

# 75 Years

# A Legacy of Conservation

## Helping People Help the Land

# Iowa Current Developments



April 2010, 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."

## A Message from the: **State Conservationist**



*Rich Sims,  
State Conservationist*

NRCS turned 75 years old this week. Formed under the leadership of Hugh Hammond Bennett after the devastating Dust Bowl, our agency helped farmers adopt new crop production methods and build conservation practices which better protected the soil while helping farmers maintain profitability.

Today, our mission remains the same: Helping People Help the Land. We continue to work with Iowa landowners in every county on a voluntary basis, providing guidance on land management decisions through cooperative conservation planning. Although our primary mission is unchanged, the type of help we provide continues to evolve with the needs of our customers.

For example, the EQIP Organic Initiative we added last year is helping organic producers add conservation practices to their operations and assist others transition into certified organic production. And this year, we are starting another initiative to reduce nutrient loading in the Mississippi River Basin. We are among 12 states to offer special assistance in key watersheds through partnership projects.

So, what began 75 years ago to prevent another destructive Dust Bowl and help America's farmers maintain sustainable ag production has evolved to meet the broader conservation needs of our nation's private landowners: improving soil productivity, protecting water quality and providing wildlife habitat. All of which continue Hugh Hammond Bennett's legacy of helping people help the land.

Helping People Help the Land  
[www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov)

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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

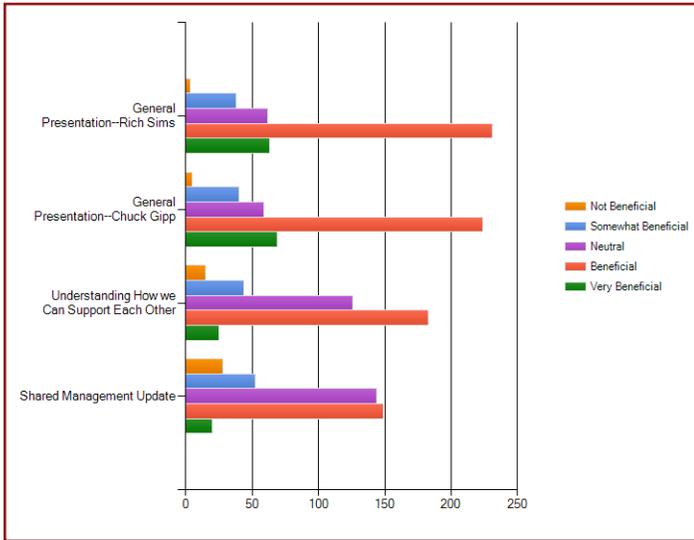
# A Strong Partnership Starts With You: All-Employee Meeting Evaluation Results

• 397 Employees Responded

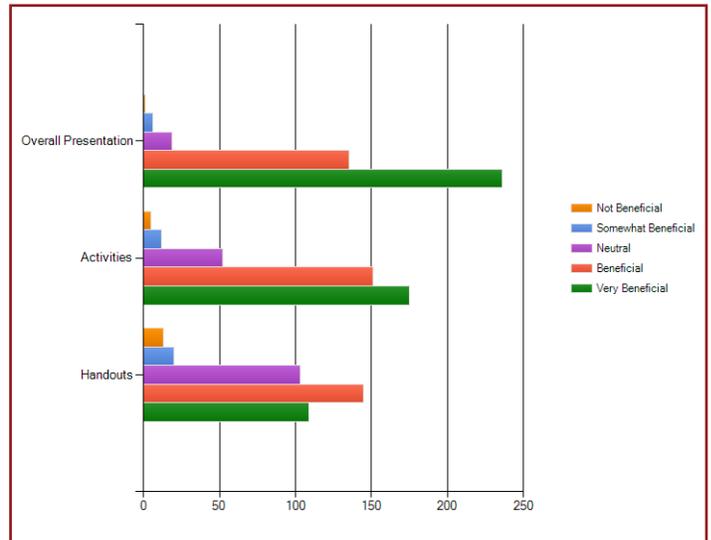
• 9 Questions

• Survey Closed March 8

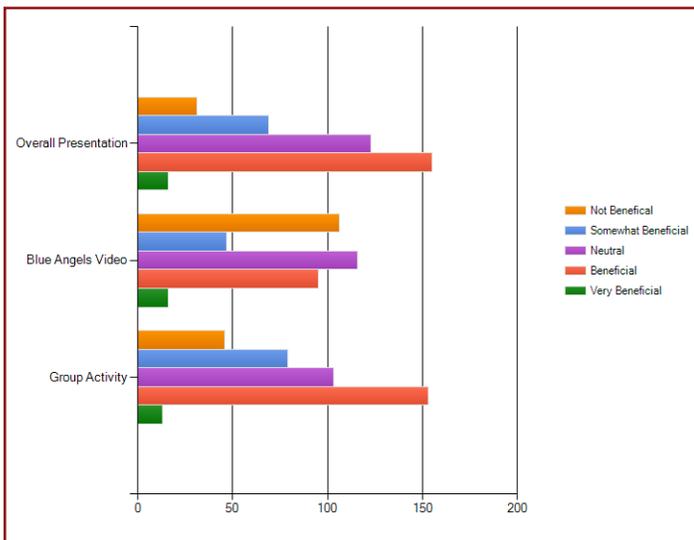
Question 1: Status Update From Agencies



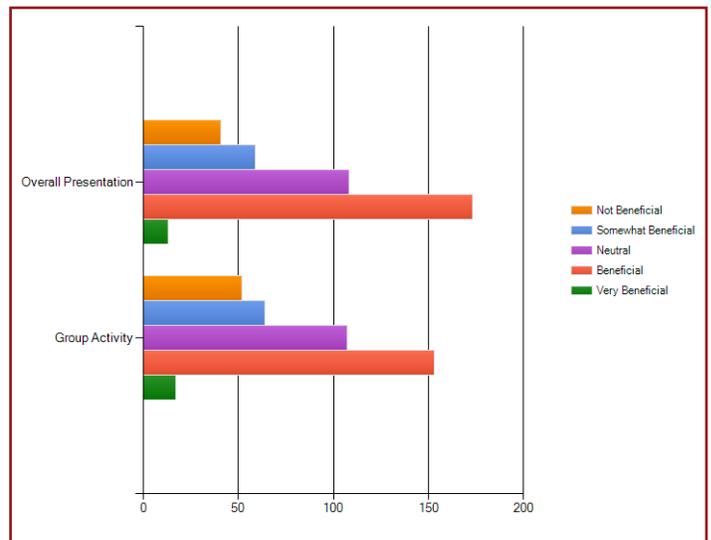
Question 3: Rob Bell - "When We Give a Little, We All Get a Lot"



Question 2: Power of Teamwork

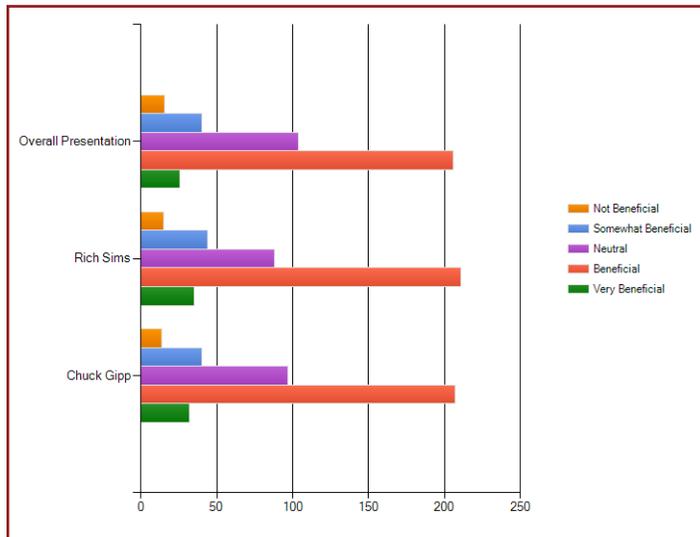


Question 4: Let's Talk About Communication (And Do Something About It)

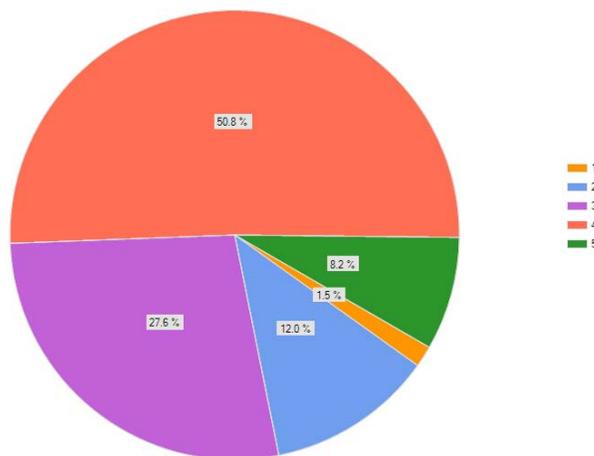


## Meeting Evaluation Results Continued...

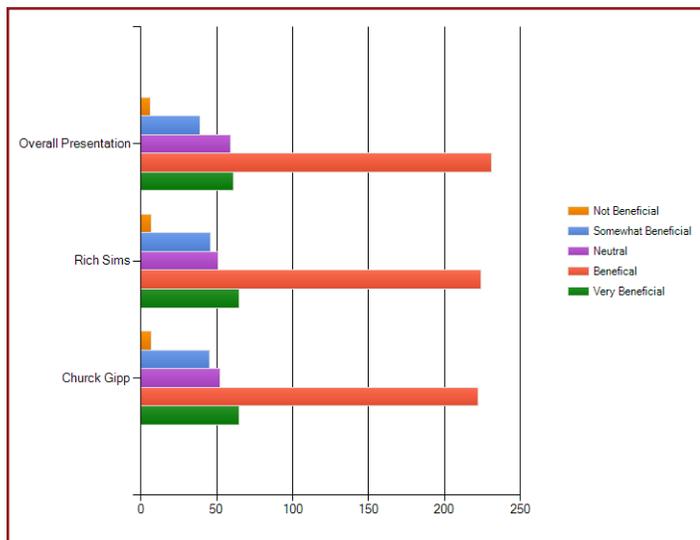
Question 5: Barriers Update



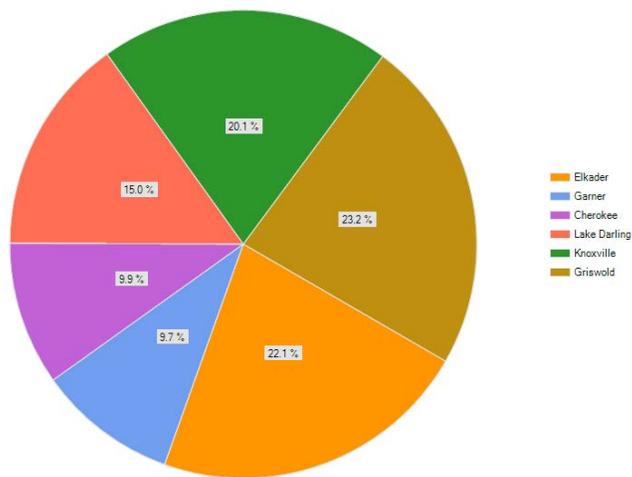
Question 7: Overall Impressions - Please rate your experience from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most positive.



Question 6: Q&A with Leadership



Question 8: Which meeting did you attend?



### Unlocking Efficiency



During the all-employee meetings this winter each table group was asked to work together

to help develop solutions to one of seven barriers previously identified by field staff or the Leadership Team. These issues were: SWCD Annual Plans and NRCS Field Office Plans,

HEL Compliance Planning and Plans, SWCD Conservation Award Winners, RUSLE II and P-Index, Encouraging producers to adopt soil quality improvement practices, Task Tracking System, Encouraging producers to adopt water quality improvement practices.

Employee input from each of the six meetings was shared with NRCS and DSC Leadership in March. A team leader was identified for each topic

and that person was charged with developing a team to review employee suggestions, develop solutions and work to review and evaluate their plans before implementing statewide. Each leader will provide an update at the next LT Meeting in June.

Progress updates from each committee will be provided after each LT Meeting in the following issue of Current Developments.

## SCS/NRCS: 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary QUIZ

### **\*Match the date with the historical event**

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| April 27, 1935     | <b>1.</b> First Conservation District formed in North Carolina; Brown County Soils Conservation District.  |
| November, 1952     | <b>2.</b> SCS provides soil surveys and interpretations to assist states and other public agencies in community and resource planning.   |
| 1985 Farm Bill     | <b>3.</b> The 1985 Farm Bill requires landowners to carry out their conservation plans to receive USDA conservation program benefits.  |
| August 4, 1937     | <b>4.</b> The Soil Conservation Service is established in the Department of Agriculture to help landowners carry out soil conservation practices.  |
| September 19, 1933 | <b>5.</b> National Association of Conservation Districts founded in Chicago, Illinois by district officials from 17 states.  |
| December 23, 1985  | <b>6.</b> SCS's name changes to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to reflect its efforts to conserve natural resources.  |
| October 20, 1994   | <b>7.</b> SCS assigned responsibility for all Soil Survey activities of USDA.  |
| April, 1996        | <b>8.</b> Establishes program that requires Secretary to enter into contracts with owners of highly erodible and other environmentally sensitive land to take the land out of production and put land into a conservation reserve. |
| July 25, 1946      | <b>9.</b> The 1996 Farm Bill creates programs to enhance wildlife, improve wetlands, and address specific resource concerns on farms.  |
| September, 1966    | <b>10.</b> The Soil Erosion Service is established. Hugh Hammond Bennett is appointed first director.  |

**\*For Answers, see 75th Anniversary Quiz - KEY on page 11**

## Earth Day 2010: Neal Smith Federal Building People's Garden



State USDA leaders helped break ground on the new People's Garden near the south entrance to the Neal Smith Federal Building in Des Moines on April 22. (L-R) NRCS State Conservationist Rich Sims, Rural Development Administrative Program Director Tim Helmbrecht, and FSA State Executive Director John Whitaker spoke on behalf of their agencies and then planted a native sunflower. After the ceremony, cake, green tea, coffee and juice were served in the lobby.



The People's Native Garden Ground breaking at the Neal Smith Federal Building in Des Moines was held on Earth Day, April 22.

The garden is located on the south side of the building, next to the loading dock. It will be a native plants and grasses garden.

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack is challenging all USDA Service Centers to establish People's Gardens. For more information about the People's Garden Initiative, visit [www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden](http://www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden).

Contact Jill Clothier at the State Office at 515-284-4370 if you have any immediate questions about the People's Garden Initiative.

## Plant Some Shade: Program Underway Across the State

The Plant Some Shade program is in full swing for the spring season. The Iowa DNR is again partnering with MidAmerican Energy and local partners to offer 6-8 ft. tall landscape trees for MidAmerican Energy customers (Iowa residents only) to plant on their property for \$30/tree. Up to 2 trees are allowed

per household, and interested persons should order ahead of time. People can get more information and order forms by going to [www.midamericanenergy.com/ee/ia\\_res\\_shade.aspx](http://www.midamericanenergy.com/ee/ia_res_shade.aspx).

Events will be held from April 17 - May 15 in Carroll, Cedar Rapids,

Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Fort Dodge, Indianola, and Waterloo. If you would like to get trees or help work at an event, contact Matt Brewer, Iowa DNR forestry volunteer coordinator, at 515-242-6892, or e-mail [matt.brewer@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:matt.brewer@dnr.iowa.gov).

## Earth Day 2010: Prairie Partners RC&D

*Submitted by Robert Moser, Prairie Partners RC&D*

The Prairie Partners RC&D in Humboldt understands that the future of our natural resources is in the hands of our youth, so for the past three years the RC&D and other conservation partners have celebrated Earth Day with an outdoor classroom for all of the 4th graders in Humboldt County.

Before the RC&D began hosting this event, the Humboldt Soil and Water Conservation District presented each 4th grader with a tree each Earth Day. Humboldt State Secretary Terri Christensen went to each classroom and delivered the trees. From this initial effort by the district, the idea of the outdoor classroom was born.

Now, the 4th graders come to a central location and various conservation topics are presented to them. The RC&D collaborated with the schools and other partners to assess interest, and in 2008 the first event was held with 120 students attending from three different schools. Students spend 25 minutes at each of the 6-7 sessions throughout the day.

The sessions for each year have stayed pretty much the same and include: trumpeter swans, water safety, wetlands, raptors, bird house building, Iowa mammals and trees. The main purpose of the event is to



*Kay Neumann of Saving Our Avian Resources (SOAR) discusses raptors with the students.*

increase awareness of the students about all the wonderful things that are around us each day, and hopefully this awareness will instill in the students a will to protect our environment.

The students become aware of the City of Humboldt's fish hatchery and the activities that take place



*Dave Hoffman of the Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources shows off a Trumpeter Swan.*

there each year, as well as the trumpeter swan pond. The partners for the outdoor classroom, other than the RC&D are: City of Humboldt Parks Department, Humboldt County Pheasants Forever, Humboldt SWCD, USDA-NRCS, Iowa DNR, SOAR, Humboldt County Conservation Board and countless other volunteers.

## Humboldt Tour: Six Farms Showcased

Humboldt Soil and Water Conservation District held a tour of conservation practices on April 13, visiting six farms and showcasing 12 conservation practices.

The tour was planned by Bob Torgerson a long-time NRCS employee and current Earth Team Volunteer. They invited the Humboldt ministerial association to join in the tour to prepare for Soil Stewardship Week, April 25-May 2.

The tour featured conservation practices such as water and sediment control basins, grass waterways, grade stabilization structures, terraces, a diversion, field borders, contour buffer strips, habitat buffers, restored wetlands, and a wind-break.

## Miller, Ridgeway: Honored for SEPM Success

Iowa NRCS Special Emphasis Program Managers Shaffer Ridgeway (Black Emphasis Program, District Conservationist - Waterloo) and Clint Miller (American Indian/Alaskan Native, District Conservationist - Carroll) were honored for their dedication and hard work to the NRCS Special Emphasis Program.

Both received their awards at the NRCS Joint Professional Employee Organization /Special Emphasis Program Manager Training Conference held March 15-19 in Kansas City, MO.

According to Miller, each national SEPM picked two state SEPMs to receive the award, based on a point system. "There was only one other state to receive more than one SEPM award," said Miller. "That's something we should be proud of."

For more information about the Iowa NRCS Civil Rights program, visit [www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/about/civilrights.html](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/about/civilrights.html).



A half dozen Iowa NRCS employees attended the Special Emphasis Program Manager Training Conference in Kansas City, MO, last month. (Front, L-R) Lya Hatton, Civil Rights committee member; Lori Schnoor, Federal Women's Program Manager; Aquanda Jones, Civil Rights Committee Chair. (Back, L-R) Shaffer Ridgeway, Black Emphasis Program Manager; Clint Miller, American Indian/Alaskan Native Emphasis Program Manager; and Paul Vondra, Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager.

## Water Monitoring: NRCS Hosts Service Project in Harlan



Photo by Rob Lawson

Harlan Community High School students collected water sampling data in the Prairie Rose Lake Watershed as part of their annual community service day on April 21. Since healthy water is vitally important in everyone's lives, monitoring plays an important role in educating our youth.

The students were trained on correct monitoring procedures. They tested for chloride, dissolved oxygen, nitrate, nitrite, pH, phosphate, water temperature, and transparency. The Prairie Rose Lake Watershed testing is part of the statewide IOWATER volunteer water testing initiative, a citizen-based program managed by the Iowa Geological Survey section of the DNR. Discussions on water quality issues, upland conservation practices, and fish habitat were discussed.

Participants, along with Harlan High School students, included Rob Lawson, NRCS District Conservationist, Bryan Hayes, DNR Fisheries Biologist, Lisa Fascher, DNR Watershed Monitoring and Assessment Section, and David Brand, Prairie Rose Lake Watershed Coordinator.

The Shelby County Soil and Water Conservation District is in the second of a three-year water quality project in the Prairie Rose Lake Watershed.



## Pheasant Fest: Secretary Vilsack Visits NRCS Booth

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack attended the 2010 Pheasants Fest in Des Moines on Feb. 27 to announce a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Pheasants Forever, Farm Service Agency and NRCS.

Vilsack also announced USDA approved an additional 300,000 acres for conservation projects under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). These additional areas include 150,000 acres for the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative; 50,000 acres for the Duck Nesting Habitat Initiative; and 100,000 acres for the Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds Initiative. Vilsack made this announcement at the Pheasant Fest annual meeting.



USDA Sec. Tom Vilsack visits with Iowa NRCS State Conservationist Rich Sims and Area Resource Conservationist Tom Hurford at the NRCS booth at the 2010 Pheasants Fest in Des Moines.

## Partner News

### ISU Leopold Center

An Iowa State University sociology professor has been named the interim director of ISU's Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, following a nationwide search that ended without a candidate being selected.

Lois Wright Morton will begin her appointment on July 1. She will fill the position currently held by Jerry DeWitt, who has served for five years and is retiring after 38 years of service to the university.

A rural sociologist, Morton has been a member of the ISU faculty for 11 years. She conducts research in areas such as farmer decision-making; social connections of people and organizations; leadership development; and how people and communities work together to solve shared problems of natural resource management. With an appointment in ISU Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension, her research is integrated into extension programs. She teaches a course on sociology of environment to undergraduate and graduate students.

### U.S. Forest Service

The U.S. Forest Service has created a Web-based guide for managing hardwood forests in the bottomlands of the Upper Mississippi River System. The guide provides extensive information about bottomland hardwood species that grow in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The North Central Region Bottomland Hardwoods Management Guide can be accessed on the Web at [http://nrs.fs.fed.us/fmg/nfmg/bl\\_hardwood/index.html](http://nrs.fs.fed.us/fmg/nfmg/bl_hardwood/index.html).

The guide contains sections on ecology, silviculture, forest health, economics, management examples, and a glossary. Each section has subsections that allow users to quickly access specific information. Section links provide an overview of the material presented in the section followed by a brief description of the subsections.

## Eric Hurley: Manure Management Planner



*Eric Hurley, Iowa NRCS  
Nutrient Management  
Specialist*

Fifteen years ago I attended a brainstorming meeting in Wisconsin on how to implement a nutrient management plan.

Each of the agencies represented, including Conservation Districts, NRCS, RC&Ds, Extension, DNR, and the Wisconsin Dept. of Ag., was trying to pass the buck to another agency. Nobody felt they had the resources to take on this apparently massive enterprise. The group kept coming back to the fact that nutrient management – integrated planning of soil fertility, manure, fertilizer, and control of runoff and leaching to protect water quality – was a natural extension of the soil and water conservation planning that NRCS and the Districts were already doing.

In the end, a collaborative effort was devised involving all these agencies along with farmers, farm associations, and private agronomists. Though much progress has been made, computer software that would integrate classic conservation planning with nutrient management planning was missing. **Manure Management Planner (MMP, version 0.28)** – sometimes called Purdue Planner – is currently available to be loaded to NRCS computers. This program is designed to meet NRCS standards, including the Iowa Phosphorus

Index. MMP is linked to Customer Service Toolkit so FSA field IDs, field boundaries, conservation structures, and plan activities can be imported.

Some Technical Service Providers are already using MMP for their nutrient management plans and have reported that it is working well for them. I am currently learning the program myself, improving the Toolkit to MMP interface, developing techniques to import data, and creating more local reporting templates. We plan to provide training for MMP for interested NRCS staff this coming fall.

What can be accomplished with nutrient management planning? A lot. A recent Wisconsin study found that with nutrient management planning farmers apply 25 percent less nutrients. My own experience mirrors this with the typical producer I worked with applying about 30 lbs. of nitrogen less per acre, and phosphorus (P) application rates that, over time, will bring down the almost uniformly high or very high soil test P. As a side benefit some of these producers were typically saving \$15 - \$25/acre in input costs and in one extreme case \$60/acre.

There are Midwestern counties where more than 70 percent of the agricultural land is farmed using a nutrient management plan. If we were able to achieve that sort of coverage throughout Iowa, we could make a serious dent in the nitrate and phosphorus water quality issues facing the state.

## M&M Divide RC&D: Wind Workshop

Missouri and Mississippi Divide Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) in Carroll hosted two well-attended wind energy workshops in March.

The workshops outlined the basic physical requirements for a successful wind generation project.

At the first workshop, “the presenters stressed that payback is not fast for wind generators,” said Patty Axman of M&M Divide RC&D. “It gets a lot faster if wind projects utilize the government grants, zero-interest loans, and numerous tax breaks that are currently available to encourage wind generation.”

At the second workshop, Axman said experts discussed these financial incentives.

The wind energy audience had a broad mix of interests. Axman said the majority were private farmers or rural people wanting to investigate supplemental wind energy. She said they also had at least seven town officials looking at municipal utility projects. “At least one school district attended,” she said. “Of course, we also had many economic development people and bankers wanting to learn about the financial feasibility. It was a good mix.”

## Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS): Iowa Chapter News

### Chapter Achievement Award

The Iowa Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) will receive the 2009 Chapter Achievement Award presented by the SWCS Board of Directors at a July 20 luncheon at this year's Annual Conference in St. Louis.

The Chapter is being recognized for the creative way they get their conservation message out to an audience - through the Iowa Conservation Team tent on RAGBRAI (Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa).

The Iowa Chapter of SWCS annually partners with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation (IDALS-DSC) and Iowa NRCS to form the Iowa Conservation Team. The partnership hands out free bananas and water to cyclists each day along the route, as well as conservation-themed postcards to send to friends and family. They also provide other conservation education information and displays.

### SWCS Chapter Volunteers at IPTV

On March 13, Iowa Chapter members came from across the state to volunteer their time to answer phones during Iowa Public Televisions Festival. The Chapter has been participating in this event for nearly 10 years.



Members of the Iowa Chapter of the SWCS take calls to help raise funds for Iowa Public Television.

During their shift, 334 pledges were taken from across the state and neighboring states totaling \$49,420. The chapter members participating had a great time!



### Fabric Checks: Area 4 Producing DVD

Staff from Area 4 and the State Office are creating a DVD to help train producers on the benefits of fabric checks following installation of small grassed waterways.

Area Resource Conservationist Tom Hurford and East Pottawattamie District Conservationist Greg Mathis spearheaded the project. "We are

going to have the DVD completed by our June no-till field day," said Mathis. The practice is required on all grassed waterway installations in the East Pottawattamie Soil and Water Conservation District, and they have seen great results.

Fabric Checks help control ephemeral gully after waterways are newly constructed - when they are most susceptible.

*Jon Anderson from ISU Extension videotapes Tom Hurford for a DVD promoting fabric checks for small grassed waterways.*

## Changes In: NRCS Personnel

*In order of Effective Date*

Name	Title	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Location
Selky, Daniel	Area Easement Specialist	2/14/10	Reassignment	Garner
Schaefers, Michelle	District Conservationist	2/14/10	Career Appt.	West Union
Pierce, Bonnie	Soil Conservation Tech.	2/14/10	Retirement	Malvern
Bolton, Frederick	Soil Conservation Tech.	2/14/10	Retirement	Sidney
Reinders, Gary	Soil Conservation Tech.	2/14/10	Retirement	Orange City
Pearson, Elizabeth	Soil Scientist	2/28/10	Separation	Waverly Soils
Hammerly, John	Soil Scientist	3/13/10	Conv. to Career Cond. Appt.	Atlantic Soils
Jensen, George	Soil Conservation Tech.	3/13/10	Promotion	Winterset
Eischeid, Scott	Resource Conservationist	3/14/10	Promotion	Corning
Wells, Linda	Human Resources Asst.	3/14/10	Promotion	Des Moines
Miller, Paul	Asst. State Conserv. (FO)	3/14/10	Promotion NTE 5/14/10	Atlantic Area
Schwalbe, Lori	Soil Conservation Tech.	3/14/10	Reassignment	Albia
Johnson, Douglas	Resource Conservationist	3/14/10	Reassignment	Davenport
Meyer-Dideriksen, Tanya	RC&D Coordinator	3/14/10	Reassignment	Amana RC&D
Webster, Michael	Natural Resource Spec.	3/14/10	Reassignment	New Hampton
McReynolds, Melinda	Soil Conservation Tech.	3/14/10	Name Change from Tague	Marshalltown
Ries, Shereen	Soil Conservation Tech.	3/18/10	Name Change from Barr	Cresco
Roberts, Mary	Soil Conservation Tech.	4/3/10	Transferred to FSA	Storm Lake
Schaefers, Patrick	District Conservationist	4/8/10	Reassignment	Elkader

### 75th Anniversary Quiz - KEY

1. August 4, 1937
2. September 1966
3. December 23, 1985
4. April 27, 1935
5. July 25, 1946
6. October 20, 1994
7. November 1952
8. 1985 Farm Bill
9. April, 1996
10. September 19, 1933

### 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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