

---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 Ramona Nitz

Just returned from spending much of June in Europe. We had a fabulous time visiting Germany, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria and Denmark. It was a beautiful time of year to be there as the countryside was so pretty. I'd say my favorite country to visit was Hungary and its capital city of Budapest. It has been and remains a farming country. This gorgeous building in Budapest is actually a museum dedicated to farming:



I've been asked so many times since we've returned what my favorite part of the trip was. I could say the beautiful palaces and churches. Or the delicious food we ate way too much of! But what I will remember most was hearing from the people who lived in those countries that, until 1989, were under communist rule. The stories they told of the conditions in which they lived will be something I will never forget. I will wake up every morning now and be more grateful than ever that I live in America. In a few days, I will celebrate our country's birthday at Okoboji with a large group of family and friends. I am especially happy this year to be an American now that I know more about how much others have envied us our freedoms over the years. God bless America, truly the land that I love. Have a wonderful holiday, everyone. See you soon for annual conference!

— Ramona

Make your reservations!

CDI Annual Conference, August 22-23, Gateway Hotel and Conference Center, Ames

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

I am hoping to see many of you at our Annual Conference in August at the Gateway Center in Ames. The Spring Regional meetings gave us the chance to see many Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners and while I realize that we need to stay safe from Covid, I truly want to be able to shake your hands and say ‘hi’ in person. **This is *your* Annual Conference and there will be important business conducted during the business meeting on Monday morning.**

I recently enrolled one of my fields in STAR so that I could test the system. We recently found out that the system did not work properly last year. When you or any other farmer enrolls, you should receive an email response to let you know how many points you scored. At Spring Regional meetings, we learned that the system did not send the reply email and so farmers didn’t know if it recorded or not. That system glitch is now fixed. When I entered the field, I received the email score immediately, and it reflected the conservation work we do. The rule of thumb with STAR is this: ‘If you are using no-till and cover crops, you will score at least 3 stars’. Please try it out on your fields. [Iowa S.T.A.R. – Conservation Districts of Iowa \(cdiowa.org\)](https://www.cdiowa.org/)

The scholarship winners have been announced and letters sent to the respective districts to present to the winners. I didn’t apply for scholarships when I attended Iowa State University in the ‘70s but I did receive help from the Iowa Association of Soil Conservation Commissioners from the speech contest prize. Wasn’t much but bought my books my first quarter with money to spare. We remember those who help us. **Please remember to bring auction items at annual conference to raise funds for our scholarship program.**

McKnight Supports Climate-Smart Farming with Second-Quarter Grants

Excerpted from McKnight Foundation online news release. [Click here](#) to read complete article

The McKnight Foundation [Midwest Climate & Energy program](#) focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, at scale, as quickly as possible in the Midwest. In the last year, the program has been expanding support for climate solutions on natural and working lands—our rangelands, farms, and forestlands—that support life and livelihoods, recognizing that we need to partner with stewards of these lands to safeguard the places that many call home...

Conservation Districts of Iowa serves as one voice for Iowa’s 100 county Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) to support local efforts and advance state goals for natural resources. They know firsthand that many Iowa farmers are aware of the benefits of practices such as no-till and cover crop use but are reluctant to try them, fearing failure in their annual crops and facing peer pressure from other farmers who do not believe that these practices can be profitable. To overcome these barriers, **McKnight granted the Conservation Districts of Iowa \$100,000 over the next year to pilot a mentorship program for producers** to learn about climate-smart agricultural methods and to adopt conservation practices on their land—educating and organizing farmers to lead on climate. “We aim to create a national movement, starting here in Iowa, geared toward market-recognized and market-rewarded regenerative farming practices to support carbon reduction in farming,” said John Whitaker, Executive Director of Conservation Districts of Iowa.

CDI Annual Conference August 22-23: Make plans to make a difference

It's been 35 years since "soil conservation commissioners" became "soil and water conservation commissioners" through the Ground Water Protection Act of 1987. Says CDI Executive Director John Whitaker, "We need to celebrate that. Water is the number one issue in Iowa. SWCD commissioners can have a tremendous influence on that." For that reason, the afternoon of day one, CDI 2022 Annual Conference, will be unlike the typical agenda from past years. "Instead of individual breakout sessions, we will have all afternoon devoted to water quality and water quantity in Iowa." Whitaker and CDI President Ramona Nitz believe attendance at the Annual Conference in August by Iowa SWCD commissioners is especially important this year, a critical year for state conservation and environmental policy. "The planning committee for this year's annual conference has been working extra hard to plan a time that will be both fun and educational for all who attend," says Nitz. "We have lots of new things planned for this year!" From the Monday morning business meeting through Tuesday's final noon lunch session, commissioners and guests will have a chance to share experience, learn strategy, meet new friends/old friends, hear expert insights, and interact with state policy makers.

"This is *their* annual conference," says Whitaker of Iowa's district commissioners. "They'll see commissioners from other districts, get to communicate with each other about what's going well, and what's not going so well. Monday's luncheon speaker – Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig – is our exclusive lunch speaker, a great opportunity to hear from him directly." Before that luncheon address by Secretary Naig, the conference will start with the all-important Monday morning annual business meeting, where decisions that affect district policy and procedures for the coming year are made. **"Voting on whether or not to change the by-laws is always a big deal," says Nitz. "So we need lots of commissioners to be in attendance at this very important business meeting."** Whitaker says commissioners can expect attractive highlights during the conference:

"After not having an in-person conference for so many years, we have so much catching up to do," says CDI President Ramona Nitz. "I can't wait to see everyone!"

- Monday banquet speaker is Larry Weber, Director of the Iowa Flood Center. "He was responsible for bringing in a Housing and Urban Development Grant to help flooding concerns we've had in Iowa," says Whitaker. "He brought into the state almost \$100 million dollars. It's imperative commissioners hear what they did with those funds."
- Monday evening will include the return of the scholarship fund auction. "That's always a fun time! And we're helping young people's future in conservation with those scholarships."
- On Tuesday morning, Neil Hamilton, former professor director the Drake Agricultural Law Center talks about legal issues. "Commissioners have a lot of power; they just don't use it sometimes!"
- Tuesday morning features a listening session with NRCS, IDALS and CDI – "Leadership from CDI, IDALS and NRCS are sitting down with commissioners and talking about what's right and what's wrong. That turned out to be an extremely successful event three years ago, and we want to continue that."
- Also Tuesday, officials with FSA, NRCS, DNR discuss what's going on in their organizations, with Q&A.
- "We're hoping we'll have NRCS Chief Terry Cosby as luncheon speaker on Tuesday. He started his career in Iowa. He's risen through the ranks from being out there in the field laying out terraces – that's where I remember him, laying out terraces at one of our farms! -- to being the national chief of NRCS." Cosby's appearance is unconfirmed.
- Annual awards will be given during lunch Monday, dinner Monday evening, and the final lunch Tuesday
- An ice cream social!
- Guest tour on Monday offers commissioner guests a tour of a glass blowing facility – and a turn at blowing glass for participants.
- Official conference ends after the Tuesday lunch.

Seeking nominations for CDI leadership positions

The bylaws of our organization state that "the president and vice president of this association shall be elected annually by the members at an annual meeting of the association." The CDI nominating committee encourages any commissioner who is interested in serving in one of these two offices to please submit your name. Commissioners are limited to two consecutive one-year terms in these offices and CDI's current president and vice president are eligible to be elected for a second one-year term. Thank you.

Dennis Carney
CDI Nominating Committee Chair

Iowa conservation group earns national recognition

SILT: preserving farmland, advocating for local food markets

The Sustainable Iowa Land Trust (SILT) is well-known by conservation-minded Iowans for actively working to preserve farmland for the future, secure access to land while promoting nature-friendly table food production. Now, for their dedicated efforts, the conservation group recently reached a milestone moment – accreditation from the [Land Trust Accreditation Commission](#). “This is quite a feat, given that SILT is less than a decade old,” says SILT board member Margaret McQuown, Red Oak. “SILT now has more than 1,100 acres in Iowa protected with SILT conservation easements - a combination of seven SILT-owned farms and seven conservation easement farms. SILT-owned farmland is being made accessible to beginning and underserved farmers.” Success with the rigorous evaluation means SILT joins more than 450 accredited land trusts nationally that meet the highest national standards for excellence, conservation permanence and ethical practices.



Field Specialist Joe Klingelutz

McQuown says SILT is now launching a new initiative – “Circle Our Cities” – a campaign to “surround 10 Iowa Cities to protect valuable farmland from urban development and provide nutrient-dense, fresh food to those cities.”

As the Field Specialist and co-leader of SILT, responsibility for taking the SILT message to Iowa farmers, landowners and state ag staff keeps Joe Klingelutz of Iowa City on the road and in the fields. The goal of the new “Circle Our Cities” initiative – conceived by Klingelutz’s SILT co-leader Suzan Erem – is to “incentivize select Iowa cities to think about their surrounding areas and to think about the impact local food farms can have on their communities,” says Klingelutz. “Our mission is to protect land on the outskirts of these cities.” Ten cities of Iowa were targeted for having large enough populations to satisfy a market for local farmers. “We’re going to be putting efforts and energies into those areas, hiring people in those areas, and reaching out to landowners about protecting their land with a conservation easement or to donate their land for the purposes of creating land access for the next generation and to be able to help feed their communities.”

Klingelutz has been fulltime Farm Specialist with SILT since 2018. “My position is funded by a 5-yr NRCS grant that allows me to meet with Iowa landowners and discuss with them the opportunities for incorporating different types of food enterprises on the landscape, as well as different types of conservation practices that landowners might be able to get cost-share programs. I have met with over 80 landowners so far, met with many NRCS DCs as well as technical service providers, matching them with landowners, trying to incentivize landowners to go into NRCS offices and to ask about different types of cost-share programs that they might not have known about.”



SILT specializes in protecting Iowa farmland for sustainable table food farming. “We talk with landowners and provide them options to be able to pass the legacy of their land on to the next generation of farmers. The land protection side of it is extremely important because land access is one of the biggest bottlenecks for beginning farmers, people of color, and underserved communities. So we talk with landowners about the options to protect our land, for example with agricultural conservation easements – what I like to call ‘land protection agreements’. We also do receive donations of land, where landowners will outright donate the deed of their land. They donate the deed to their land during their lifetime to SILT, give up the right to sell it, but maintain ownership until they pass on, and the land goes to full ownership to SILT.” Klingelutz notes that conservation easements are powerful land protection tools as well as land access tools because easements “restrict development, restrict industrial agriculture, restrict unsustainable farming practices such as the reliance on synthetic chemicals, tilling on highly erodible land, not putting a confined animal feeding operation on the farm property – the conservation easement restricts but also then allows for food farming.” Because easements devalue the land, he says the market value makes it more affordable for someone who wants to access that property specifically for food farming purposes. “That’s where the land access comes into play. It does devalue the land, which is incredibly helpful for those people who can’t afford farmland at the fair market value that it is today if they don’t have capital for it or don’t have land in the family, which is a lot of people.”

Spring Tour 2022 Northcentral Iowa



Monday, June 20, 2 p.m.: Joint SSCC/CDI Board meeting; followed by separate SSCWQC and CDI Board meetings (pictured at right, l. to r.): CDI V.P. Jeri Thornsberry, CDI Executive Director John Whitaker, CDI Program Manager Carlee Sabus.



Tuesday, June 21, 8:50-11:00 a.m.: Far left, Martin Marietta quarry, Alden; at right, Stolee CREP Wetland, Radcliffe; (pictured at right) Shane Wulf, Wetlands Project Manager, stands with landowner Heath Stolee to his right, explaining wetland benefits to water quality, flood mitigation and habitat.

Tuesday, June 21, 11:45 a.m.-2:35 p.m.: At left, Carlson Tree Farm, Hampton; far right, Fossil and Tile Center, Rockford; (pictured at right) after an educational presentation of the history and scientific significance of the old tile quarry, tour members search for small ancient sea life fossils from the Devonian period – 375 million years ago.



CDI board, commissioners, state partners tour practices-in-place

Jon Hubbert

State Conservationist, USDA-NRCS

"To me, the Spring Tour is a culmination of being able to see some of the work that we've done over the years in its implemented form. You can talk to some of the producers that have been impacted – but also it helps commissioners see the long-term benefit of those practices in place. So we get this great chance to bring people together to look at the successes that we have all accomplished together. The partnership collectively has been part of many of these projects on the tour, and just seeing that partnership thrive through these practices is a tremendous opportunity. They are very much a part of the Iowa landscape, seeing them in practice out on the land makes it come together."

Susan Kozak

Soil Conservation and Water Quality Division Director

"The purpose is just to bring the conservation districts of Iowa and the state soil and water quality committee together to be able to be able to talk about conservation. We try to focus around our three bureaus, the Mines and Minerals Bureau, the Water Resources Bureau, and Field Services to show a variety of the different things that we try to do for conservation and water quality. Great to get meetings together, for updates, and be able to talk about some things that are succeeding or what are some challenges that we need to work on together. We've been doing a summer tour at least as far back as 15 years and we move it around SWCD regions -- so next year it will be in NE Iowa!"



Roller Crimper & Soil Health Field Day

Fred and Vicki Abels, of K & A Acres, hosted a [Practical Farmers of Iowa](#) field day exploring cover crops and roller-crimping on June 11th, on their farm near Holland, Iowa. Fred Abels is the CDI Region 3 Director, from Grundy SWCD. According to PFI, "Fred is a seasoned cover cropper who farms corn, soybeans and cover crops for seed, and employs a range of conservation practices. Among them, he uses buffer and filter strips to protect water quality, and participates in local watershed projects, reserve programs and more." The field day featured demonstrations of roller-crimping, a discussion of roller-crimping following corn and soybeans. Other topics included planting corn into living cover using skiprows, spring and fall Haney soil tests, and planting corn following fall legumes and spring oat cover crops. The field day was sponsored by Albert Lea Seed, Conservation Districts of Iowa, Grundy Soil & Water Conservation District, Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance and Iowa Farmers Union.



 **Boone County
Soil & Water Conservation District**

Boone County SWCD 75th Anniversary + Cover Crop Showcase

FREE Dinner, CAKE and Social Hour
Presenting...

The Hagie High Boy Cover Crop Planter
Reduced Tillage Cover Crop Applicator
Local Watershed Projects

**Tuesday, July 12th
5-7pm**

**Boone County
Fairgrounds**
(Enter from Industrial Park Road)

Please RSVP to
[Christine.ThompsonBolton
@ia.nacdnet.net](mailto:Christine.ThompsonBolton@ia.nacdnet.net)
or by calling 515-432-
2316 (ext. #3)