contract unless there are unforeseen technical or weather issues that arise. Pre-approval and technical guidance must be given to switch the location of the practice.”

Additional information: The current policy wording is “Multi-year contracts must be on the same ground and the same number of acres each year of the contract.” *Submitted by:* Cherokee SWCD

Resolution: Supporting Farmer-led Conservation in Clean Energy Policy

Action: CDI supports the formulation of a Midwest Clean Energy Policy which both recognizes and rewards farmer led conservation and carbon storage efforts. Such policy should start with the basic knowledge that farmers who incorporate conservation into their farming practices are responsible for the lower carbon emissions that clean energy provides.

Additional information: During the past two years, CDI has been involved with a clean fuel study group. One of the concerns that has arisen from this participation is that over 90% of the value of carbon storage through farmer conservation efforts is not credited to the farmer who is storing the carbon to the benefit of all society. Farmers have been clean energy leaders for many years by promoting the environmental benefits of ethanol and biodiesel, yet those efforts are considered to be baseline carbon storage in clean energy policies. In order to increase conservation efforts through carbon storage programs, farmers must be fairly compensated for their increased work. *Submitted by:* CDI Executive Board

Jean Eells: the Meryl Streep of Conservation Awards?

Longtime Hamilton SWCD commissioner gathers well-deserved honors



*Dr. Jean Eells
"Conservation Woman of the Year"*

Perhaps only Jean Eells is surprised. During the 2021 CDI Annual Conference, the Hamilton SWCD Commissioner was awarded "Conservation Woman of the Year". Says Jean, "I had no idea it was coming." And yet: it's the third time this year Jean's lifetime of work in conservation earned recognition by professional peers. So far in 2021, Jean Eells, Ph.D., is recognized as "Conservation Professional of the Year" from the International Soil and Water Conservation Society ... "Conservationist of the Year" from the National Organization for Professional Women in NRCS ... and "Conservation Woman of the Year" from CDI. And there are still four months left in the year! "It's like getting to eat the whole birthday cake at once!"

"Women landowners tend to be invisible, and they shouldn't be. But things happen when they get together: they act."

– Jean Eells

Jean is well-known in Iowa and nationally for her work with

women in agriculture. As a Hamilton SWCD commissioner for two decades, she sees more women becoming active in SWCD commissions. "There are a lot more women producers and operators who are actively involved in their farms, so I think there's some

good opportunities for women to step up to the plate and be involved" in district work, she says. Jean believes Iowa districts need to initiate more conversations with landowners, and that will breakthrough to include *women* landowners. "Districts need to not be afraid to reach out to the landowners who are out of state, find out who they are and start sending out information, figuring that out as best we can. It's not easy, but I think that's the next horizon."

Jean is a landowner, educator, and founder of a consulting business devoted to "environment, education, evaluation and energy": [E Resources Group LLC](#). Much of her education work includes nationwide group facilitation, especially targeting women. "When women get together, they don't very often talk about farming, and I think it makes us a little bit more invisible – not only to each other, but also outwardly to others," she says. Raising the profile and influence of women in agriculture means networking and education. "When women learn what they need to do they really are pretty persistent at making that happen. They'll keep asking or keep working at it. At some point, when push comes to shove, once they know what they have to do they are a lot more relentless about getting that to happen."

Jean's work to increase awareness and action by farm women and landowners is part of a growing and welcome change in attitude. "This is a movement that's gone across states. So many other states are picking up on it and making it their own. That's been the journey. Seeing others pick this up and carry it forward has been a real joy."

A message from Sherman Lundy, Black Hawk SWCD:

"2021 CDI Outstanding Soil and Water District Commissioner"

"It was a great honor to be nominated for this award and an even greater yet humbling experience to receive this very prestigious award as the Outstanding Soil and Water District Commissioner for 2021. This thought I have shared with my fellow Commissioners in Black Hawk Soil and Water Conservation District: No one individual can ever hope to take credit for any or all of the great Conservation work that has been done in the past. Collectively, we make a difference; and it is that teamwork – whether it's on the farm, in town, at the District, State, or even the Federal Level – that implements conservation practices. While I deeply appreciate this award, the successes and activities in that nomination are really reflective of the combined efforts of many dedicated individuals and organizations working together for Soil and Water Conservation." – Sherman Lundy

Planner Profile: Jon Hendricks, CDI Planner for SW Iowa

For Jonathan Hendricks, the road to CDI started at a corporate desk, sitting in a cubicle world, realizing he needed a change. “I was searching for something fulfilling and something I could reach out and touch and make an impact on,” he says. “That caused me to go back to school to find things I might be passionate about, might be fulfilling.” He found it in the study of biology and organic chemistry. “I was made intimately aware of some of the things that were affecting agriculture, our climate, sustainability, our place and how we humans – our practices, our buying habits – how that was affecting our earth, our lifestyle. I got interested in sustainability and our environment.”

Today, as the Soil and Water Resource Conservation Planner for southwest Iowa, the Omaha native says CDI offers that chance to help make an impact. “Working on these plans, helping commissioners facilitate some of this process, inevitably I knew CDI would be great place where we can know the work that we do will get in the ground someday. I’ve loved going out and meeting all these district commissioners and staff and farmers that are passionate about a lot of the same things we are and what we do, and who are also keenly aware and smart about the way we can be improving our resources.”



Jonathan Hendricks, SW Iowa Planner

Jon says working directly with district commissioners and staff in formulating, evaluating, and executing the state-mandated 5-Year Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plan (SWRCP) offers the opportunity to get together and think about bigger things – about the long range as opposed to the day-to-day. He also believes the process raises the presence and awareness of SWCDs in their community. “The process itself has drawn together folks. We’re seeking out local working group members, we’re bringing in community involvement, we’re having such good luck in brain-storming meetings – 30 or 40- people sharing their ideas and passions that lets you know that we’re not alone in this.” Jon is responsible for 24 districts in southwest Iowa, and as one of the first CDI Planners to engage district leaders pre-Covid, earns responsibility for significant progress moving plans from introductions to approvals. “We’re really getting better, getting sharper. We built this process from the ground up and we’re grateful for those initial districts. Now we’re really on a roll, we come in and start these processes, we’ve got things ironed out really well. We see nothing but good things coming on the horizon, and we’re really looking forward to it.”

Commissioner training videos sharpen skills, offer district leaders tools for success

Take a few minutes each day and check out ideas and information that support your important work and can help you meet your goals for your district.

- [Intro session to training videos](#)
- [History of Conservation Districts Part 1](#)
- [History of Conservation Districts Part 2](#)
- [What CDI does for you](#)
- [Iowa Code Chapter 161A Overview](#)
- [Understanding Open Meetings Law and Governance of Districts](#)
- [Reporting requirements for IDALS and NRCS](#)
- [State and National Benefits of CDI Resolution Process](#)



Commissioner training videos, conducted by CDI leadership and partner experts, focus on strengthening commissioner knowledge base and arming them with insights that help leverage the effectiveness of their district work.