

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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President's Report

By Sean Dolan

It does not seem like we should be half-way through 2026 already. Maybe it is because the weather has been cooler, but according to the weatherman, we will be catching up on heat units in the next couple of weeks.

In my area, corn looks excellent, but the soybeans seem to be lagging. The rye and oats look great too. I just hope we can avoid the major storms we experienced last July which flattened those two crops. This is my fourth year of raising small grains and I really enjoy the flexibility these crops give me.

After these crops are harvested, I have a wide range of options to address resource concerns on these acres. Following the oats, I plan on leveling tile lines from a few years ago and planting a multi species cover crop that will provide grazing for my neighbor's cattle, and fix nitrogen for next year's corn crop.

On the rye acres, I would like to experiment with buckwheat. Buckwheat roots have the ability to colonize microorganisms which are adapted at releasing the phosphorus in the soil, and I have another who wants to bring a couple of her hives over to make some buckwheat honey. I am not sure about harvesting and cleaning the buckwheat, but I guess I will have to cross that bridge when I get there! I enjoy planting different crops and observing how my soils react to them.

In early June, the CDI board had our annual joint meeting and bus tour with the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee. The bus tour focuses on a different region in Iowa each year. Jake Hansen, the IDALS Water Resources Bureau chief lined up 4 stops that were interesting, educational and relevant to our mission.

The first stop was at the Amana Farms biogas production and electric generation plant where we learned about the challenges and benefits of the operation. My main take away was the digester -- **Continued on Page 2**

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needs to be consistently fed a balanced ration to achieve maximum results—just like an animal or growing plant. Our second stop of the day was at a saturated buffer installation site. A saturated buffer is built by intersecting a field tile and diverting a portion of the water into a tile that runs parallel to a stream or creek. This water then slowly drains to the body of water, giving microbes in the soil an opportunity to remove the nitrates in the water. Agronomy conservationists from the Heartland Coop explained the batch and build program and how they are helping control contractor costs by lining up multiple buffers in close geographical locations. On our third stop we viewed a completed stream restoration project in West Branch at Beranek Park. City leaders walked us through the flooding issues they were experiencing as well as how small towns can leverage state and national dollars to complete a project of this scope and how it will benefit the town’s residents. Our fourth stop brought us to JCS Farms where Jim Sladek explained his Rainfall Retention and Irrigation Water Collection pond and the agricultural and recreational benefits he has experienced since the project was completed.

I really enjoyed the bus tour and would like to once again thank Jake and all of the IDALS staff who made the tour so successful.

Executive Director’s Report

By Dien Judge

Summer is in full swing, and that means it’s almost time for our CDI Annual Conference. As we announced last month in *Connections*, we’re changing up the schedule of events this year. We’ve decided to condense the schedule a little bit, and try to get everything into one day. We believe changing things up from the same old way of doing things is sometimes necessary.

We’ve seen a decline in participation in the conference in recent years, and one of the most common reasons that we hear from commissioners is that they just don’t have enough time to participate in a two-day conference. We’re hoping that more commissioners will choose to attend if they only need to commit one day of their time.

In a perfect situation, we would see all 500 locally elected Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners attend the conference. We believe we are a stronger organization when we hear the voices and concerns of every district commissioner from every part of the state of Iowa. Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners are elected by their constituents to represent their local area and communities, and that representation extends beyond just one district meeting per month. At our annual conference, we hope to inspire commissioners by sharing new ideas, providing important legal and best practice information, and by providing an opportunity to network together.

Despite the shorter time frame, we will continue to provide important information on the hot topics of the day. We have an excellent fact-based presentation from Iowa DNR’s Adam Schneiders on nitrate pollution in Iowa waterways, as well as an opportunity for commissioners to get a refresher on important legal questions from Iowa Assistant Attorney General Eric Dirth. We will also hear from CDI lobbyist Jim Obradovich on the recent legislative session and the state of legislation effecting soil and water conservation programs. And we will be joined by Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig at our breakfast.

For those attendees who have the extra time, there will be an optional guided farm tour on the following day at the nearby Helland Farm. CDI will provide bus transportation to the farm where those in attendance will see various conservation practices as they have been implemented on the farm.

All in all, this year’s conference promises to be educational and a lot of fun. We hope you will plan to join your fellow commissioners and partners. Please go to <https://cdiowa.org/annual-conference-2/annual-conference/> and register today!

CDI board joins State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee summer tour

Members of the CDI Board of Directors joined with the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee this month for the annual SSCWC Summer Tour.

This year the tour was held in eastern Iowa, with several stops at interesting conservation projects along the way.

The first stop of the tour was at Amana Farms Digester site, where a beef cattle feeding operation creates power with a manure digester, followed by a tour of the site of a large saturated buffer system being constructed by Heartland Co-op. Lunch was held at Beranek Park Shelter in West Branch, where the City of West Branch and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources showed some urban conservation practices that have been implemented. Lastly, there was a tour of JCS Family Farms to view their drainage water recycling pond.



John McGrath, pictured above, led a tour of the Amana Farms Digester Site near Marengo during the State Soil Conservation and Water Quality Committee's annual Summer Tour. Pictured at left, Heartland Co-op is constructing a saturated buffer project near West Liberty. Below, a tour of JCS Family Farms to view their large drainage water recycling pond, where water is collected and used for crop irrigation.



Do you have a conservation success story or an event to share?

Please send us your stories and we'll share them with our members and partners!



Registration is now open for CDI Annual Conference

CDI Annual Conference to be held August 25 in Ames

Conservation Districts of Iowa will hold its 80th Annual Conference at the Gateway Hotel & Conference Center in Ames on Aug. 25. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend!

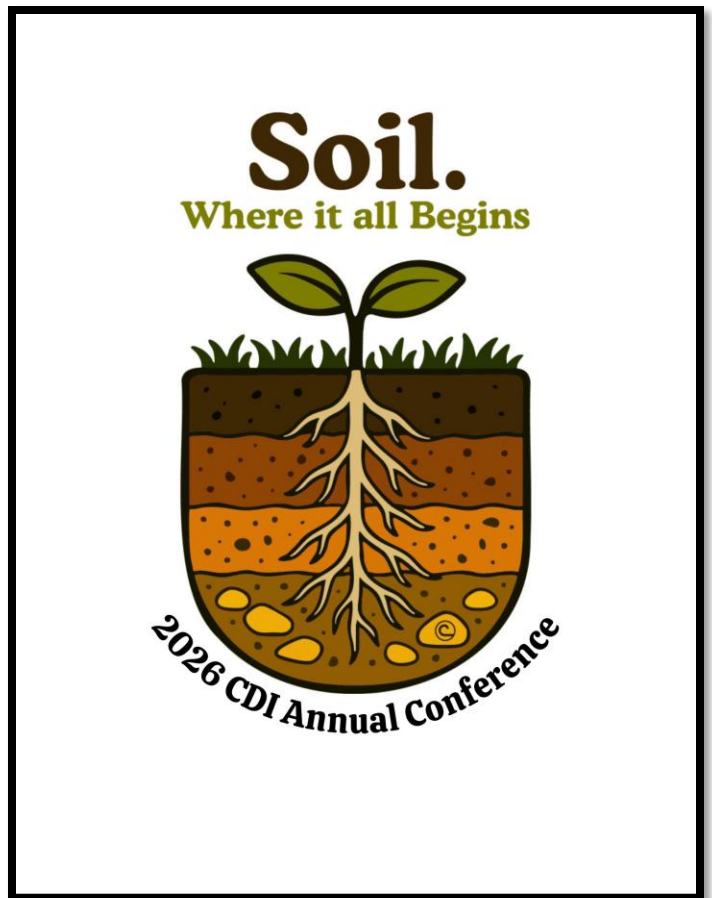
Several exciting changes to the conference schedule have been made this year, and once again all Iowa Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners can attend free of charge. Registration costs for SWCD commissioners and assistant commissioners will once again be covered by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

All 500 Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners are welcome to attend and participate in the conference.

Changes to the schedule of events at the conference will allow most of the conference events to be held on one day, Tuesday, Aug. 25, with the exciting addition of an optional tour on Wednesday, Aug. 26 of the nearby Helland Farm featuring some excellent examples of soil and water conservation practices and structures.

Conference attendees who arrive on Monday evening, Aug. 24, will be welcomed with an informal President's Reception at 7:00 PM at Gateway. Then things get started early on Tuesday, Aug. 25, with a breakfast at 6:30 AM including a formal Welcome by Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig, and a keynote presentation by agronomist Ruth McCabe. This will be followed by a break to visit our sponsors, and then the CDI Annual Business Meeting of our organization is held. All locally elected Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners from dues-paying districts are eligible to participate in this meeting, where important votes are conducted on CDI Resolutions. Members will also conduct the election of the CDI President and Vice President.

Your participation in this process is important to the success of your organization in the future. CDI Resolutions passed at the annual meeting involving state policies are taken to the Iowa Legislature and pushed by CDI's professional lobbyist. Resolutions involving federal policy are advanced and moved through the resolutions process in the National Association of Conservation Districts. Your involvement in this process at the CDI Annual Conference is critical to making your voice heard to influence – **Continued on Page 5**



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government policies involving conservation programs. In addition to the business meeting, the conference will include a legislative update from CDI Lobbyist Jim Obradovich.

Following the business meeting, an Awards Luncheon will be held and conservation leaders from all around the state will be honored with awards.

In the afternoon, those in attendance will hear a presentation from Iowa Assistant Attorney General Eric Dirth, who will be available to answer questions from commissioners about their legal duties and obligations. And later in the afternoon, attendees will hear from Iowa DNR Water Quality Coordinator Adam Schneiders, who will focus his presentation on nitrate pollution and water quality improvement efforts and challenges.

Conference registration forms are being distributed to all Conservation Assistants, so please plan to register and attend the CDI Annual Conference.

Optional farm tour event to be held on August 26

The following day, on Wednesday, Aug. 26, is an optional guided tour of the nearby Helland Farm, which will be included with the conference registration.

For more information about registration, go to <https://www.cdiowa.org/annual-conference/>. Rooms can be reserved after completing the registration process.

CDI scholarship fundraising drive begins for 2027 scholar awards

Silent Auction Fundraiser to be held at conference

The CDI Scholarship Program is funded by your donations, including for the annual conference "Silent Auction". Will you contribute this year?

What to donate to this year's auction? Here are some starter ideas!

- Products specific to your county or region make great auction items!
- Compile a basket of local goods. Local wines, beers, honey and other items go over great!
- Consider bringing a craft from a local artisan, for example, a wildlife painting, bird house, yard art or quilt.
- Request a donation of an agricultural or conservation product or service from your local co-op or other agribusiness such as corn, bean, cover crop or native grass and forb seed, equipment rental, etc.
- Go green...or red! John Deere, Case, and other branded items, new or old, are always a hit!
- Promote the great outdoors with your donation! Ask a local store to donate hunting or fishing gear for the auction.
- Show your school pride by donating Cyclone, Hawkeye or your favorite team's gear and items!
- Iowa's Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners know how important it is to invest in the future of conservation.

The Conservation Districts of Iowa Board of Directors has renewed its commitment to partnering with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts to support Iowa students – **Continued on Page 6**

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who are interested in conservation and agriculture. Through first-year college scholarships, we can help open doors for young people who may become the next generation of conservation leaders. These scholarships give us a meaningful way to support students who are ready to learn, serve, and bring their talents back to Iowa communities. Scholarship funds are raised primarily through the silent auction at the conference and through generous cash donations from individual supporters. Whether your support comes from an auction item, a cash gift, or even a required distribution from your IRA, every contribution helps.



“Please donate some wonderful, intriguing, interesting, unusual items for our Annual Silent Auction. It is so much fun to watch the bids increase as time passes. Let’s help our young people interested in conservation. We need the next generation really engaged. Donate an item or more and help supplement our Scholarship Fund!”

CDI Past President Jeri Thornsberry

For decades, commissioners across the state have helped keep this scholarship program alive. The CDI Board asks that each district contribute at least \$100 to the Scholarship Fund so it remains strong and sustainable. If donations exceed the current funding schedule, we can increase scholarship awards and support even more deserving students.

We also encourage each district to continue promoting local scholarship opportunities for high school seniors and to forward your top applicant to your Regional Director for consideration in the statewide process. (<https://www.cdiowa.org/get-involved/scholarships/>)

“Thank you for continuing to invest in Iowa’s future conservation leaders,” said CDI Past President Jeri Thornsberry. “These scholarships are more than financial assistance—they are a way of saying we believe in these young people and the future they will help build.”

Green Cover helps Iowa youth learn value of conservation stewardship

CDI welcomes new sponsor for annual poster contest

At CDI we’re very happy to announce a new sponsor for the annual CDI Poster Contest. Green Cover Seed is our new poster contest sponsor, and will begin by supporting the prizes for the 2026 contest winners this year.

The CDI Poster Contest provides students from Kindergarten through 12th grade the chance to have their art displayed as part of a national conservation outreach initiative. Each year, the winning posters highlight the work of conservation districts and the state conservation associations, auxiliaries and agencies to protect and enhance natural resources. – **Continued on Page 7**

Continued from Page 6 “At Green Cover Seed, our mission is to help people regenerate, steward and share God’s creation for future generations,” said Green Cover Co-Owner Keith Berns. “ And we believe that work begins with teaching the next generation to see the soil beneath their feet as something work caring for. We’re honored to invest in these students, because faithful stewards pour into those who will carry the work forward.”



Newly elected officials now required to take public information training

Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners are included in this mandate

Iowa law (Iowa Code § 21.12) requires newly elected or appointed public officials to complete mandatory training on Open Meetings and Public Records (Chapters 21 & 22) within 90 days of taking the oath or assuming office. The 1–2 hour training covers meeting notices, closed sessions, and records requests, with certificates issued upon completion.

Approved Training Providers

The [Iowa Public Information Board \(IPIB\)](#) oversees the training requirements. Approved training options include:

- Iowa League of Cities: Offers online and in-person sessions.
- AEA Learning Online: Specialized modules for school board members.
- State Library of Iowa: Provides the "Open Meetings, Open Records: Compliance is the Law" course via Workday Learning.
- Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach: Offers workshops for local officials.

For more specific information on authorized training, visit the [IPIB Training Page](#).

Do you have a conservation success story or an event to share?

Please send us your stories and we'll share them

with our members and partners!

Send to admin@cdiowa.org