



United States Department of Agriculture

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

December/January 2016

MEET DOUG PETERSON
REGIONAL SOIL HEALTH SPECIALIST
PAGE 6

SCENIC BYWAY
HIGHLIGHTS CONSERVATION
PAGE 8

NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE

www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov



WISHING YOU A
HAPPY *new* YEAR
FILLED WITH GREAT CONSERVATION





WHAT'S INSIDE?

- 3 Message from State Conservationist Kurt Simon
- 4 CEAP Update
- Then and Now: What's a ton of manure worth?
- 5 Back In the Day Photo
- Retirement Contact
- Conservation Client Gateway Tip
- 6 Employee Spotlight: Doug Peterson
- Homeland Security: New Advisory System
- 7 Spotlight Video: Soil Health Style
- HR Corner: Active Shooter Info
- 8 Yolanda's Pink Team Shares Support
- Conservation Highlighted on Iowa Valley Scenic Byway
- 9 Rocking the Mocs in the State Office
- Hatch Act Social Media Dos and Don'ts
- 10 Chicken Ranching and Herd Health
- 11 NRCS Personnel Actions/DSCWQ Personnel Actions
- Indianola Fire Safety

a **Message**
from the
State Conservationist



Kurt Simon,
State Conservationist

Looking Forward

I feel honored to be part of the Team in Iowa and look forward to serving as your State Conservationist. Hugh Hammond Bennett, the first Chief of the Soil Conservation Service once said: "If we take care of the land, it will take care of us."

As conservationists we all are part of a team that continues this important conservation movement. Taking care of the land is core to our mission and why many of us have chosen this as our profession.

This coming winter I look forward to getting out to all of the sub-areas to meet with you and listen about the great things you are accomplishing. I also want to hear about what is impeding our efforts to get conservation on the land and what processes you feel can be improved or streamlined.

We have many challenges ahead of us and that is one of the reasons why NRCS is transitioning into a conservation planning first approach. As State Conservationist, I look forward to assisting us through this transition and to continue expanding our efforts on Soil Health and the benefits it can bring to on farm profitability, cleaner water, reduced soil erosion and nutrient reductions.

I hope you enjoyed the Holidays with family and friends and we will see you soon,

Kurt Simon
State Conservationist

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Current Developments is a product of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Des Moines, Iowa, published bimonthly by the Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Staff in cooperation with NRCS and partner agency employees from across the state.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS STORIES AND PHOTOS

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Crowell at laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov. Past issues can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2_008273



United States Department of Agriculture

www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
210 Walnut Street, Room 693
Des Moines, IA 50309
515-284-4769



@IowaNRCS

An equal opportunity provider and employer.

CEAP UPDATE: NASS SURVEYING FARMERS THROUGH FEB. 2016

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is contacting farmers and ranchers now through February 2016 as part of the second National Resources Inventory – Conservation Effects Assessment Project (NRI-CEAP-2) survey of agricultural producers' conservation practices.

CEAP is a multi-agency study of the environmental impacts of conservation practices and programs on cultivated and non-cultivated agricultural lands. The survey will gather field management data and conservation implementation information from scientifically-selected National Resources Inventory (NRI) points on farms and ranches nationwide. That information will be used to measure the environmental impacts associated with farm management and conservation practice implementation. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the lead agency for the collaborative project and NASS conducts the CEAP survey under a cooperative agreement with NRCS.

"CEAP is a critical tool for quantifying the impacts of the good conservation work done by millions of farmers and ranchers partnering with USDA," said NRCS Chief Jason Weller. "Results from CEAP assessments help to shape USDA policies and practices that improve voluntary conservation delivery and the resulting benefits on the landscape."



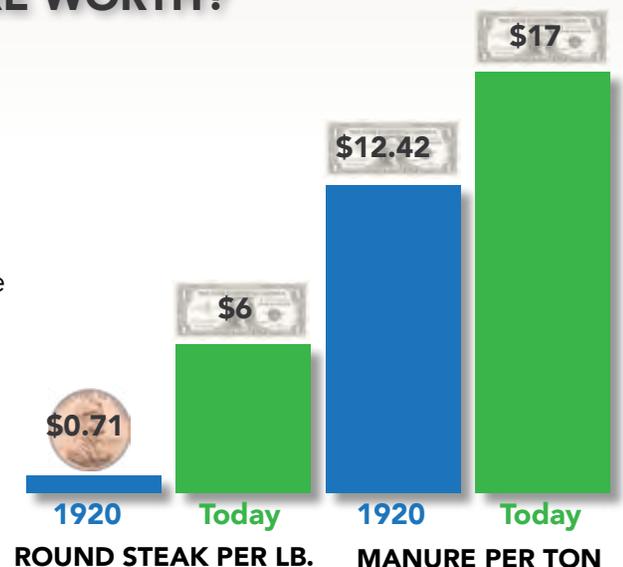
Trained by NASS, enumerators or surveyors from the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) will interview approximately 23,500 farmers and ranchers in 2,150 counties throughout the continental United States to obtain field data for the NRI-CEAP-2 survey. The enumerators will gather data on management and conservation practices such as cropping and tillage methods, pesticide and livestock manure applications, and other field activities. Information gathered from the NRI-CEAP-2 survey will be used to evaluate changes that have occurred on the land since the first nationwide CEAP survey (NRI-CEAP-1), conducted in 2003-2006. These two surveys are the only two CEAP surveys conducted nationwide on cropland. The NRI-CEAP-2 survey will also include pastureland.

The entire survey process will take two years. Some producers will be surveyed through February 2016, and the rest in fall 2016 through the winter of 2017.

THEN & NOW: WHAT'S A TON OF MANURE WORTH?

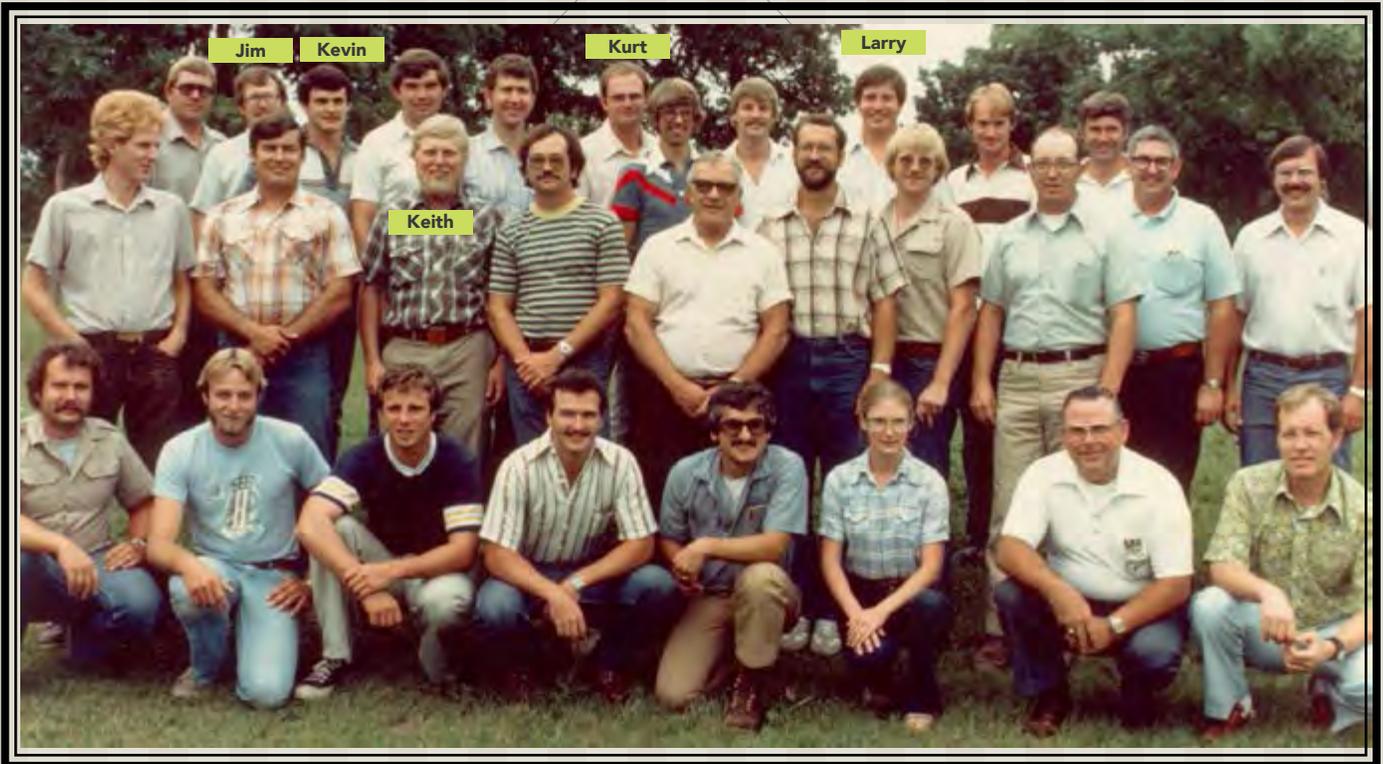
Iowa State University experiment station scientists studied the value of manure in 1920. They based the value on increased corn yields, unlike today's value which is based on nutrient content. They determined that corn yields increased 11.4 bushels per acre by applying eight tons of manure once in a four-year rotation of corn, oats and clover. Figuring corn at \$1.40 per bushel, income increased nearly \$16 per acre. They determined one ton of manure equaled \$6.96, which is equivalent to \$12.42 today. According to NRCS Nutrient Management Specialist Eric Hurley, one ton of cow manure is worth about \$17 today.

In comparison, one pound of round steak cost about \$0.71 (in today's dollars) in 1920. Today it costs about \$6/pound.



BACK IN THE DAY

1981



And then, there were 5... From this training group photo taken at Springbook, the remaining Iowa NRCS employees include, ASTC-Programs Larry Beeler and District Conservationists Keith Krause, Kevin Reynolds, Jim Brown and Kurt Hoeft, (who supplied this photograph.)

THINKING RETIREMENT? HERE'S WHERE TO START

Whether you are simply contemplating retirement or are ready to sign your papers, any retirement inquiries should be sent to **Jaia Fischer**, *business services specialist*.



She will confidentially forward your request to the appropriate administrative transformation team which will assist you with your questions and retirement processing. Jaia can be reached at 515-323-2225 or Jaia.Fischer@ia.usda.gov.



CUSTOMER SERVICE TIP:

Some NRCS customers may encounter delays when signing up for Conservation Client Gateway because their customer information is not correct in Business Partners (formerly SCIMS). They must work with FSA to update this information before requesting an eauth.

EMPLOYEE
SPOTLIGHT

**Doug
Peterson**

Title: Regional Soil Health Specialist,
National NRCS Soil Health Division

College Education:

» B.A. in Agricultural Economics, Minor from
Missouri Western State University, 1986.

Younger Years: Doug grew up on a crop and
livestock farm Newtown, MO, about 20 miles south
of Corydon, Iowa. He still helps his folks run the
operation, which includes 300 head of cows. Doug
also runs a contract grazing operation.

Conservation Career: A few months after gradua-
tion, Doug started working at the Putnam County
Soil and Water Conservation District as a soil scien-
tist assigned to the Soil Survey. He worked under
the direction of the NRCS soil scientist. After this
experience, he became a soil conservationist with
the NRCS office in Maysville, MO in the winter of
1987. After three moves in four years, he became
the district conservationist (DC) in Osceola, MO.
And in 2000 he became the DC in the Gentry/Har-
rison/Worth field office service area. Seven years
later he became the state grassland specialist and

was named the state soil health specialist in 2012.
In his new position, Doug will primarily provide
training and education to staff and producers in
both Missouri and Iowa. This will include field days,
meetings, cover crop walks and other assistance
requested by the state conservationists.

NRCS Goals: Doug's goals include helping all
staff have a great understanding of soil health and
how improving soil health can improve almost all
resource concerns, as well as improve their local
economy.

In His Free Time: In addition to chasing his three
kids (18, 16, and 13) to all their activities, Doug
helps run his family farm and finds some free time
to go hunting.



Doug Peterson

HOMELAND SECURITY: NEW ADVISORY SYSTEM

Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson released
an update to the National Terrorism Advisory System
(NTAS). This will ensure that USDA employees, as
well as the American people at large, are prepared
and informed as we face ever-evolving threats.

Effective December 16, 2015, the NTAS will now
consist of two types of advisories: **Alerts** and
Bulletins. As before, when there is specific, credible
information about a terrorist threat against the United
States, DHS will issue an NTAS Alert. NTAS Alerts can
be categorized as either **Elevated** or **Imminent** based
on the specificity of timing and target information.
Elevated Alerts are more general, while Imminent

Alerts provide more detailed information about an
impending potential attack.

Additional information can be found NTAS homepage
[https://www.dhs.gov/national-terrorism-advisory-
system](https://www.dhs.gov/national-terrorism-advisory-system)



Celebrating the International Year of Soils: Gangnam Style

December marks the last month of the International Year of Soils. The Iowa Learning Farms celebrated soils with the release of a new music video Soil Health Style... it's a fusion of soil science, dynamic biology, and Gangnam Style! And it borrows material from the national NRCS "Unlock the Secrets in the Soil" campaign <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBJDaMzA3W4>.



ACTIVE SHOOTER: WHAT TO DO

HR
CORNER

An Active Shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area; in most cases, active shooters use firearms(s) and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims. The Department of Homeland Security recommends three potential responses when an active shooter is in your vicinity:

1. RUN

- Have an escape route and plan in mind.
- Leave your belongings behind.
- Keep your hands visible to law enforcement.

2. HIDE

- Hide in an area out of the shooter's view.
- Block entry to your hiding place and lock the doors.
- Silence your cell phone.

3. FIGHT

- This is a last resort, only when your life is in imminent danger.
- Attempt to incapacitate the shooter.
- Act with physical aggression and throw items at the active shooter.

Call 911 when it is safe to do so and be prepared to share the following information:

- Location of the active shooter
- Number of shooters
- Physical description of the shooters
- Number and type of weapons used by the shooters
- Number of potential victims at the location

When law enforcement arrives it's important to:

- Remain calm and follow their instructions.
- Put down ANY items in your hands.
- Raise hands and spread fingers.
- Keep hands visible at ALL times.
- Avoid quick movements toward officers.
- Avoid pointing, screaming or yelling.
- Do not stop to ask officers for help when evacuating.

Here is a link to the "Run, Hide, Fight" training video produced by Homeland Security: <https://vimeo.com/73940709>

YOLANDA'S PINK TEAM: GRUNDY CENTER SHARES SUPPORT



This Fall the Grundy Center Field Office hosted a TEAM PINK day for former co-worker, Yolanda Butler, who is currently battling breast cancer. She currently works as a technician in the Marshalltown Field Office but was previously a district technician in the Grundy Center office. Everyone dressed in pink and shared pink food!



Left: NRCS and FSA staff support Yolanda's pink team. **Right:** Yolanda's granddaughter Blessing shares her support. Photos and story supplied by Denise Freeseaman, conservation asst.

IOWA VALLEY SCENIC BYWAY: HIGHLIGHTING CONSERVATION



This 77-mile Iowa Valley Scenic Byway along the Iowa River is anchored by two distinct cultures - on the western end you'll find Iowa's only Native American community, the Meskwaki Settlement, and on the eastern end, you'll travel through the seven villages of the Amana Colonies. The Byway also highlights key conservation practices along the way, and recently added two interpretative panels to explain the benefits of conservation.

The signs are part of a larger project that will include 25 panels installed along ten of Iowa's scenic byways. Topics will range from stream bank stabilization to crop rotation to prairie reconstruction. This statewide project included many partners: 6 RC&Ds including Iowa Valley RC&D, NRCS, Iowa DNR, scenic byway boards, county conservation boards and EQIP producers.

The goal is to demonstrate promising conservation technologies, practices, systems and approaches through these interpretive panels along Iowa's byways. Funding was made possible through a Conservation Innovation Grant and REAP grant.

Above: Iowa Valley RC&D staff Jason Grimm and Jessica Rilling, Iowa County Conservation staff Mike Bode, Shelby Williams and Caitlin Savage, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist Kate Timmerman and Area Easement Specialist Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen (also Iowa Valley Board Member. Right: Close up of the Big Bend interpretative panel.)



ROCK THE MOCS: CELEBRATING NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH



Jean Sandstrom, Civil Engineer, models her mocs.

This November was the 5th year of Rock Your Mocs, a worldwide Native American & Indigenous Peoples movement held annually during National Native American Heritage Month. This year, during the week of Nov. 8-15, Iowa NRCS Civil Engineer Jean Sandstrom and State Geologist Kathy Woida both were rocking moccasins all week in recognition of the event.

Jean's Alaskan Native mocs belonged to her grandmother, Anna Stranksy and fit Jean's feet perfectly. Fred Stranksy, her grandfather, bought the mocs in the early 1900's when he worked as a carpenter in Skagway, Alaska.

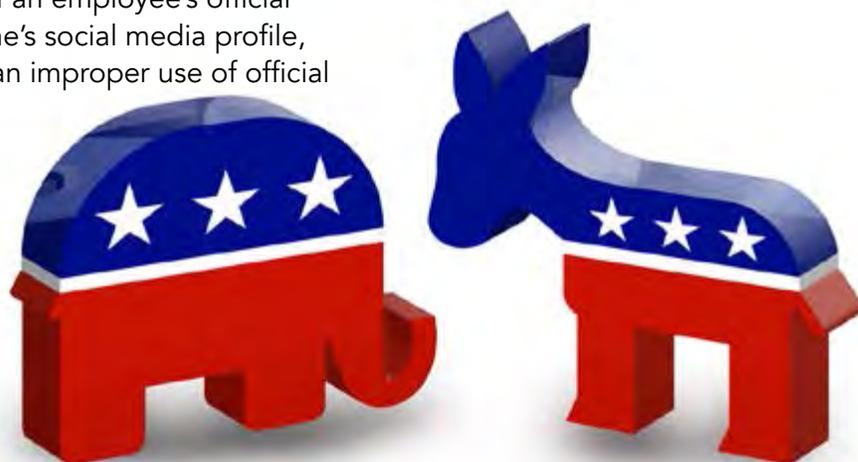
"It was great fun to wear shoes all week that were basically equivalent to beautiful bedroom slippers," said Sandstrom.

For more info go to: <http://heyevent.com/event/fkpspuwmnxcrga/rock-your-mocs-2015>

TO LIKE OR NOT TO LIKE: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE HATCH ACT

Federal employees may express their opinions about a partisan group or candidate in a partisan race (e.g., post, "like," "share," "tweet," "retweet"), but there are a few limitations. Specifically, the Hatch Act prohibits employees from:

- engaging in any political activity via Facebook or Twitter while on duty or in the workplace;
- referring to their official titles or positions while engaged in political activity at any time (note that inclusion of an employee's official title or position on one's social media profile, without more, is not an improper use of official authority); and
- suggesting or asking anyone to make political contributions at any time. Thus, they should neither provide links to the political contribution page of any partisan group or candidate in a partisan race nor "like," "share," or "retweet" a solicitation from one of those entities, including an invitation to a political fundraising event. An employee, however, may accept an invitation to a political fundraising event from such entities via Facebook or Twitter.



CHICKEN RANCHING: MIMICS NATURE AND IMPROVES HERD HEALTH

When bison roamed the Great Plains, prairie chickens and other fowl played an important role as the clean-up crew. They would follow the herds feasting on the larvae in the bison manure.

In Doug Darrow's 160-acre mob grazing system near Oxford his 300 chickens have the same job, but they ride in style from paddock to paddock in an old school bus that doubles as a chicken coop. "This means there are fewer flies to pester the cows," said Darrow. This improves herd health and rate of gain, while providing another income source from the eggs laid by the clean-up crew.

Along with serving as mass transit for the chickens, the bus doubles

as a nightly shelter protecting them from predators.

NRCS visited with Darrow about grazing systems in 2004, said Jess Jackson, former grazing specialist and current NRCS National Partnership Liaison. "Years later when he was ready to move to a high-density grazing system, we met to lay out the fences and watering system, and developed a plan to implement the new system," he said.

About a year after converting 80 acres of cropland into pasture, Darrow was approved for a 2014 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract through his local NRCS office in Johnson County to install fencing and the

watering system. The fencing was used to divide his pastureland into 2.28-acre paddocks. The cows are moved from pasture-to-pasture on a 60-day rotation.

Each pasture is grazed for one day, and rests for the remaining 59. Darrow's chickens follow in the same rotation, but three days behind the cow-calf herd.

The high-density, or mob grazing system, also promotes soil health and nearly eliminates erosion by preventing overgrazing. "With only grazing one paddock per day, the cows don't have time to overgraze the grass and clover pastures," he said. "With all the roots and many of the leaves intact, the plants have the strength to quickly replenish themselves."

And the undisturbed root system of the continuous pasture allows microorganisms to flourish, improving soil health and increasing organic matter, said Iowa NRCS State Soil Scientist Rick Bednarek.

Darrow converted all of his cropland acres to a "mob grazing-chicken ranch," a time-intensive system requiring daily attention. But for Darrow the benefits far outweigh the time requirements.

"I'm trying to mimic nature," said Darrow. The system eliminates his need for fertilizer and other inputs, saving costs, machinery time, and preventing runoff of commercial inputs.



This old school bus doubles as a chicken coop. (Photo: Jess Jackson)

Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Henke, Darwin F.	Soil Conservation Tech	Promotion	11/15/15	Ida Grove MU
Kuhn, Kevin P.	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	11/29/15	Des Moines
Swales, Jacobine Maria Yvonne	Soil Conservationist	Name change	11/15/15	Dewitt MU

Changes In IDALS-DSCWQ PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Davison, Hannah	Soil Technician	New Hire	11/23/15	Jackson/Jones SWCD
Thompson, Jacob	Soil Technician	New Hire	12/4/15	Marion SWCD
Dowling, Monte	Soil Technician	New Hire	12/18/15	Plymouth SWCD

Central Office Changes:

Derek Namanny; Field Services Bureau, Urban Environmental Specialist, 11/20/15

derek.namanny@iowaagriculture.gov

Phone: 515-725-0150

Cell: 515-401-4908



Mark Johnston, of Rural Development, takes his turn discharging a fire extinguisher.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST: SAFETY FIRST IN INDIANOLA OFFICE

Regarding the joint memo USDA Emergency Response – Fall Fire Drill 2015 the Indianola Service Center invited Indianola Fire Department to give training on evacuation and proper use of a fire extinguisher. Each employee present received firsthand experience in discharging a fire extinguisher. Photos and information supplied by Nick Morrell, district conservationist.