

---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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Volume 3, Number 5

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From: CDI President Ramona Nitz

As I write, I'm on my way home from the NACD annual conference which was held in Orlando. Since our oldest son and his wife live in that area, we stayed on for a few days to visit. We drove down to Florida by way of Arkansas and Mississippi and I especially enjoyed learning about growing rice and cotton. And I had a chance to talk with some folks about a conservation project they we are doing along the Banana River in eastern Florida. It's always fun to learn new things!

Speaking of learning new things, we learned so much at annual conference. CDI Board treasurer Angela Rosol and CDI Program Director Carlee Sabus also attended. I had gone to annual conference a few years ago as a speaker but this was the first time I attended as a voting Board member and it was very interesting. I continue to be impressed with the people at NACD who work so hard for and are so knowledgeable about all things conservation.

Iowa continues to have a seat on the NACD Legislative Committee. As a former U.S. Government teacher, I am very pleased to serve on this committee. This year, we spent a large part of our time talking about the next Farm Bill and what we might expect the discussion to look like. We were reminded that the results of this year's mid-term elections will likely play a role in what may be included in the bill.

Everyone there was so happy to be back together in person. Just as your CDI Board is happy to be holding our regional meetings in person this year! Please plan to join us in these next few weeks as we meet to discuss what you've been up to since we last met and make plans for going forward. See you soon!

Ramona

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

On February 15, we received good news from the McKnight Foundation. We had applied for a grant to begin a mentoring program for farmers who wanted to learn more about regenerative farming practices or to go ahead and try these practices but were unsure of how to do so. The idea came from commissioners who have experience with regenerative practices such as no-till and cover crops. When these commissioners were meeting with the planning coordinators to work on their five-year Soil and Water Resource Conservation Plans, they stated that having mentors is critically important to learning new practices. Many of them had learned on their own and if they could save others from some of that trial-and-error type learning, it would help increase conservation on the land in Iowa. The grant we received is for \$100,000 to help us support up to ten mentors. There is a stipend for the mentors, but we need to find the mentees who want to learn.

On February 7, 2022, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities program. Through this program, USDA will support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through a set of pilot projects that provide voluntary incentives through partners to producers and landowners, including early adopters. I believe this is a great idea. For too long, programs have encouraged new adopters to conservation and regenerative farming practices. Those of us who were the early adopters were not eligible and often were asked to show others how the systems work. Worse, early adopters were often told, 'you can't farm that way' or 'that will never work.' The other day someone mentioned the term 'trash farmer' to me. I had not heard that in a long time, but I remember hearing it when my dad first began trying no-till in 1979. It was not meant as a compliment! CDI is discussing, along with other STAR participating states, how we can use STAR which creates that market for conservation as one of the pilots in the new USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities. I firmly believe that consumers want to know how their food is produced and marketing 'climate-smart' commodities should reward those early adopters.

Nominate Conservation Leaders in Your Community for the 10th Annual Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig and Department of Natural Resources Director Kayla Lyon invite Iowans to nominate individuals or families in their communities for the [10th Annual Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award](#). Nominations will be accepted until Monday, May 2, 2022, to be considered for the 2022 awards ceremony held at the Iowa State Fair. Farmers and landowners who invest in conservation practices, like cover crops or wetlands, and incorporate best management practices into their operations to improve and protect the state's natural resources are eligible for the award. They must also actively serve as leaders in the agriculture community. "It is important to recognize Iowans who lead by investing in conservation stewardship as part of their agriculture operation," said Director Lyon. "Generations from now will benefit from the concerted effort these farmers and landowners have made today to protect Iowa's lands and waters while preserving Iowa's proud agricultural heritage." An appointed committee representing both conservation and agricultural groups will review the nominations and select the winners. The recipients will be recognized on Wednesday, Aug. 17, 2022, at the Iowa State Fair. Gov. Reynolds, Lt. Gov. Gregg, Secretary Naig and Director Lyon will present the winners with an Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award and a yard sign donated by Bayer. Since the creation of the award in 2012, nearly 700 farm families have been recognized. The [nomination form](#) and a list of previous awardees can be found at iowaagriculture.gov/farm-environmental-leader-awards.

2022 Commissioner Spring Regional Meeting Schedule

DATE	REGION	DISTRICT	LOCATION	TIME
Tuesday, March 1	9	Monroe Diana.Williams@ia.nacdnet.net 641-932-5144	Trinity United Methodist Church 1117 Benton Ave East Albia IA 52531	10am-2pm
Tuesday, March 1	7	Washington Teresa.Munn@ia.nacdnet.net 319-653-6654	Lake Darling State Park Lodge 111 Lake Darling Rd Brighton IA 52540	4pm-8pm
Wednesday, March 2	8	Adams Kelsey.Kinyon@ia.nacdnet.net 641-322-3116	Prescott Eagles Nest 801 1 st St Prescott IA 50859	10am-2pm
Thursday, March 3	6	Boone Christine.ThompsonBolton@ia.nacdnet.net 515-432-2316	Iowa Arboretum 1875 Peace Ave Madrid IA 50156	2pm-6pm
Tuesday, March 15	4	Bremer Mary.Zelle@ia.nacdnet.net 319-352-4373	Waverly Civic Center 200 1 st St NE Waverly IA 50677	10am-2pm
Tuesday, March 15	3	Franklin Megan.Harms@ia.nacdnet.net 641-456-2157	Maynes Grove Lodge 946 US Hwy 65 Hampton IA 50441	4pm-8pm
Wednesday, March 16	2	Dickinson Maxine.Butler@ia.nacdnet.net 712-336-3782	Milford Community Ctr 806 N Ave Milford IA 51351	10am-2pm
Wednesday, March 16	1	Ida Barbara.knudsen@ia.nacdnet.net 712-364-2124	Cobblestone Inn & Suites Convention Ctr 2011 Indorf Ave. Holstein IA 51025	4pm-8pm
March 22	5	Virtual Only		

Hamilton SWCD “Cover Crops Round Table” returns

Producers exchange insights, concerns with peers face-to-face (finally!)

After a two-year Covid delay, producers returned to the table in Stanhope to share what’s working and what’s not working as well when it comes to conservation practices in the field. The event, sponsored by the Hamilton SWCD, featured free breakfast and free advice from farmers either active in – or interested in – restoring and maintaining soil health. Hamilton SWCD Conservation Assistant Jennifer Rank – who helped organize the morning session – says it’s good to be back in the same room with local farmers. “It was nice to be able to have face-to-face contact and interaction and have good conversation,” says Jennifer. “I really enjoy hearing what works for certain producers and hearing them exchange their experiences with each other.” The session also offered a chance to remind producers of the benefits their local district offers. “We do have something available for producers who are trying out or continuing conservation practices,” Jennifer says. “We want to make sure for the producers in our county that their needs and wants as far as funding are met in any possible way we can help. There may be options for funding that they might not know.”



Hamilton SWCD 'Cover Crop Round Table' in Stanhope.

Record Program Obligations Despite COVID Limitations

by Jon Hubbert, State Conservationist, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service



Jon Hubbert, State Conservationist

I hope your 2022 is off to a great start! It's interesting how the temperatures outside seem to turn bitter cold in Iowa as soon as the calendar changes. Thanks to above average temperatures and below average precipitation last fall, District, IDALS and NRCS staff were able to accomplish a lot. Offices kept busy in the field designing practices, working on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts, and helping producers plan their conservation goals.

Our accomplishments over the past year showcase the importance of the conservation partnership in Iowa. The collaborative efforts of local, state, and federal employees and other partners in our field offices helped NRCS contract to treat 323,000 agricultural land acres with conservation practices through various Farm Bill programs. We provided a record \$83 million in conservation assistance to Iowa farmers last year. Combine that with the nearly \$15 million in state cost-share practices obligated to Iowa farmers and other funding assistance through local soil and water conservation districts and it's safe to say we topped the \$100 million mark this past year in conservation funding to Iowa producers – and that doesn't include CRP.

The NRCS total included nearly \$2 million in cover crops for Derecho storm recovery and more than \$25 million in new floodplain easements stemming from damage caused during the 2019 western Iowa floods. Cover crops were once again our most popular practice. We obligated \$8.1 million through 889 new Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts covering 152,643 acres. We also obligated nearly \$20 million in new five-year Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contracts last year. Through CSP, Iowa farmers will treat natural resource concerns on more than 186,000 acres. Our staff also wrote 10,245 conservation plans last year, covering nearly 800,000 agricultural acres.

NRCS Staffing and Reorganization

Despite ongoing staffing shortages and significant COVID limitations in our field offices, I am proud to report we increased our overall conservation implementation in fiscal year 2021. We are still working to fill some key District Conservationist positions – some that have been advertised multiple times! We appreciate the help, collaboration, and teamwork from our Iowa conservation partners. As most of you know, we began implementing a staff reorganization two years ago, which just happened to coincide with the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to several factors, such as the slow pace of increasing space in resource team offices, filling critical staff vacancies, and USDA COVID protocols limiting face-to-face interaction with producers, the reorganization we envisioned is taking longer to fully implement than we had hoped. With that said, we are seeing glimpses of reorganization success in various locations. One example is in Williamsburg, where Resource Team Leader Kate Timmerman says having a district conservationist in every county is allowing for a reliable local point of contact and a dedicated office manager. "This has improved customer relationships and availability of an NRCS Line Officer," said Timmerman. "The team approach has also provided us with more staff who are dedicated to four counties. The team concept allows the staff to shift to the areas of higher workload, letting us get more, high quality, conservation on the ground." Although we know every field office and resource team is different, we are hoping our reorganization helps provide more consistency and streamlining of program and conservation practice implementation.

USDA Goals and Priorities

Lastly, I would like to share some of USDA's goals and priorities for 2022. NRCS will be supporting these priorities, where our mission area is involved:

- Build on our progress to integrate **climate change** into programs and services.
- Embrace **diversity, equity, inclusion, and access** in the workplace and integrate equity into decision-making for programs and services.
- **Create more and better market opportunities** by prioritizing processing and distribution capacity, creating open and competitive markets, strengthening local food systems, and investing in organic and other emerging opportunities.
- Invest in bold solutions that **enhance food safety**, improve nutrition programs, and reduce food and nutrition insecurity.
- **Make USDA a great place to work for everyone** by building a culture that welcomes and respects everyone, and that encourages everyone to reach their highest potential.

Testing the Waters

ISA water lab provides data to help improve water quality

Sharing and supporting the values important to Farmers for Iowa Soil and Water future, the Iowa Soybean Association Research Center for Farming Innovation:

- Engages in water monitoring and research on cropping systems because agriculture has a responsibility to apply knowledge to solve problems.
- Believes water monitoring and research projects and programming can sit alongside the mission and work that conservation districts, and local ag retail are in the business of providing to farmers.
- Assists groups such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts and watershed management organizations by coordinating the design and implementation of monitoring projects and programs that support farmers who work to improve their water, land and farming operations to be productive, profitable and more sustainable.
- Supports and fosters champions who exhibit and exercise leadership locally.
- Believes informed champions at the grassroots level, are best equipped to be the advocates and communicators as they find and extract value from the knowledge generated by data and information.
- To review the full article on ISA's Research for Farming Innovation's certified Water Lab: [ISA water lab provides data to help improve water quality.](#)



Anthony Seeman, ISA Sr. Field Services Lab and Data Manager at the ISA Research Center for Farming Innovation's Certified Water Lab (Photo: Joclyn Bushman/Iowa Soybean Association).

To explore potential collaboration on water monitoring or for more information about the ISA RCFI visit [ISA Research Center for Farming Innovation \(iasoybeans.com\)](http://iasoybeans.com) or drop an email to kdearden@iasoybeans.com.

Iowa Soybean Association is a valued sponsor of CDI.