



United States Department of Agriculture

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

February/March 2016

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT: TINA CIBULA

PERSONNEL CHANGES: FIND OUT WHO RETIRED!

NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE

www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov



WHAT'S INSIDE?

- 3 State Conservationist Kurt Simon
- 4 Tim Smith Named 2015 Iowa Conservation Farmer of the Year
- 5 Nominations Accepted for Top Conservation Farmer, Other Awards
- 6 Back in the Day Photo: May 1983
Partnership Day at the State Capital
- 7 Employee Spotlight: Tina Cibula
NRCS Chief Jason Weller Visits Des Moines
- 8 Spotlight Video: TJ Mathis Interviewed About Water Quality
HR Corner: Benefits & FOIA Information
- 9 Economics Update: 2016 Crop Production Costs
- 10 New IDALS Field Rep Kate Bussanmas
Three New Iowa NRCS Display Options
- 11 Iowa NRCS/IDALS-DSC Personnel Changes

a **Message**
from the
State Conservationist



Kurt Simon,
State Conservationist

I want to thank all of you who have already participated in the sub-area listening sessions in Areas 4 and 1. I appreciate all the helpful feedback, input and questions I have received. All this information will be very important for me as I look for ways to improve the customer service delivered to the

field office staff.

It's also been great to get out into the field, see the landscape (sometimes through a blizzard), and meet with people face-to-face. I look forward to visiting with folks in Area 2 next, and wrapping up all the sub-area visits by the first part of April.

I've learned some important things about life in the field and look forward to listening to additional

perspectives and experiences in the remaining three areas.

Once we've wrapped up these visits, I'll be analyzing all we've learned, and develop action plans to address items in three main categories: low-hanging fruit, mid-range items and longer-term issues. We will be sharing our plans and progress with you in the future.

In the middle of the sub-area visits, I will be attending my first round of CDI Spring Regionals. I will attend almost all of these, only missing a few during a fly-in to Washington D.C. to meet with Iowa's Congressional representation.

Commissioners and districts are very important conservation partners who play key roles in delivering and implementing conservation across the landscape. I look forward to meeting many commissioners and sharing updates from NRCS with our partners.

Thank you for all you do!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kurt Simon".

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.

TIM SMITH: 2015 IOWA CONSERVATION FARMER OF THE YEAR

From *The Des Moines Register*, Dec. 31, 2015:

As I look forward to a new year in Iowa, I've never felt more grounded with what is at my feet. This marks the end of the International Year of Soils, implemented by the United Nations to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of soil for food security and the ecosystem. Iowans should feel proud that America's farmers have made great strides in protecting soil, one of our most valuable resources.

I've farmed for 40 years near Eagle Grove. The Mississippi River basin's importance to the environment is one reason I joined the Soil Health Partnership, a National Corn Growers Association



initiative bringing together commodity, academic and environmental groups to identify, test and measure practices that improve soil health. This farmer-led initiative collects data to show growers how cover crops, conservation

tillage and nutrient management can benefit the environment and their bottom lines. There are also farmer-led state projects, like the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance, doing great work to improve water quality.

I've made some important changes on my farm, to make sure my farming system is sustainable for future generations. These include:

- Growing overwintering cover crops, like cereal rye, on 575 acres of crop land. Cover crops help store excess nitrates that might otherwise leach into groundwater. They also help prevent erosion and improve soil health.
- Scientific nutrient management, using the latest technology to help measure and optimize the application of fertilizer on my crops. This helps minimize nitrate loss.
- Using strip-till to prepare my land for planting, a less-intensive method of tillage. By utilizing less intensive tillage, beneficial fungi and bacteria can



Tim Smith on his farm near Eagle Grove.

thrive, soil gas exchanges improve, water holding capacity increases and nutrient use efficiency can improve.

- Installing a bioreactor on my farm. This is essentially a trench filled with a carbon source, like wood chips, which serves as a food source for microorganisms that break down nitrate in the water.
- Many of us in agriculture are making progress. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says a fourth of U.S. farmers have adopted no-till practices and more than half use some sort of conservation tillage. Seed sales records show cover crops on about 2 million acres. We want to see these numbers grow, but this shows a strong start.

I believe we need to see significant government policies that incentivize soil health, rather than inadvertently discouraging it. But we should also acknowledge that modern technology has made farming more precise and efficient than ever. While we have important work to do in sustainably feeding and fueling a growing world, I'm encouraged to see more farmers working together to become better stewards of the land, wanting to leave it improved for future generations. I'm hopeful we're not just entering a new year, but also a new era in agriculture.

Tim Smith of Eagle Grove earned a White House Champions of Change award in October for his progressive agricultural practices.

ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS: IOWA CONSERVATION FOY

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey is encouraging Iowans to nominate deserving farmers for the 2016 Iowa Conservation Farmer of the Year Award. The award is given out each year to one statewide winner who is making outstanding contributions towards soil conservation and water quality. The award is sponsored by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation.

"The award recognizes a farmer who has gone above and beyond in their conservation efforts. It is important that we recognize the continuous voluntary improvements made by all Iowa farmers and help raise awareness about the efforts by farmers to conserve our valuable soil and protect water quality," Northey said.

The statewide winner again this year will have free use of a John Deere 6D series utility tractor or its equivalent for up to 12 months (or up to 200 hours). The Van Wall Group and John Deere are providing the use of the tractor to the state winner.

To nominate a deserving farmer, the nominator needs to write a brief letter (100 words or less) and submit it to their local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) office. **Nominations must be submitted by June 5.** Upon receipt of the nomination letter, the District will then help complete the full application.

The local SWCD will select one nomination to advance for consideration for the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) Regional Conservation Award.

"Conservation of our land and water is something that all Iowans believe in, and through the Conservation Farmer of the Year award, more Iowans can learn about the continuous conservation progress being made by so many farmers today," said IFBF President Craig Hill.

The nine regional award winners will then be considered for the statewide Conservation Farmer of the Year award. Representatives from the Department, ISU Extension and Outreach, CDI, State Soil Conservation Committee, USDA NRCS and the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation serve on the award selection committee.

Farmers, farm managers, Certified Crop Advisors (CCAs), agribusiness and financial professionals, ag organizations, and other interested Iowans are encouraged to nominate deserving farmers.

The local SWCD office will have all the nomination details. A SWCD directory is available on the Department's website at www.iowaagriculture.gov under "Hot Topics."

The winner will be honored August 30 at the Conservation Districts of Iowa Annual meeting in Altoona.

Visit the [Conservation Districts of Iowa](http://ConservationDistrictsofIowa.org) website to find additional nomination forms for awards presented to Iowans who are making outstanding contributions to soil conservation and water quality.

Along with Iowa Conservation Farmer of the Year, these awards include:

- Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award
- Outstanding Watershed Award
- Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners
- CDI Honorary Members
- Ruth Wagner Award (SWCD Asst. Commissioners)
- Ken Wagner Award (Beginning Asst. Commissioner, Less Than 5 Years)
- Iowa Conservation Teacher of the Year
- Woodland Owner of the Year
- Izaak Walton League Windbreaks Award
- Iowa Conservation Woman of the Year



BACK IN THE DAY

May 1983



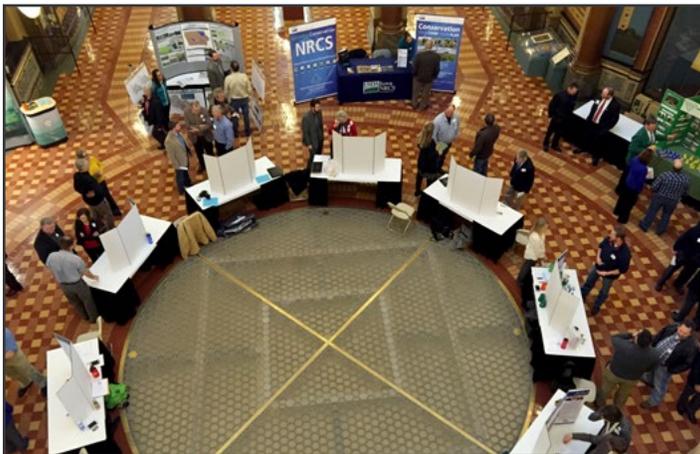
About 35 students from the Creston FFA Chapter helped plant trees on Twelve Mile Lake as part of the wildlife plantings in May 1983. The FFA Chapter saved local sponsors money by doing the job for less than a typical contractor. (Photo by Tom Braymen)

If you have a "Back in the Day" picture you would like to contribute, please mail it to Jason Johnson or Laura Crowell in the State Office, or scan and e-mail a high resolution version to laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov.

PARTNERSHIP DAY: GROUPS GATHER TO ADVOCATE FOR CONSERVATION

About a dozen Iowa conservation partners, along with soil and water conservation districts representing all nine Iowa regions gathered on Jan. 19 at the State Capital in Des Moines to advocate for conservation.

The event included a presentation by group members to the Iowa Agriculture and Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee, as well as a visit from Governor Terry Branstad, Lt. Governor Kim Reynolds, and Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey.



Left: Iowa conservation partners and SWCDs set up displays in the Iowa Capital Rotunda. Above: State Conservationist Kurt Simon takes a few minutes to talk to Linn County SWCD Commissioner Larry Jons at Conservation Partnership Day, Jan. 19.

EMPLOYEE
SPOTLIGHT

Tina
Cibula



Tina Cibula

Title: Resource Conservationist
(Buchanan, Bremer, Black Hawk,
Benton and Tama Counties.)

College Education:

» Iowa State University, B.A., 2005
(Ag Business Major, Agronomy
Minor)

Younger Years: I was born and
raised in Tama County. I attended
North Tama High School in Traer.

My husband and I took over the
family farm in Clutier after my
dad passed away in 2002. That is
where we reside today. We own
a herd of 40 Gelbvieh & Balancer
Cows and operate 150 acres of
cropland.

Conservation Career: I started my
career with NRCS/SWCD in 2003,
working in Iowa and Tama Coun-
ties as a Student Intern. In 2005,
I joined the agency full-time as a
Soil Conservationist in Poweshiek
County, then transferred to Benton
County in 2012. I served as the
Area 3 Business Tools Specialist
prior to taking a job as a Resource
Conservationist in October of
2015.

What She Likes About Her Job:

Every day I continue to learn
something new at work, and I like
this challenge. Working for NRCS
has truly been a fun and reward-
ing career. I have met some of the
best people through this agency.

Hobbies/Interests: In my spare
time I enjoy chasing after our
three young children, showing
cattle, and experimenting with
different conservation practices
on our farm. I have learned a lot
about no-till/strip-till, cover crops,
nutrient management, rotational
grazing, etc. through first-hand
experience and from visiting with
producers in our area. Helping
others is a passion of mine. I love
getting conservation practices on
the ground.

CHIEF WELLER VISITS DES MOINES

NRCS Chief Jason Weller met
with Iowa NRCS Leadership Team
members, along with conservation
partners, at the State Office in Des
Moines, Nov. 20.

Weller was in town to speak at a
conference on soil health sponsored
by the Drake University Agricultural
Law Center. The conference focused
on the relationship between water
quality, soil health, and erosion.



SPOTLIGHT VIDEO

TJ Mathis on Water Quality, KHQA-Quincy, IL, Jan. 7, 2016

Iowa NRCS District Conservationist T.J. Mathis was interviewed by KHQA-7 out of Quincy, Ill., Jan. 7, for the 5 p.m. news about water quality efforts in southeast Iowa and in the Mississippi River Basin.

The interview was prompted by Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack's announcement of a [strong commitment by USDA for water quality improvement practices in Iowa](#).



BENEFITS & FOIA REQUESTS

Where do I go for benefits information?

With the former Iowa NRCS Human Resources staff on national administrative teams, questions regarding employee benefits should be directed to Business Services Specialist [Jaia Fischer](#) (515-284-4525). These topics could include:

- Health Benefits
- Leave
- Life Insurance
- Long Term Care Insurance
- Retirement

An excellent resource for benefits information is available through the OPM.gov website: <https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/Guide-Me/Federal-Employees/>.

What do I do if I get a FOIA request?

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was enacted on July 4, 1966, and provides any person the right, which is enforceable in court, to obtain access to federal agency records currently in existence.



The FOIA will disclose all releasable information, excluding any

information exempt from release pursuant to one or more of the nine FOIA exemptions and any statutes pertaining to specific programs. Congress also passed the Open Government Act of 2007, addressing procedure issues pertaining to the administration of FOIA.

The FOIA officer for Iowa is Jaia Fischer. All FOIA requests should be forwarded to Jaia for follow-up. It is important that NRCS employees or partner staff do not respond directly to formal FOIA requests. All formal communication regarding FOIAs go through Jaia.

For more information about FOIA requests, visit: www.dm.usda.gov/foia.htm.

HR
CORNER

Agronomy 2016 Crop Production Costs

By Alan Lauver, Agricultural Economist



Alan Lauver

Good news for Iowa farmers. Estimated crop production costs should decline in 2016.

Since 2013, costs have declined more than 7% for corn and about 3% for soybeans, with most of the reduction occurring this year. Lower fuel and fertilizer prices are the primary reason for the reduced costs.

Unfortunately, the lower costs are overshadowed by declining crop prices. Corn and soybean prices have decreased 45% and 34%, respectively, over this same three year period. Farmers will continue to scrutinize their production costs in 2016 because the market prices will likely be below the break-even costs for their crops.

The 2016 estimated total costs for corn following soybeans is \$719.01 per acre (assumed yield of 180 bushels) and soybeans following corn is \$533.30 per acre (assumed yield of 50 bushels). Based on these estimated costs, a producer's total cost per bushel or break-even price for corn and soybeans is \$3.99 and \$10.67 per bushel, respectively. (Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Estimated Costs of Crop Production in Iowa – 2016, FM 1712, January 2016)

USDA projects commodity prices to decline for a fourth consecutive year to \$3.45 per bushel corn and \$8.50 per bushel soybeans for 2016/17. (USDA, 2016 USDA Grains and Oilseeds Outlook - Agricultural Outlook Forum 2016, February 2016) Future expectations are that the average farm price for corn will not top \$4 per bushel through 2025. And soybeans will remain below \$10 per

bushel through the same projection period. (USDA, USDA Agricultural Projections to 2025, Long-term Projections Report OCE-2016-1, February 2016)

Although production costs and break-even points vary from farm to farm, being familiar with the numbers from Estimated Costs of Crop Production in Iowa – 2016, FM 1712, will give you a starting point. Another source of crop production costs is the Iowa Farm Custom Rate Survey, FM 1698, usually released in March. Both documents can be found at the [Iowa State University Extension Ag Decision Maker website](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ia/technical/dma/econ/), or use the crops link on the economics web page: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ia/technical/dma/econ/>.

When working with producers on their conservation plan, keep in mind that you are helping them develop a long-term plan. These are decisions that will get implemented over time. In general, producers tend to think year-to-year, but you need to get them to think long-term when developing a conservation plan.

If you need assistance in interpreting or using the crop production information, email or call me at alan.lauver@ia.usda.gov or 515-323-2726.

**Corn Production
Break-Even Price:**

\$3.99/acre

**USDA Projected
Corn Price:**

\$3.45/acre

2016 Predictions

KATE BUSSANMAS: NEW IDALS FIELD REP STARTED IN JANUARY

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Field Services Bureau Chief Vince Sitzmann announced the hiring of Kate Bussanmas in January as the new IDALS Field Representative for Western Iowa.

Bussanmas started in her position on Jan. 15.

Most recently, she was a Project Manager for Barker Lemar Engineering Consultants in West Des Moines. Bussanmas also served as Marketing Coordinator/Paralegal for the Law Offices of Hopkins & Huebner, P.C. for two years. Prior to that, she worked for three years as Environmental Coordinator – State Revolving Loan Fund for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.



Kate Bussanmas

EXHIBITS: CONSERVATION CHOICES DISPLAYS NOW AVAILABLE

Iowa NRCS has three new displays that field offices can reserve for exhibiting purposes. All three displays feature the new “Conservation Choices” farm illustration, showing best management practices at work.

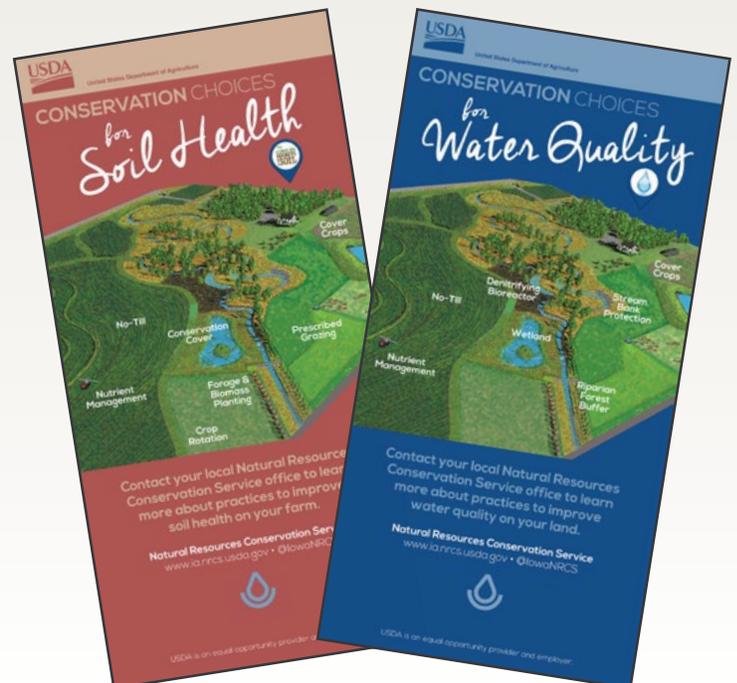


The 6' x 6' tabletop popup is a four-panel display that highlights the 32 conservation practices featured in the “Conservation Choices” publication that debuted last year. This display is a general piece that

could be used at any conference or workshop.

The other two new displays are easy to assemble pullup banner stand displays. One display focuses on water quality practices and the other on soil health practices. Like the tabletop display, the “Conservation Choices” publication would be a perfect accompaniment piece with these.

To reserve Iowa NRCS displays for your next function, email [Tara Kinyon-Anderson](mailto:Tara.Kinyon-Anderson@aphis.usda.gov) or call 515-284-4370. A complete list of Iowa NRCS displays is also available [online](#). And, don't forget there are many other exhibits available through the [NRCS Distribution Center](#) (888-526-3227).



Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Adkins, Martin	Assistant State Conservationist (Partnerships)	Realignment	11/12/15	Des Moines
Henke, Darwin	Soil Conservation Technician	Promotion	11/15/15	Ida Grove MU
Swailles, Jacobine Maria Yvonne	Soil Conservationist	Name Change	11/15/15	DeWitt MU
Focht, Andrew	Soil Conservation Technician	Resignation	11/15/15	Clarinda MU
Kuhn, Kevin	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	11/29/15	Des Moines
Buittenwerf, Tamara	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	12/27/15	West Union
Benson, Barbara	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	12/31/15	Sergeant Bluff
Hammitt, Larry	Civil Engineering Technician	Retirement	12/31/15	Area 4 Engineering
Jones, Larry	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	12/31/15	Corning MU
Shelman, Meleia	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	1/1/16	Malcom
Brown, James	District Conservationist	Retirement	1/2/16	Vinton
Falcon, Julie	Soil Conservationist	Retirement	1/2/16	Waterloo MU
Krause, Keith	District Conservationist	Retirement	1/2/16	Manchester
Hoffmann, Marvin	Resource Conservationist	Retirement	1/3/16	Area 2 Agronomic
Kovarna, James	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	1/3/16	Sergeant Bluff
Henderson, Michael	Area Agronomist	Reassignment	1/24/16	Area 1 Agronomic
Plath, Allen	Soil Conservationist	Retirement	1/31/16	Onawa
Sass, Neil	Area Agronomist	Promotion	2/7/16	Area 3 Agronomic
Zmoos, Nicholas	Soil Conservation Technician	Promotion	2/7/16	Elkader

Changes In IDALS-DSC PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
McCarthy, Ron	Conservation Technician	Retirement	1/4/16	Dubuque
Maxwell, Leslie	Conservation Assistant	Resigned	1/14/16	Williamsburg
Bussanmas, Kate	Field Representative	New Hire	1/15/16	Des Moines
VanDenHuevel, Lacey	Conservation Assistant	Resigned	1/22/16	Oskaloosa