

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

JULY 2013



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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NO-TILL CORN
ALLAMAKEE CO.

A Message from the: **State Conservationist**



Jay Mar,
State Conservationist

LEADERS: PAST AND PRESENT

Tama Jim: Over the weekend I attended a museum dedication in Traer for “Tama Jim Wilson,” past US Secretary of Agriculture (1901-1909). Many of his descents attended, and the proud community showed their support as Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Senator Charles Grassley, and Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey paid tribute to the legacy of this man who is historically known for his common sense approach to building a stronger USDA, and a Department based on science.

Wilson exemplified character, integrity, and a vision for a Nation driven on strong agriculture. His accomplishments contributed to the strength of USDA, and his legacy is honored by the USDA building in Washington D.C. and the notable Wilson Arch.

Problem Solvers: Secretary Vilsack recently highlighted the importance of creativity in promoting and delivering USDA assistance. He complimented NRCS, saying Congress recognizes us as an agency of “problem solvers” making progress during a time of limited resources. He urges us to continue to challenge the status quo, to not settle for mediocrity, to continue to strive for more effective and efficient means of delivering assistance, to be effective sellers during unprecedented times of unsure legislative and budgetary support.

As USDA employees, we should be proud of these two lowans. Two leaders, both during challenging times not settling for complacency, but looking at opportunities to be better through hard work, dedication and the mind-set that we all have the capacity to make change.

Chapman: On a sad note, we recently lost one of our very own, Scott Chapman, soil conservationist in Crawford County. I wish I could have gotten to know him better. What I do know is that he dedicated his life to his family, agriculture, and 26 years of conservation. His life’s work was clearly for a better future. He demonstrated creativity, hard work, and dedication until the day he was called away. His vision will be honored by the family, friends and the producers he impacted and the land will forever honor his legacy.

You see people are not born leaders; they become leaders through passion, vision, and a dedication towards making our world a better place.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jay F. Mar".

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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



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United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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STRIPs: Iowa Farmer Adds Prairie to Cropland Acres

Iowa farmer Seth Watkins is blazing the trail with a new conservation practice to reduce soil loss and improve water quality: seeding strips of native prairie into cropland on his farm.

Planting prairie strips in row-cropped fields is a conservation approach pioneered by the Science-based Trials of Row crops Integrated with Prairies (STRIPs) Research Team at Iowa State University. Watkins seeded eight acres in a 50-acre field with prairie on June 27, becoming one of the first Iowa farmers to adopt this practice.

“Adoption of research is what we’ve been investing in and waiting for,” said Jeri Neal, leader of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture Ecology Initiative that provided initial funding for the STRIPs project in 2002. “We have some practices that make an enormous difference. How can we get them on the ground?”

Watkins runs a 600-head cow-calf operation and grows corn, soybean and alfalfa on 2,800 acres of land that he owns, rents or manages for pasture in Taylor County. He invited members of the STRIPs Research Team to visit his operation last summer to hear their advice about how to plant prairie strips on the land under his care. Doug Davenport, a Natural Resources Conservation Service



Research indicates native prairie plants slow surface runoff and hold soil in place better than brome or other cool-season plantings.

(NRCS) district conservationist, arranged the collaboration.

Davenport called the prairie strips “a new opportunity” for farmers. “We’ve never had the best land use be something people could actually make a living doing,” he said.

Research conducted by the STRIPs team at the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge showed that planting 10 to 20 percent of a watershed in native prairie reduces the amount of sediment leaving the watershed by more than 90 percent. Nitrate and phosphorus movement also decreases, protecting the quality of nearby waterways.

The deep roots and stiff, upright stems of native prairie plants slow surface runoff and hold soil in place more effectively than cool-season plantings such as brome,

and also create better wildlife habitat. Even small patches of prairie have the potential to greatly improve a farm’s resilience to extreme climatic events, such as heavy rainfall and flooding.

On the hilly farmland where Watkins seeded prairie strips, deep ruts and an algae-choked pond showed evidence of erosion and runoff from very wet spring weather. “My hope is that if the strips work as well as I believe the ruts will go away and the pond will be clear again,” he said.

STRIPs researchers will help Watkins monitor the effect of the new prairie strips on soil, water and wildlife. “My gut tells me it’s a good practice,” Watkins said. “If other people are going to buy in, they’re going to need some hard data.”

Bringing Back Wetlands: Iowa NRCS Celebrates 165,000 WRP Acres



NRCS Resource Conservationist Jay Jung is interviewed by a KIMT TV3 (Mason City) reporter prior to an event near Charles City celebrating 165,000 Iowa acres enrolled in WRP.

NRCS along with Iowa conservation partners celebrated Iowa landowners enrolling 165,000 acres into the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) at an event on July 9 at the Savage Family WRP easement north of Charles City.

Bringing back wetlands is at the forefront of reducing nutrient loading into Iowa's water bodies and adding wildlife habitat across the state.

By the 1980s Iowa lost more than 95 percent of the wetlands which naturally dominated much of the Iowa landscape, serving as nature's sponge to recycle nutrients, recharge groundwater and reduce flooding. Nearly 20 years ago, the NRCS began helping Iowa landowners bring back wetlands through a variety of USDA easement programs.

Since then, Iowa landowners have enrolled 165,000 acres into permanent easements, protecting and restoring wetlands across the state, according to State Conservationist Jay Mar. "Since 1994, USDA has invested more than \$300 million in Iowa through a variety of programs including the Wetlands Reserve Program, Emergency Wetlands Reserve Program

(EWP) and Emergency Watershed Protection Program-Flood Plain Easements (EWPP-FPE)," he said.

Iowa NRCS celebrated this achievement at the Jung and Savage farm near Charles City. Landowner Carol Savage, who lives in the Kansas City suburb of Stilwell, Kan., has owned the 200-acre farm for about 30 years.

To preserve the family farm, Savage enrolled 140 acres into a permanent easement through WRP in 2009. Savage is the oldest of seven Hughes siblings who grew up there. "It was very important to me and all my siblings that the farm stayed in our family in good condition," said Savage. "WRP is a wonderful program."

» More About the Savage WRP Easement

Here's a breakdown of Iowa's wetland easement contracts, acres and dollars by program:

EWPP-FPE	280	34,542	\$85M
EWRP	401	44,610	\$44M
WRP	739	82,956	\$179M

Iowa currently ranks tenth national for the number of acres enrolled in WRP. Restored wetland acres provide many benefits including:

- » Supporting our state's efforts to reduce nutrient loading of Iowa's rivers and streams.
- » Reducing the potential for flooding.
- » Providing valuable habitat for Iowa's wildlife.
- » Adding scenic beauty to our state's landscape.

"None of these benefits would be possible without our conservation-minded landowners. I would like to thank them for their efforts to protect our natural resources and enhance the scenic beauty of our great state," said Mar.

Video Spotlight: Third Whobuddies Book

Check out the latest Whobuddies book, "Top Secret Field Trip" by viewing it online at right. This latest edition features Connor and friends going on a field trip to the Whobuddies' secret headquarters. Hard book copies are available through the State Office.



Cover Crops Survey: Results Shows Increase in Use, Crop Yields

A report was recently released with detailed results from a farmer survey on cover crops. The survey was carried out in partnership between the USDA North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC). More than 750 farmers were surveyed during the winter of 2012-13, primarily from the Upper Mississippi River watershed. Questions on cover crop adoption, benefits, challenges, and yield impacts were included in the survey. Key findings included the following:



- » During the fall of 2012, corn planted after cover crops had a 9.6% increase in yield compared to side-by-side fields with no cover crops. Likewise, soybean yields were improved 11.6% following cover crops.
- » In the hardest hit drought areas of the Corn Belt, yield differences were even larger, with an 11.0% yield increase for corn and a 14.3% increase for soybeans.
- » Surveyed farmers are rapidly increasing acreage of cover crops used, with an average of 303 acres of cover crops per farm planted in 2012 and farmers intending to plant an average of 421 acres of cover crops in 2013. Total acreage of cover crops among farmers surveyed increased 350% from 2008 to 2012.
- » Farmers identified improved soil health as a key overall benefit from cover crops. Reduction in soil compaction, improved nutrient management, and reduced soil erosion were other key benefits cited for cover crops. As one of the surveyed farmers commented, Cover crops are just part of a systems approach that builds a healthy soil, higher yields, and cleaner water.
- » Farmers are willing to pay an average (median) amount of \$25 per acre for cover crop seed and an additional \$15 per acre for establishment costs (either for their own cost of planting or to hire a contractor to do the seeding of the cover crop).

Back In the Day

Iowa NRCS has a strong catalog of old images, from people working to old structures to erosion control practices.

In a new section called "Back In the Day" we will feature some of these images. The first image was taken in Sept. 8, 1937 at the entrance to the Moorhead Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp.

The image shows Uncle Hank, the soil saver, with a weekly comment. The sign board was sponsored by the Moorhead Soil Conservation Association.



What is the Civilian Conservation Corps?

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was a New Deal Program instituted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to help energize the economy and bolster the needs of citizens in the grips of the Great Depression.

The goal of the CCC was to conserve America's natural resources and to help young people get

jobs and get on track. The CCC is recognized as the single greatest conservation program in America, and it served as a catalyst to develop modern conservation. The work of the CCC changed the future of conservation. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the CCC.

For more information, visit www.ccclegacy.org.

Silver Creek: Fish Survey Completed Prior to Water Quality Project

Howard SWCD and Iowa DNR Fisheries, with volunteers from Northeast Iowa Community College - Cresco campus Environmental Studies class, conducted a fish survey of Silver Creek and Minor Creek on May 15. Several assessments were completed within the watershed over the last two years by Neil Shaffer, project coordinator for Silver Creek. This survey was done to assess the diversity of fish in the streams and determine if the streams are capable of sustaining reproducing trout. Water sampling and water temperature monitoring have been conducted by the SWCD to see if the streams can be categorized as cold water streams. Both streams are considered high quality due to the type of fish species collected and the quality of the stream habitat.



Those pictured include: Bill Kalishek, Iowa DNR, Megan Tlusty, Hunter Slifka, Dale Dennler, Theresa Shay, Iowa DNR and Ethan Thies, Howard SWCD Intern.

HR Corner

How does DOMA Ruling Affect USDA?

Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) provides that, when used in a Federal law, the term "marriage" would mean only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and that the term "spouse" referred only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife. Because of DOMA, the Federal government has been prohibited from recognizing the legal marriages of same-sex couples for purposes of Federal benefit programs.

On June 26, 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 3 of DOMA is unconstitutional. As a result of this decision, the United States Office of Personnel Management is now able to extend benefits to legally married same-sex spouses of Federal employees and annuitants. For purposes of benefits coverage, you must follow the same procedures you currently follow when enrolling an opposite-sex spouse or child(ren) of an opposite-sex marriage. Additional information regarding changing your benefits may be found on HR's sharepoint at: <http://tinyurl.com/o8dog4>.

Hispanic Emphasis Spotlight: Sonia From the Bronx

Submitted by Renae Nicholson, Iowa NRCS Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager

As our nation's 111th Justice of the Supreme Court, Justice Sonia Sotomayor is the Court's third female justice, and first Hispanic justice to serve on the Supreme Court.

Sotomayor was born in The Bronx, NY, to Puerto Rican parents. She graduated as Valedictorian from Cardinal Spellman High School, then attended Princeton University and Yale Law School. She credits affirmative action for the opportunity to attend an Ivy League University that she had never heard of prior to contact with Princeton.

Justice Sotomayor served as a judge in the US District Court and the US Second Circuit Court of Appeals. In 2009, she was nominated to the Supreme Court by President Barack Obama to replace retired Justice David Souter.

In a recent *60 minutes* segment, Sotomayor muses that her favorite title, more than Justice Sotomayor, is Sonia from The Bronx. She is an avid New York Yankees fan, having grown up near Yankee Stadium. Sotomayor remains active in The Bronx community. In June 2010, the housing development where she grew up was renamed for her. The Bronxdale Houses became the Justice Sonia Sotomayor Houses and Justice Sonia Sotomayor Community Center. The development houses over 3500 residents. This is only the second time that a housing development has been named after a former resident.

Check out her book *My Beloved World* for a more in-depth look at Justice Sonia Sotomayor.



Donate Food Now Through Aug. 28

Through the Feds Feed Families food drive, from now through August 28 you can help provide healthy meals to families across the country. All food items collected are donated to local food banks to reach those in need right in your community.

"I encourage you to select a food bank in your area that you'd like to support and set up collections and donations locally," said Acting NRCS Chief Jason Weller.

For more information on how to organize a food drive in your state and record your contributions, visit the Feds Feed Families community on USDA Connect. When you're there, click on the "Follow this Community" link in the upper right corner to get email alerts with the latest updates.

This year, USDA is leading the charge for Feds Feed Families nationwide, aiming to make this year the best year yet. The USDA goal is to collect 4.4 million pounds of food for families in need.

If you have questions, please contact Janet Perry who is graciously serving as NRCS's champion for this year's effort at janet.perry@wdc.usda.gov or 301-504-2314.

Stream Sign Project: Carroll County Featured at National Conference

The local Carroll County project that placed 62 creek signs at 31 stream crossings on county and state highways is getting national attention. The project will be featured as a local example of active conservation awareness at the Soil and Water Conservation Society national convention in Reno, Nev., July 22-24.

It will be highlighted in poster form that allows conference attendees to get a brief synopsis of the project and leads them to additional information for implementation details.

"One of the attractive features of our Carroll County stream sign project was that it was accomplished by the cooperation of many groups of ordinary people," said John Klein, local coordinator for the project and an unpaid volunteer for the Carroll Soil and Water Conservation District. "The Soil and Water Conservation Society is mostly comprised of technical and academic professionals or agency administrators. They typically show the results of years of highly technical work in the conservation management world.

"Our project is 'low tech.' It reaches thousands of people daily, and because of the wonderful local partnerships we received, it was also low cost."

The partners in the stream project were the Conservation District, Timmerman Trust Fund, Renze Trust Fund, Community Foundation of Carroll County, Iowa Department of Transportation, Carroll County Secondary Roads Department, Carroll County Chapter of Pheasants Forever, Carroll County Conservation Board, Carroll County Board of Supervisors, and the cities of Carroll, Coon Rapids, Lidderdale, and Breda. The project was conducted in three phases during 2011, 2012, and completed this spring 2013.



"We hope other groups interested in conservation will want to replicate our success in this local project in their county. This will give the project nationwide visibility. We expect to get calls from anywhere," said Klein.

For more information about the stream sign project, or to receive a small copy of the poster, contact John Klein at 712-792-1212, extension 113.

Sign-Up Through Aug. 9

**Iowa NRCS Golf Tournament
Friday, August 23, 9:00 a.m.
Copper Creek Golf Course
Pleasant Hill, Iowa**

Contact Jason Johnson at 515-323-2701
or jason.r.johnson@ia.usda.gov

Practice Makes Perfect: 2013 Conservation Application Training

Twenty-four Iowa NRCS employees and conservation partners participated in the Conservation for New Employees - Application course at Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge in Prairie City June 17-21.

Photos

Top Right: NRCS Civil Engineering Technician and Instructor Curt Fopma (middle) shows (from left to right) Leah Hart, soil conservation technician - Iowa City, Jody Peek, soil conservationist - Creston, Ryan Rasmussen, WC - Ottumwa, and Chase Crill, soil conservation technician - Corning, how to use equipment while conducting some surveying.



Middle Right: NRCS Civil Engineering Technician Ted Oswald (right) works with Carroll Soil Conservationist Robyn Wilson (left) and Ross Frederickson, state technician in Orange City, to lay out a waterway.



Below: Thirty-three students and instructors, including Iowa NRCS State Conservationist Jay Mar (sitting front right), gather for a group picture during conservation application training on June 18.



Summer Interns: College Students Take Central Iowa Tour

About 30 summer interns, conservation district interns and NRCS employees took a two-day tour, July 9-10, across central Iowa, from Ames to Marshalltown, as part of an annual Summer Intern Tour.

1. Tourists take a ride around the Horticulture Research Station (Hort Farm), located four miles north of Ames. The station is located on 230 acres that includes flat areas, rolling hills, and waterways, as well as a 12-acre lake. There are 14 horticulture faculty and graduate students who conduct research on the site. Research projects range from work on fruits, vegetables, and herbaceous ornamentals, to work with trees, shrubs and turf grass. On-site trials include evaluating cultivar performance, crop production as a function of fertility level, weed pressure, herbicide performance, and more.
2. The group took a tour of the Lincolnway Energy ethanol plant in Nevada on July 10. Lincolnway Energy has been processing corn into fuel grade ethanol and distillers' grains since May 2006.
3. NRCS District Conservationist Dana Holland talks to the group about a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Constructed Wetland southwest of Story City. CREP wetlands are helping to filter sediment and agricultural chemicals and recharge groundwater.



Training Sites for 2013 Iowa NRCS Summer Interns

Area	Student	Location
1	Jaime Sandoval	Ida Grove
1	Brayton Grote	Sac City
2	Emily Seidl	Guthrie Center
2	Shelby Erickson	Jefferson
2	Ava Haun	Northwood
4	Gabrielle Shaffer	Leon
4	Matthew Smith	Malvern
5	Ashley Hanson	Tipton

Employee Spotlight: Bryan Shupe

Each edition of Current Developments we try to feature at least one employee. This edition we feature Red Oak's new soil conservationist, Bryan Shupe, who started with Iowa NRCS on May 5.

Background:

Bryan was born and raised on the family farm in Toledo, IL, helping his family produce corn and soybeans and raise beef cattle. "Toledo is located half-way between St. Louis and Indianapolis," he said.

Education:

- » 2006 - Bryan received an associate degree from Lake Land College in Mattoon, IL, where he majored in Agriculture Business and Supply.
- » 2008 - Bryan received his bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, with a major in Plant and Soil Science.
- » He also pursued a master's in Plant, Soil, and Ag Systems at Southern Illinois, where he performed a research experiment on the effects of vermicompost and compost on tomato plant growth and the effects on soil characteristics. "I worked at the campus vermicomposting facility - a worm farm - that utilizes food waste from two dormitory kitchens to produce vermicompost that could be used on campus for research or landscaping," said Bryan.

NRCS Career:

- » Bryan's first job with NRCS was as a STEP student in the Carbondale MLRA Project office where he archived Illinois counties' soil surveys produced by the University of Illinois.
- » July 2011 - April 2013 - His first full-time position with NRCS was in Nevada, where he took a soil conservationist position in Winnemucca. Most of his workload included providing financial and technical assistance for center-pivot irrigation systems, livestock watering facilities, and fence. Bryan also earned experience with the Sage Grouse Initiative, which is funded through EQIP, providing financial and technical assistance to producers interested in installing or implementing conservation practices such as Pinyon-Juniper removal, livestock watering facilities, and prescribed grazing.



Bryan Shupe

What do you like most about your job?

My favorite part of the job is helping landowners and producers improve their operations by implementing conservation practices that also benefit the environment.

Why did you choose NRCS?

In high school I developed an interest in conservation after learning about the devastating effects of soil erosion and the length of time it takes arable soil to form. It was then that I planned on pursuing a career in soil conservation or soil science.

Hobbies:

My hobbies include traveling and photography. Winnemucca is centrally located in the West, so I was able to travel throughout Nevada, California, Oregon, and a small part of Idaho during my time there. Being a mountainous region, I wanted to show my family and friends in the Midwest the area I lived. I purchased a camera, and quickly learned how to use it by photographing the Western landscapes. Now that I have relocated to Iowa, I look forward to traveling and photographing the Loess Hills, the Ozarks, and the Black Hills.

Changes In: NRCS Personnel

In order of Effective Date

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Lohafer, Andrea	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	5/5/13	Sibley
Fischer, Jaia	Management Analyst	Promotion	5/5/13	Des Moines
Fenderson, Kristen	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	5/5/13	Williamsburg
Shupe, Bryan	Soil Conservationist	Conv to Career Cond Appt	5/5/13	Red Oak
Allgood, Stephanie	Civil Engineer	Reassignment	5/5/13	Albia
Grimm, Hannah	Soil Conservationist	Conv to Career Cond Appt	5/19/13	Centerville
Goemat, Justin	Soil Conservation Technician	Promotion	5/19/13	Hampton
McWilliams, Mark	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	5/31/13	Anamosa
Mathis, Greg	Resource Conservationist	Retirement	5/31/13	Council Bluffs
Harman, Michelle	Farm Bill Support	Conv to Career Cond Appt	6/2/13	Sioux City
Koehlmoos, Andrew	Soil Conservationist	Conv to Career Cond Appt	6/2/13	Atlantic
Hanson, Rebecca	Soil Conservation Technician	Promotion	6/2/13	Northwood
Rash Daniels, Peggy	Soil Conservation Technician	Promotion	6/2/13	Iowa Falls
Boersma, Justin	Soil Conservationist	Reassignment	6/2/13	Primghar
Williams, Lya	Civil Engineer	Resignation	6/3/13	Ottumwa
Porter, Lance	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	6/16/13	Epworth
Harris, Aris	Soil Conservationist	Conv to Career Cond Appt	6/16/13	Corydon
Folsom Jones, Sondra	HR Specialist	Transferred to VA	6/29/13	Des Moines
Bueltel, Merlin	Soil Conservationist	Retirement	6/29/13	Ottumwa
Gilles, Chad	Farm Bill Support	Career Cond Appt	6/30/13	West Union
Jensen, Sindra	Natural Resource Specialist	Temporary Promotion	6/30/13	Des Moines
Schmidt, Mark	Soil Conservation Technician	Reassignment	7/14/13	Anamosa
Rogers, Jackie	Farm Bill Support	Conv to Career Cond Appt	7/14/13	Washington
Wolter, Jacob	Soil Conservation Technician	Promotion	7/14/13	Epworth

Changes In: DSC Personnel

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Kinyon, Kelsey	Secretary	New Hire	6/7/13	Adams/Taylor SWCD

The Monona SWCD address changed:

211 Iowa Ave.

Onawa, IA 51040

Phone: (712) 423-2624 (same)

FAX: (855) 246-1549 (changed)

Fun and informative graphics about soil health like this one are located on the NRCS website. Just click "Soil Health" on the home page.

