

# Iowa Current Developments



August 2009, Iowa Current Developments  
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service  
210 Walnut Street, Room 693, Des Moines, IA 50309

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"Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service: Excellence in helping people conserve and improve our natural resources, communities and environment."

Helping People Help the Land  
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## A Message from the: State Conservationist



Rich Sims,  
State Conservationist

In March I asked each field office to work together to identify up to five barriers to efficiency. These items must have been something Iowa NRCS controlled and could change; I received nearly 350 comments and assigned them to the appropriate staff members on the Leadership Team (LT).

I shared this list at our July meeting and asked each staff member to identify the top five barriers assigned to their area. LT members will develop an action plan to address each of these barriers and add them to the 2010 business plan. We will continue this process until we've addressed each barrier. And if the issue is beyond Iowa's control, we will send a white paper to National Headquarters explaining the problem and offering possible solutions from the field perspective.

Some of the barriers were training issues. If you need training in a par-

ticular area, let your supervisor know. If statewide training needs to be developed, our Employee Development Committee will work on it.

Your workloads are heavy and you often face extremely tight timeframes. It is our job at the State Office to help remove obstacles not add them. So during the upcoming year, and beyond, we will be working hard at fixing the barriers you submitted, and working carefully to avoid creating new ones.

Since March, we've already fixed some of the barriers. These are discussed in another article in this issue of Current Developments.

I will keep you informed of our progress on a quarterly basis and in a new employee intranet page. Some of our fixes might need fine tuning. If one of the solutions isn't working as planned, let us know. We can rework it and make it better.

Thank you for the careful thought put into this process. We will put equally careful thought into helping improving efficiencies and removing the barriers.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Sims". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## Iowa NRCS Student Trainee Program Attracts: Diverse Group

A diverse group of five student trainees with varying educational backgrounds and work experiences spent the summer training in Iowa NRCS field offices.

The student trainee program is a valuable resource to develop a pool of candidates for future employment, says Iowa NRCS Human Resources Office Chris Knudsen.

"We use the the program to its fullest, based on budget," he said.

NRCS attracts trainees by posting information on the Iowa NRCS website, attending career fairs, college/career counselors, working with the Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) and past student trainees.

Once selected, each trainee is placed in an appropriate training site. They have a position description with duties and responsibilities while serving in Iowa. "Each supervisor ensures student trainees have a hands-on experience in the full range of conservation programs," says Knudsen.

### 2009 Iowa NRCS Student Trainees



**Travis Eastern**

**Hometown:**  
St. Joseph, LA

**Education:**  
Southern Univ. A&M

**Major:**  
Urban Forestry  
(Plant/Soil Science)

**NRCS Office:**  
Marion

**His Experience:**  
"I learned a lot about the business, including the responsibilities of each position, as well as all of the career opportunities that NRCS has to offer. I really enjoyed this experience."



**Kendall Field**

**Hometown:**  
Weimar, TX

**Education:**  
Texas A&M-Kingsville

**Major:**  
Ag. Science Ed.  
(Range Mgmt.)

**NRCS Office:**  
Ottumwa

**Her Experience:**  
"Working out in the field and being able to interact with local farmers has been really good for me. I learned how to do a variety of surveying, how to work with waterways, the ECP, and other programs; and I have had many hours of training on the computer."



**Hannah Grimm**

**Hometown:**  
Des Moines, IA

**Education:**  
Iowa State Univ.

**Major:**  
Forestry

**NRCS Office:**  
Elkader

**Her Experience:**  
"I learned a great deal about soil conservation practices, and also about managing timber. I now know that in order to complete a conservation project it is far more complex than I had originally thought. A lot of time, planning, and hard work go into "helping people help the land."



**Laura Shipley**

**Hometown:**  
Villisca, IA

**Education:**  
Univ. of Wyoming

**Major:**  
Rangeland Ecology  
& Watershed Mgmt.

**NRCS Office:**  
Waukon

**Her Experience:**  
"The knowledge that I have gained this summer from the Allamakee County Field Office is extraordinary. They have encouraged my participation with all staff members, including other departments, which enhances my experiences and broadens my overall views."



**Robyn Wilson**

**Hometown:**  
Tahlequah, OK

**Education:**  
Rochester IT (NY)

**Major:**  
Environmental Sci.

**NRCS Office:**  
Marshalltown

**Her Experience:**  
"I had never been to Iowa, so I experienced a new place and different environment, as well as gained knowledge about what different NRCS employees do through hands-on experience, and I can say, I really liked my summer experience and I could see myself working for the NRCS in the future."

## Unlocking Efficiency: Progress Report

### Unlocking Efficiency



The Leadership Team has addressed some of the items submitted in March as barriers to efficiency. Following are a brief description of the barrier and information about the solution.

#### Conservation Tillage Survey

The survey requires too much time and resources and does not gather producer attitudes. Survey should be done every three to four years or hire a firm (or TSP) to gather data and incorporate interviews with producers.

**Solution:** As decided by Rich Sims, Iowa NRCS is not participating in the CTIC Conservation Tillage Survey this year. We can use TSP funds, but leadership would prefer to use those for engineering and CNMPs.

#### Online Bulletins

All bulletins should be posted on the Iowa NRCS website, NOT on shared drives.

**Solution:** Bulletins and other directives have been added to the employee intranet section of the Iowa NRCS website at [www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/eDirectives.html](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/eDirectives.html).

#### Equipment for Shared Management Units

Resource conservationists and district conservationists experienced issues with computers and mobility between offices.

**Solution:** We have purchased several more laptops for Shared Management Units. Delivery is expected in the near future. In addition computers can be reassigned within Areas to help alleviate additional challenges.

#### Wetland Determinations

This is too time-consuming.

**Solution:** Rich Sims asked State Soil Scientist Mike Sucik to develop a schedule for digitizing the slides from Iowa counties with heavy wetland determination workloads. This is based on a system developed by the Nevada Field Office, Rich Sims discovered during an office visit. So far, three counties are completed. It takes about 8 days to digitize all the slides from one county.

#### State Secretary Access to On-line Records

Iowa NRCS should obtain permissions to allow state secretaries to have access to FSA 156-EZ online records.

**Solution:** This is taking longer than expected, however Roy Campbell is working with Fort Collins to get the required permissions. Exactly when permissions are granted is out of our control, but we will keep pushing for a solution.

## Secretary to USDA employees: "United We Serve"



Ag Secretary  
Tom Vilsack

Recently the Secretary of Agriculture encouraged us to give back to our communities and serve others by volunteering.

The Secretary strongly encourages all USDA employees to join in volunteer service between now and September 11, a national day of remembrance and service.

At [www.serve.gov](http://www.serve.gov), you can record and highlight what you and other USDA team members are doing to serve others, and in the weeks ahead Secretary Vilsack will be reporting to President Obama what the USDA does this summer regarding our volunteer efforts.

Vilsack says, "I will be following up to ask you to submit your stories, volunteer hours and activities by September 15. Until then, please share your volunteer experiences on the 'United We Serve' blog. Every week we'll highlight individuals and the impact they are having on their communities."

If you give back to your community, let us know about it. E-mail Laura Greiner at [laura.greiner@ia.usda.gov](mailto:laura.greiner@ia.usda.gov) about your story, and we will publish it in the next Current Developments.

## Iowa Conservation Team: Bananas/Postcards Continue to be Popular

For the seventh consecutive year the Iowa Conservation Team handed out free bananas, postcards and water to RAGBRAI® riders needing a break.

Volunteers from the Iowa Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NRCS and IDALS-Division of Soil Conservation also talked conservation issues and showed off interactive displays throughout the week of July 19. Displays included a Stream Table from the Iowa DNR and the Rainfall Simulator from the Iowa Learning Farm.

The team handed out 3,200 pounds, or about 10,000 bananas in six days. The 14-case daily allotment of bananas were usually gone by 10 a.m. Each case weighs about 40 pounds. And cyclists sent out approximately 5,500



Shelby County District Conservationist Rob Lawson (left) opens a water jug for Page County District Conservationist Kevin McCall (right). Both men volunteered several days for the Iowa Conservation Team.

conservation-themed postcards all over the world.

A new feature this year was the partnership effort with Chamness Techology, Inc., of Blairsburg to compost the banana peels.

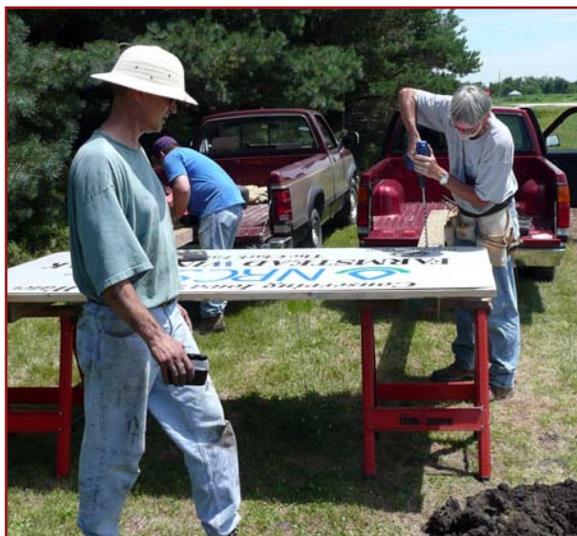
To view pictures from this year's Iowa Conservation Team Tent activities, and to see copies of the 2009 conservation-themed postcards, go to [www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/features/RAGBRAIphotos2009.html](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/features/RAGBRAIphotos2009.html).

## NRCS/SWCS Partnership: Place Practice Signs Along RAGBRAI® Route

Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) volunteers installed six permanent conservation practice signs along the 2009 RAGBRAI® route in southern Iowa on Wednesday, July 15.

Signs were paid for with funding from Iowa NRCS, and SWCS volunteers agreed to install the signs.

Many riders reported seeing the signs and commented on them at the Iowa Conservation Team Tent.



SWCS volunteers (from left) Mark Fehseke, Jeff Matthias and Duane Miller install a farmstead windbreak sign along the RAGBRAI® route on July 15.

Photos by Mike Sucik.

## RC&D Donates DVD's for: Ag Education



The Missouri and Mississippi (M&M) Divide Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) in Carroll recently donated 235 agricultural education DVD's to the Iowa Association of Agricultural Educators so each high school Vocational Agriculture teacher in Iowa has a copy.

Patty Axman from the M&M Divide RC&D attended their conference June 23 in Ames to demonstrate the educational value of these agricultural animated videos.

The DVD has six parts that explain, in basic terms, the principles of Conservation Tillage, Water Quality Practices, Wind Erosion, Water Erosion, Filter Strips, and Windbreaks. Animation is used in these videos to show the processes and outline prevention of agricultural problems.

The M&M Divide RC&D produced these videos with a grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. DVD's have already been sent to every Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District and every Extension Office in the state.

"The original grant paid for distribution to local soils and extension offices, but it did not cover the voc ag departments in schools. Our RC&D Council thought that was very important and so we paid for that from RC&D funds. I demonstrated the different videos at their statewide conference. We offer both English and Spanish versions to meet the needs of teachers," said Patty Axman, RC&D Program Assistant.

These six agricultural videos are also available on the Internet for anyone to see. They can be accessed at <http://www.mmdividercd.org/projects.asp>.

A seventh video about watersheds is currently in the production stage.

## Effective KSA Writing for: Job Applications

A guide for writing effective KSAs was recently added to the Iowa NRCS Web site, as a resource for employees. This guide provides hints, tools, different approaches,

what to include, and the importances of KSAs in the federal application process. It is available at: [ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/IA/intranet/KSA\\_Writing.pdf](ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/IA/intranet/KSA_Writing.pdf).

## Three New to: State Soil Conservation Committee

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey welcomed Jean Eells, PhD of Webster City, James "Kelly" Tobin of New Market and Sherman Lundy of Cedar Falls to the State Soil Conservation Committee. Eells, Tobin and Lundy were appointed by Governor Culver to six-year terms commencing May 1, 2009 and ending April 30, 2015.

"These members will help the State Soil Conservation Committee in their efforts to continue to provide leadership and guidance to Iowa's soil conservation and water quality improvement efforts," Northey said.

Eells was reappointed and will continue in her position as the north-central Iowa farmer representative. Eells is also a district commissioner, has farming interests and currently serves as an educational consultant.

Tobin was also reappointed and will continue to serve as the south-west Iowa farmer representative. Tobin is a district commissioner, farmer and farm realtor.

Lundy has been appointed to represent the Mines and Minerals industry. Lundy works for BMC Aggregates.

## Earth Team Volunteer Flower Garden: Selected for State Fair

Earth Team Volunteer Bailey Brackin, daughter of Decatur SWCD State Secretary Debby Brackin, planted a flower garden beneath the Leon Service Center sign as a Citizenship Project for the Decatur County Fair, and it was selected for the State Fair.

Bailey, who has Down Syndrome, says the project was something she could accomplish, even with her disability. "I chose that location because that is where my mom works, and they plant a flower garden there every year," she said. "My mom was there to help me when I needed it."

A couple weeks after planting Bailey pulled weeds. She says she goes back about every 10 days to two weeks to maintain the area.

Bailey said the most important thing she learned from the project is that you have to be flexible. "You can't plant flowers if it's too muddy, and it doesn't matter if you end up with two white flowers next to each other. It still looks pretty," she said.



Bailey Brackin's flower garden, beneath the Leon Service Center sign, was selected for the State Fair as a Citizenship Project.

## Fayette County Burn Spreads: Hits Schneider Land

A trash burning blew out-of-control in Fayette County last April, and spread to neighboring land, which happened to be CRP ground owned by former Iowa NRCS Geologist Jim Schneider, who now works for NRCS in California.

Schneider says the fire torched 90 percent (about 20 acres) of the CRP land he planned to burn two weeks later. "I probably won't burn the other 10 percent," he said.

Schneider's brother lives on the farm and says it was fortunate the fire didn't reach the buildings. "The Wadena and Elgin Fire



An April trash fire got out-of-control, and nearly reached these farm buildings on the Schneider farm in Fayette County.

Departments and a neighbor with a disk helped control and stop the fire," said Jim Schneider. "They concentrated on protecting the buildings and used the adjacent roads as firebreaks."

Schneider says field tile intakes melted and had to be replaced, and they sustained some slight fence damage.

## Volunteers Needed for: Playground Installation

Volunteers are needed to help with the installation of new playground equipment at the Lake Geode State Park Beach in south-east Henry County.

Geode RC&D Coordinator Christa Perkins says you can help by actually assisting in the playground installation or by donating water, pop and snacks to volunteers.

The installation is August 18-21 from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. Organizers ask that volunteers not be under the age of 14.

If you are interested, call Geode State Park at (319) 392-4601 or e-mail [ulf.konig@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:ulf.konig@dnr.iowa.gov)

## Restored Appanoose County Wetlands See: Nesting Swans

For the first time in more than a century trumpeter swans nested in Appanoose County, thanks in part to restored and enhanced wetlands and other habitat implemented by outdoor enthusiasts Steve Archer and Richard Doll of rural Moulton.

The swans were released on Archer's property three years ago by Wildlife Biologist Dave Hoffman of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, who coordinates the DNR's swan restoration program. In early May 2009 Archer began to see the swans become territorial in one of his restored wetlands. He saw the male swan chase off Canada geese – a sign they may be getting ready to nest. "(The swans) kept everything else off the wetland," said Archer. "During nesting the male wouldn't let anything near that female."

Archer said the cygnets hatched on June 12. "It took about two days for them to hatch completely," he said.

Trumpeter swans are the world's largest waterfowl, weighing from 25-35 pounds when fully grown. They nested throughout Iowa prior to settlement, but wetland draining and unregulated hunting brought their demise in the early 1880s. In 1993 the DNR developed a plan to restore trumpeter swans in Iowa. And in 1998 three cygnets hatched from a wild nesting trumpeter pair in Dubuque County.

Trumpeter swans form strong pair bonds that can last for years. They build their nests five feet across, which are usually among aquatic

plants. They will often use the tops of muskrat houses for a nest base.

Nearly 1,000 trumpeter swans have been released in Iowa since 1993. And from 1998 to 2008, about 500 cygnets were reported hatched in Iowa, according to Hoffman.

Together, Archer and Doll own about 1,000 acres of wildlife habitat, including timber, wetlands, prairie and pasture in southeast Appanoose County – excellent habitat for trumpeter swans, which gravitate to riverine wetlands, lakes, ponds, and marshes; open wooded regions; and prairies.

The Archer/Doll land sits adjacent to two publicly owned and managed recreation areas – the Sedan Bottoms Wildlife Management Area, 4,400 acres of wetlands long the Chariton River Bottoms; and Rebel's Cove Conservation Area, 4,225 acres of forestland, cropland, grassland, wetlands and ponds in Missouri. "This is a block of area where everything is being managed the same way," said Archer. "We help each other and get things from each other."

More than 350 acres of the Archer/Doll land is enrolled in the



(above) Cygnets hatched June 12th on one of Steve Archer's wetlands in Appanoose County – the first time in more than a century.

(left) Richard Doll and Steve Archer stand by a restored wetland.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts. The goal is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. All but 55 acres of the adjacent Sedan Bottoms area is also enrolled in WRP.

To read more Iowa NRCS success stories, visit [www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov) and click on "Iowa Conservation Showcase."

## After Three Decades: Christensen Retires from NRCS Office

Story Provided by Emma Struve, Iowa Farm & Ranch



Jean Christensen

Jean Christensen retired June 30 from her position as the Crawford Soil and Water Conservation District secretary,

a position she held for about 35 years and only the second job she worked since graduating from Manning High School in 1961.

When Christensen accepted a part-time assistant secretary position with the Soil and Water Conservation District in 1974, in a combined office with the NRCS in Crawford County, she did not anticipate remaining with the job for three decades.

Shortly after she was hired, Christensen was promoted to secretary. In the intervening years, Christensen worked under three differ-

ent bosses, and in three different locations.

Most recently, Christensen worked with District Conservationist Jay Ford, though Ford also has accumulated quite a tenure at the office: more than 30 years.

Christensen said she and her husband plan to travel. "There's some places in the U.S. we've never been," Christensen stated. First on the list to explore are Las Vegas and Washington, D.C.

"Another change I'm looking forward to is spending a summer outdoors," she commented. Christensen said she enjoys gardening and camping with her kids and grandkids.

Though, Christensen admitted, she has some mixed feelings about retiring, a combination of excitement to "call your time your own" and some anxiety. She concluded, "I kind of hate leaving the people."

## The Latest From: LANDCARE

LANDCARE provides complimentary publications, posters and displays with free shipping to NRCS offices. Some samples of what's available:

**Backyard Conservation book** is a 28-page color booklet that highlights 10 conservation practices used on the farm that can also be used in your own backyard.

**Helping You Help Your Land** is a 12-page brochure that describes the USDA-NRCS vision, who we are and what we do, and the role of partners and programs.

**Inch of Soil Poster** provides historical events that have occurred between 1507 and 2006, which is the time it takes the Earth to form one inch of soil.

**Challenging Careers in the Natural Resources Conservation Service** is a brochure that describes the opportunities available.

To order, please visit <http://landcare.nrcs.usda.gov/>, call 1-888-LANDCARE or e-mail [landcare@usda.gov](mailto:landcare@usda.gov).

## Check Out These: Unique AgLearn Courses

AgLearn is more than ethics and security training. This summer, check out some of the unique courses offered. For example, this is a great time to review first aid, health and safety.

[www.aglearn.usda.gov](http://www.aglearn.usda.gov)

A sampling of courses includes:

- First Aid - Basic
- First Aid - CPR
- First Aid - Medical Emergencies
- Heat Stress
- Back Safety
- Fire Prevention and Safety
- Slips, Trips and Falls



## Changes In: NRCS Personnel

*In order of Effective Date*

Name	Title	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Location
Bahl, Douglas	RC&D Coordinator	4/26/09	Promotion	Maquoketa RC&D
Clothier, Jill	Secretary	4/26/09	Reassignment	Des Moines
Groth, Jacob	Soil Conservation Technician	4/26/09	Promotion	New Hampton
Peek, Jody	Soil Conservationist	4/26/09	Career Intern Appt.	West Union
Joy, Carl	Soil Conservation Technician	5/2/09	Retirement	Corydon
Harvey, Matthew	Contract Specialist	5/10/09	Career-Cond. Appt.	Des Moines
Matthiesen, Jana	Soil Conservationist	5/10/09	Career Intern Appt.	Williamsburg
Thilges, Jeremy	Resource Conservationist	5/10/09	Reassignment	Emmetsburg
Tremain, Richard	Public Affairs Specialist	5/21/09	Retirement	Des Moines
DePoy, Richard Mark	RC&D Coordinator	5/24/09	Reassignment	Creston RC&D
Sporrer, Jeffrey	Resource Conservationist	5/24/09	Promotion	Audubon
Belden, Richard	Soil Conservationist	5/31/09	Retirement	Manchester
Frieden, John	District Conservationist	6/3/09	Retirement	Albia
Sperry, Wyatt	Soil Conservationist	6/7/09	Transferred to Missouri	Centerville
Vondra, Paul	Resource Conservationist	6/7/09	Promotion	Allison
Frana, Raymond		6/20/09	Transferred to Corps of Engng in Illinois	Osage
Musselman, Aaron	Resource Conservationist	6/21/09	Reassignment	Keosauqua
Schaefer, Nicholas	Civil Engineer	6/21/09	Promotion	Williamsburg
Sinn, Tangelia	Soil Conservation Technician	6/21/09	Name Change from Luhmann	Clarion
Grabe, Dan	Civil Engineer	7/3/09	Retirement	Storm Lake
Hagan, Judith	Soil Conservation Technician	7/3/09	Retirement	Tipton
Ehlers, Loren	Resource Conservationist	7/5/09	Reassignment	Estherville
Focht, Karla	Soil Conservationist	7/5/09	Name Change from Horihan	Creston
Franklin, Brandy	Soil Conservationist	7/5/09	Transferred to Missouri	Keosauqua
McNaughton, Shane	Resource Conservationist	7/5/09	Promotion	Malvern
Meisel, Lewis	Soil Conservation Technician	7/5/09	Reassignment	Rock Rapids

*Continued on Next Page...*

## Changes In: NRCS Personnel Cont...

Name	Title	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Location
Moran, Timothy	Soil Conservation Technician	7/5/09	Reassignment	Emmetsburg
Nicholson, Renae	Soil Conservationist	7/5/09	Reassignment	Sioux City AO
Anderson, Sarah	Agricultural Engineer	7/19/09	Transferred to Illinois	Fairfield
Crespo-Soto, Arnelis	Soil Conservationist	7/19/09	Career Intern Appt.	Fort Dodge
Hutson, Edward	Soil Conservation Technician	7/19/09	Reassignment	Onawa

## Changes In: IDALS-DSC Personnel

Name	Title	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Location
Hoyle, Terry	Soil Technician	6/2/09	Resignation	Guthrie Center
Williams, Janet	Secretary	6/11/09	Retirement	Wapello
Fine, Darla	Secretary	6/25/09	Retirement	Bedford
Christensen, Jean	Secretary	6/30/09	Retirement	Denison

## Address Changes

District	Street	City
Appanoose	501 N. 12th St., Suite 2	Centerville, IA 52544-1405
Ida	5973 State Hwy 175	Ida Grove, IA 51445-8089
Muscatine	3500 Oakview Dr., Suite A	Muscatine, IA 52761-5807

### Current Developments Stories and Photos

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Greiner at [laura.greiner@ia.usda.gov](mailto:laura.greiner@ia.usda.gov).

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