



United States Department of Agriculture

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Fall 2021

**NRCS NAMES EELLS 2021 IOWA
CONSERVATION WOMAN OF THE YEAR**

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**NATIONAL VIDEO SERIES TO FEATURE
IOWA NRCS STAFF, FARMERS**

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NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE
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Greg Van Dyke harvests soybeans in Searsboro. Photo by Erin Patterson, FSA Program Technician, Malcom

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IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS STORIES AND PHOTOS

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to Public Affairs Specialist Jason Johnson at jason.r.johnson@usda.gov. Past issues can be found at https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ia/people/employees/nrcs142p2_008273/.



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a **Message**

from the

State Conservationist



Jon Hubbert,
State Conservationist

I want to commend NRCS and partner staff on the work you're doing to get conservation on the Iowa landscape. The past 20 months have been some of the most interesting of my life - and certainly my career.

Although Farm Bill Programs aren't always the most important barometer of the work

we're doing, it's impressive to see we provided about \$83 million in financial assistance to Iowa farmers during fiscal year 2021, which to my knowledge, is the second most ever. We did that during a pandemic - without seeing many customers face-to-face. What we've accomplished and continue to achieve is truly remarkable. To say I am proud is an understatement.

It's been a great Fall for harvesting crops in Iowa and I hope the early harvest means we see more green cover

crops than ever growing in the fields. Since 2009, Iowa NRCS has obligated more than \$50 million through EQIP for farmers to plant cover crops on 1.1 million acres. This is a substantial investment! It's arguably the most important practice for helping our customers achieve their long-term soil sustainability goals, however, so we are going to continue to emphasize soil health management practices like cover crops, no-till, and conservation crop rotations.

I want to close by thanking you for your patience as new office and vaccine guidance comes in regarding COVID-19. These are situations nobody has experienced and I, nor anyone else, can predict how long the pandemic will continue to impact our daily lives. My message is to be safe and find ways you are comfortable interacting with your coworkers and producers.

Here's to hoping fiscal year 2022 is a great one!

Sincerely,
Jon Hubbert, State Conservationist

DR. JEAN EELLS NAMED 2021 CONSERVATION WOMAN OF THE YEAR

by Jolene Bopp, Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

In the 1980s, Dr. Jean Eells was determined to find a way to make a living in rural Iowa as a woman interested in conservation. She became the first woman to serve as the Hamilton County Conservation Board Naturalist.

Forward to August 2021 and NRCS named Eells the Iowa Conservation Woman of the Year thanks to nominations from the Women, Food, and Agriculture Network (WFAN) and Iowa State University. The award annually recognizes a woman who has made significant contributions to conservation and the improvement of Iowa's natural resources conservation through achievements on her own land, her career, or voluntary efforts.

"Jean has collaborated with the Women, Food & Agriculture Network for over 12 years, a role that has been crucial in advancing conservation outreach and implementation to women, empowering them to use their voices and their power in seeing the changes they want on their land," said Wren Almitra with WFAN. "That is just the tip of the iceberg regarding Jean's work and impact. She pushes the needle on conservation and outreach, from her farm to statewide and national scales, and our land is all the better for it."

A Path of Twists and Turns

Not only is Eells an educator, but she is also a landowner. She grew up on a family farm where her parents didn't treat her and her sisters differently because of their gender. They encouraged her to work hard and to continue her education. Her brother was incredibly influential in her decision to become involved with conservation. While he was working on his degree in wildlife conservation, he was able to bring Eells to a prairie burn, and her passion ignited.

Today, Eells and her family collaborate on conservation practices on their land. They started changing farming practices in 2015 and asked their tenant to plant oats as a cover crop and eliminate fall tillage. They currently have two small Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) plots, plant cover crops, and practice no-till.

Over the years, Eells has been an advocate and educator for conservation outreach for landowners, specifically women. However, owning her own successful business and earning a Ph.D. was never a part of her plan. There were not many opportunities for women with degrees when she began her career in conservation, so she paved her own way.



Dr. Jean Eells was named Iowa Conservation Woman of the Year for her lifetime commitment to conservation and outreach to women landowners.

One important question arose in 2002, where are all the women landowners, and why are they getting left out? This question became an inspiration for her to earn her Ph.D. To her, one can make an impact and inspire change by solving an interesting problem.

"When I graduated, I was delighted that the Women, Food and Agriculture Network was in a good position to expand, experiment and take a risk," said Eells. "So, we launched some more aggressive programming to help women landowners get more involved in conservation."

Others have told her she started a movement by sharing what women landowners are capable of. She takes any opportunity she can to share her knowledge and experiences with other women. Her hope is women will be given the confidence and be inspired to make changes to their lands and start asking questions.

She continues to serve as a Hamilton Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Commissioner. She has served continuously since 1998. Eells also assists with grant writing and conference presentations for WFAN. She represents WFAN in Iowa on the NRCS State Technical Committee and the Iowa Monarch Consortium led by Iowa State University. Her future projects involve launching virtual workshops for women who own land but live out of state to learn where to start and build a cohort group. She also wants to continue helping female ambassadors share their stories.

COMING HOME: A WOMAN LANDOWNER'S CONSERVATION CALLING



Ruth Rabinowitz

*by Sarah Nizzi, NRCS
Partner Biologist*

When it comes to thinking about conservation within the Iowa landscape it's important to make sure everyone has a seat at the table. Roughly 97 percent of the state is privately owned and over 85 percent of that land is considered farmland. Iowa is known for its corn and soybean production as well as pork and poultry—and nearly half of the

agricultural land in the state is owned or co-owned by women, such as Ruth Rabinowitz.

Ruth did not grow up in Iowa. She was born in Michigan, raised in Arizona, and spent part of her adult life in California, but she has a long connection with the land in the state where she now lives. Her father invested in agricultural land in Iowa and South Dakota and as a child Ruth made regular trips to the Midwest, so much so that the Iowa State Fair became a staple in family life. After his passing, her father's land assets and responsibilities fell into the hands of Ruth and her sister, Shauna. It wasn't until Ruth became a farm manager that it became clear the farms her father had owned were in rough shape. Soil erosion was evident on most of the farms, and this alarmed Ruth a great deal. Adding to the challenges for Ruth was the fact that she was living in the Bay Area of California for most of the time. Managing farms remotely is no easy task, even when the land is in good condition.

Nearly 13 percent of Iowa's agriculture land is owned by a non-operating landowner who lives out of state. The distance between California and Iowa did not allow Ruth to be present for all the farming activities (planting, growing, and harvest), compounded by being responsible for a number of small farms in south central and northeast Iowa, and northeast South Dakota. Nonetheless, she and her sister immediately got to work to improve their valuable land. Conservation practices were considered out of a deep concern about

soil health, water quality, and wildlife. Being able to successfully balance conservation while also maintaining profitability was critical, too. Ruth had run her own photography business for over twenty years before becoming the family's farm manager in 2013. Farming was now her main source of income.

Conservation is essential to Ruth. The next generation is something Ruth spends a lot of time thinking about. She feels a calling to make positive changes to the land her father worked hard to provide for his children. It's important for her to remember to look beyond her own lifetime. She grew up with a large garden and had her own garden in California, but she knew she had much to learn in terms of sustainable agriculture. She knew she would need assistance in trying to make her goals reality. Ruth partnered with a number of different conservation experts to acquire technical assistance for a variety of projects. The NRCS has been her primary technical resource over the years in Iowa and South Dakota, and she also asked Xerces Society for pollinator conservation guidance. Other organizations that have provided technical and financial assistance include Ducks Unlimited, Environmental Defense Fund, Pheasants Forever, and Practical Farmers of Iowa.

Ruth considers the topsoil to be the skin of the earth, and it is a high priority while she walks her farms. Cover crops and no-till practices have been added to some of the farms, but she admits this has been a slow process. She also has implemented twenty-five grassed waterways designed to capture and move rainwater across a field to reduce erosion and keep sediment from being delivered to lakes, streams, or rivers. Habitat and wildlife projects include creating two one-acre ponds, planting field edges with native vegetation as conservation buffers, and managing small and large forested areas to stimulate the growth of native species. One of the Iowa farms is home to a seven-acre project to restore an oxbow wetland, a curving meander that no longer is connected to the water flow of a river. These ecosystems provide important habitat for aquatic species and other wildlife. Ruth is enrolled in eighteen different Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts, a sign of her commitment to protecting the land.

Read more of this article at <https://xerces.org/blog/coming-home-woman-landowners-conservation-calling>.

IOWA TEACHER WORKS TO LEAVE LEGACY OF CONSERVATION

by Kate Hansen, Center for Rural Affairs

For Margaret Hogan of Earlville, Iowa, prioritizing conservation means sharing it with the next generation. A farmer and landowner who implements conservation practices, Margaret is also a science teacher who gets her seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade students involved as much as she can.

After graduating from Iowa State University, Margaret moved back to the family farm and met her husband, John, shortly after. The two have been farming together for more than 40 years. Today, they grow corn, soybeans, and hay, and have about 30 cows on pasture.

Over that time, they have been involved with various conservation programs and efforts, many through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Margaret traces her interest in conservation back to her father.

"Growing up, my dad was always conservation-minded; putting in (perennial vegetation) strips, setting aside acres even before they started paying farmers to do so," she said. "I grew up with that kind of conservation mindset. Then my husband and I bought our present farm, and I decided we were going to call up NRCS."

One of the programs that helped Margaret and John enhance their conservation practices was the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Through CSP, they have implemented cover crops, no-till, pasture management with native prairie plants, invasive species management, buffer strips, and pollinator plots.

"We started with pretty sandy soil that was low in organic matter," Margaret said. "To improve our yields, we started doing these conservation practices. To start the cover crop, we got some funding. Even though there have been years we haven't gotten funding, we continue to do it on our own. In addition to building our organic matter, it also helps us to improve moisture retention."

To involve her students, she hosts field days at the farm and plants multiple pollinator plots and a few hundred trees with them.

Margaret says the students especially enjoyed working on the pollinator plots, for which she gathered lots of support—from NRCS and organizations such as



Margaret Hogan conducts bluebird data collection during a field day in Iowa. The science teacher gets her students involved in hands-on projects so they can learn ways to help the environment.

Pheasants Forever to a local concrete company willing to provide sand.

She enjoys the prospect that, "later in life, (her students will) be able to drive by these pollinator plots, look at them, and know they helped make them beautiful."

Dave Mack, district conservationist for Delaware County NRCS, said he has enjoyed working with Margaret over the years.

"She's always finding ways to get her students involved," he said. "She also helps out at the county conservation board in the summers, and she does a lot of educational programs for kids."

Dave fondly recalls a time she organized a tree-planting effort.

"The soil and water district in Delaware County has a tree sale every spring," he said. "One year, we had more than a few trees left over, and wanted to get them in the ground somehow. Margaret stepped up and got them all put to good use and planted with her students. It was really neat."

CONSERVATION AT WORK VIDEOS TO FEATURE IOWA FARMERS

Five new short national videos will feature northeast Iowa agricultural producers.

USDA national videographers and NRCS staff visited three northeast Iowa farms, Aug. 31 - Sept. 2, to shoot for the video series, [Conservation At Work](#), featuring practices on three Iowa farms.

The *Conservation At Work* videos promote “Real Stories. Real Successes. Real Quick.” They strive to teach audiences the benefits of conservation practices directly from the farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners in a 90-second video.

The video crew visited Blake and Roger Gamm on their rural Fayette farm on Aug. 31. They spent the day interviewing NRCS Area Resource Conservationist Jered Finley, District Conservationist Aaron Anderson, and the Gamms. The Gamms have a wildlife haven on their land, including Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) ground, pollinator plots, and tree plantings. USDA will feature Brush Management, Pollinator Habitat, and Tree and Shrub Site Preparation for videos from the Gamms.



Winneshiek County District Conservationist Todd Duncan interviews for the Conservation At Work video series at the Jewell Enterprises Farm outside of Decorah. State Public Affairs Specialist Jason Johnson helped set up the videos and provided assistance, such as lighting, during the shoots.



On Sept. 1, the video crew spent the day with Bobby and Robby Jewell on their farm north of Decorah. The Jewells enrolled over 700 acres of their farm in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Ag Land Easement (ACEP-ALE) option. Conservation At Work is developing videos on easement program options, and will feature the Jewell farm.

The final day of video production was near Waukon in Allamakee at the Distant View Farm. The video there will highlight lighting system and other energy improvements Ann Deering and her family installed on their dairy.

The videos shot in Iowa are scheduled to be released on [Farmers.gov](#) early in 2022. The Soil and Water Conservation Society released results from the first ever Conservation Practitioner Poll

Allamakee County District Conservationist LuAnn Rolling (right) talks to Ann Deering of Distant View Farm on Sept. 2 about the lighting system improvements they implemented in their dairy barns on their farm east of Waukon.

DUBUQUE COUNTY FIELD DAY FEATURES COVERS AND COWS

*Submitted by Theresa Weiss,
District Conservationist, Dubuque County*

Dozens of local producers, conservationists, and ag business professionals attended a Dubuque County Field Day, "Cows and Covers," hosted by Dubuque County Watersheds on the evening of Aug. 25 at the Smith Farm near Durango.

The event featured Nick Smith of Smith Farm and Jamie Hostetler from Jackson County. The farmers shared how they use summer-planted cover crops to benefit their livestock operations.

Hostetler and his family operate Rolling Meadows Farm near Bellevue, where they raise Red Devons for grass-fed beef and seed stock. Jamie is a local expert in grass-finishing cattle and has been successful in utilizing cover crops and rotational grazing to improve both his bottom line and the soil on his farm. He shared how he interseeds his perennial pastures with annual species and the benefits he has seen in his operation.

Smith farms with his family - father (Jack) and brother (Ted) - in Dubuque County, where they raise row crops and cattle. They have been using cover crops on the farm for about 15 years and grazing cattle on

the covers for the last 10 years. Nick's talked about his most recent experiences with planting a summer annual cover crop mix after their small grain harvest, and grazing their cattle on it. "The Smiths have really done a great job looking for ways to take the next step in conservation on their farm, and they're a great resource for our area farmers," says Theresa Weiss, district conservationist for NRCS in Dubuque County.



Nick Smith, a crop and livestock producer near Durango in Dubuque County, hosted a field day on Aug. 25 about the covers he grows to feed livestock.



Field day attendees gather on the Smith Farm in Durango on Aug. 25 to watch livestock graze cover crops.

The photograph shows a booth for the USDA's National Pollinator Garden Program at the Iowa's Latino Heritage Festival. The booth is set up under a white tent. Three individuals, two men and one woman, are standing behind a table covered with a blue cloth that prominently displays the USDA logo. They are all wearing face masks. The table is laden with various informational materials, including brochures and a sign that reads "BEHOLD OUR living SOIL". The background features large vertical banners. The left banner is titled "Butterflies and Pollinators Moths" and features a monarch butterfly. The right banner is titled "Bees Pollinators" and features a bee. Above the booth, a sign for the "Iowa's Latino Heritage Festival" is visible, dated September 25 & 26, 2021.

AFTER YEAR OFF, NRCS GOLF TOURNAMENT ATTRACTS CROWD

The duo from Waukon - Jim Ranum, retired NRCS Grassland Conservationist (left) and Brian Rodman, Area Computer Specialist (right) - won the tournament by a wide margin by shooting a 6-under par (66). They finished five strokes better than the second place team: Vince Sitzmann (IDALS) and Kyle Ament (Iowa DNR), who shot -1 (71).

SWCS RELEASES FIRST CONSERVATION PRACTITIONER POLL (CPP)

The Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) released results from the first ever [Conservation Practitioner Poll \(CPP\)](#) on Sept. 1. The poll surveyed conservation practitioners in the Upper Mississippi River Basin who provide technical assistance, implement programs, and work directly with farmers to realize natural resource conservation goals on the landscape.

“Recent research has shown that farmers who interact regularly with conservation practitioners are more likely to adopt conservation practices,” says Chris Morris, who served on the CPP planning team as a PhD student in rural sociology and sustainable agriculture at Iowa State University and was formerly a 15-year conservationist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. “With the CPP, we now have a research-based infrastructure to gain the perspective of conservation practitioners on an ongoing basis.”

“Despite the critical role that conservation practitioners play in helping farmers protect the nation’s natural resources, the voice of conservation practitioners is largely absent from policy and program discussions,” SWCS CEO Clare Lindahl says. “The results of this poll elevate insights from the boots on the ground on how to improve the conservation delivery system.”

Key findings from the report include:

- » Nearly all conservation practitioners rated in-person work with farmers and landowners, whether in the office or in the field, as the most effective strategy for getting conservation on the ground, and 92% rated cost share programs as effective or highly effective tools to support conservation implementation.
- » Conservation practitioners are limited in their ability to build relationships with farmers by the burden of paperwork and program administration, employee turnover, inconsistent program rules and policies, and lack of communication and training on new rules.
- » State-level conservation programs were ranked highest for ease of administration, while the Conservation Stewardship Program, the nation’s largest conservation program, was rated most difficult to administer.



- » Just 18% of conservation practitioners indicated discussion of climate change helps get conservation on the ground in the region, but 69% are interested in training and information about climate-smart agriculture.
- » The Conservation Practitioner Poll 2021 Summary Report can be found on the Soil and Water Conservation Society’s website, www.swcs.org/CPP.

The inaugural survey was conducted in spring 2021 by the Soil and Water Conservation Society with funding from the Walton Family Foundation and in partnership with Iowa State University (ISU) researchers Dr. J. Arbuckle, professor of rural sociology, Extension sociologist, and director of the Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll, and PhD student Chris Morris.

SECRETARY VILSACK VISITS USDA BOOTH AT IOWA STATE FAIR

USDA Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack and his wife, Christie, stopped by to visit with staff volunteering at the USDA State Fair Booth on Aug. 16.

One of those in attendance was Williamsburg Resource Team Leader and Navy veteran Kate Timmerman. "I had a lovely chat with Mrs. Vilsack about the USS Iowa and how it's the first US Navy submarine to have female officers enlisted on the crew," said Timmerman. "Mrs. Vilsack is a sponsor for the ship and was very excited to share the information to a female Navy veteran."

NRCS had a record 26 staff members sign up to work the USDA State Fair Booth this year.

This is Vilsack's second stint as Ag Secretary. He served from 2009 to 2016 during the Obama Administration.

NRCS Resource Team Leader Kate Timmerman with USDA Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack at the USDA Iowa State Fair Booth on Aug. 16, 2021.



The Vilsacks posed for a couple pictures with USDA staff at the Iowa State Fair Booth on Aug. 16. Included in the picture are: Bob Wegand (Iowa FSA Acting SED), Heather Bopes (FSIS), Christie and Tom Vilsack, Timmerman, and Greg Townley (NRCS Resource Team Leader, Indianola).

NRCS STAFF PROMOTE SOIL HEALTH, PROGRAMS AT ILF FIELD DAY

Iowa Learning Farms, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and Poweshiek County Soil and Water Conservation District hosted a cover crop field day on Tuesday, Sept. 14, at Roger Van Donselaar's Farm in Grinnell.

Cover crops continue to grow in popularity in Iowa due to their many benefits, including reduced soil erosion, weed suppression potential, reduced nitrogen and phosphorus loads entering water bodies, and increased soil organic matter. Cover crops and no-tillage work together to help increase water infiltration and reduce erosion during heavy rain events. The field day provided attendees best management practice information to maintain yields during the transition to a higher residue system of no-tillage and cover crops.

The workshop began with a panel discussion with host farmer Roger Van Donselaar and Mike Phillips, a fellow Poweshiek County farmer. Roger has been using no-till on his corn and soybean farm for nearly 30 years and added cover crops to the system six years ago to help with reducing herbicide usage and

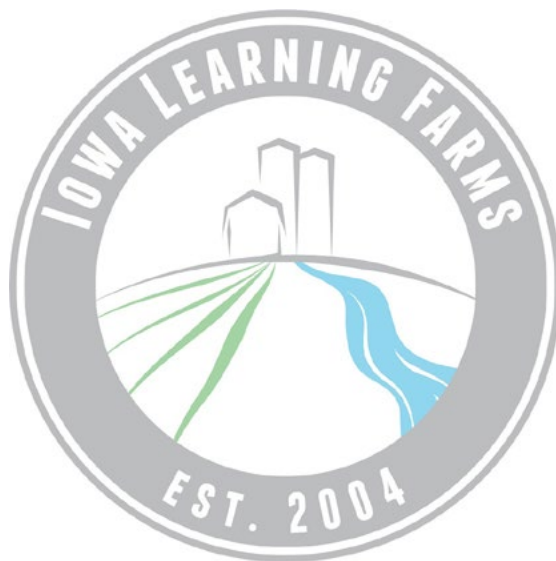
control erosion. As Roger states, "Cover crops do the tillage for you!"

Rebecca Vittetoe, Iowa State Extension Agronomist, provided cover crop species and seeding best management practice information and shared tips for those considering grazing cover crops.

Beth Brand, NRCS District Conservationist in Poweshiek County shared county updates and program opportunities.

Iowa Learning Farms field days and workshops are supported by the USDA-NRCS. For more information about Iowa Learning Farms, visit www.iowalearningfarms.org.

Established in 2004, Iowa Learning Farms is building a Culture of Conservation by encouraging adoption of conservation practices. Farmers, researchers and ILF team members are working together to identify and implement the best management practices that improve water quality and soil health while remaining profitable.



NRCS Soil Conservationist Jack Little (Malcom) shows some local farmers the difference between no-till/cover crop managed soil and conventionally tilled soil during the cover crops field day in Grinnell on Sept. 14.

NRCS PROVIDES REMINDER ON MANURE PIT SAFETY

National media is reporting on the death of three brothers who reportedly lost consciousness inside a manure pit at a farm in Western Ohio. No NRCS employees were involved in the incident, but we are taking this moment to remind staff about the importance of safety in and around these types of structures.

Background

NRCS provides technical or/and financial assistance to many Farms in the United States, an unknown number contain manure pits or tanks. Manure pit systems are used primarily on livestock farms (including dairy operations) to allow for the easy cleaning of animal confinement buildings and the efficient underground storage of large amounts of raw manure. Because large areas of the confinement building can be cleaned with a water hose or other similar methods, such handling of manure is more efficient than the historical method of shoveling solid animal waste (USDA 1985).

Inside the pit, the manure undergoes anaerobic digestive fermentation to form fertilizer. The digestive process can generate potentially dangerous gases such as methane, hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide and ammonia. The accumulation of these gases within the confined space of the manure pit can produce an oxygen-deficient, toxic, and/or explosive environment. Prolonged exposure can ultimately lead to death by asphyxiation.

Safety Recommendations

Employees and customers should treat Manure pits just like any other type of confined space and follow the Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) confined space standards (29 CFR 1926). In addition, employees and customers should:

- » NEVER enter a manure pit unless necessary and only when proper safeguards have been taken.
- » Post hazard signs on all manure pits. The signs should be understandable to workers who cannot speak English or read. Signs in more than one language may be necessary in some areas.
- » Provide a powered, continuous fresh air ventilation system for each manure pit. Ventilation is especially important when agitation of waste is initiated after it has been fermenting for some time. Because this system should consist of both supply and exhaust ventilation, two openings are required in the waste pit. Portable fans can be used if they have an explosion-proof design and are sufficiently large enough to provide a continuous change of air within the pit. An alternative is a ventilation system that

uses a large, high-velocity, high-volume fan of explosion-proof design to force fresh air into a manure pit that has an exhaust vent located as far from the supply fan as possible. All exhaust from the pit should be directed outside and away from workers and livestock.

- » Explosion-proof ventilation equipment must be used because methane and hydrogen sulfide gas can be explosive. The pit should be ventilated continuously. Contact local agriculture extension agents for additional information on ventilating manure pits.
- » NEVER enter a manure pit unless someone is standing by and maintaining constant visual or auditory contact. This standby person must remain at the opening of the pit during the entire time the pit is occupied, have a mechanical device (winch, hoist, or pulley) in place to help remove the person from the pit, be physically capable of using the mechanical device to lift an unconscious victim from the pit without entering it, resolve all details of the rescue plan, including availability of rescue equipment, before anyone enters the pit, and remember that a delay of even a few minutes could be fatal in an emergency.
- » ALWAYS wear a harness or safety belt with a lifeline when entering a manure pit. Secure the end of this lifeline to the mechanical lifting equipment outside the pit. The use of a harness or safety belt with a lifeline is critical because it is the only safe means for a standby person to rescue a worker from the pit without proper respiratory protection (i.e., positive-pressure, self-contained breathing apparatus).
- » NEVER enter a manure pit to attempt a rescue without proper respiratory protection (i.e., positive-pressure, self-contained breathing apparatus). Rescuers who enter the pit without such equipment will almost certainly become victims. Instead, call the local fire department or rescue squad immediately. They have the training and equipment needed to accomplish such a rescue without endangering other lives.



If you have any additional questions, please contact the FPAC Occupational Safety and Health Program: (202-731-0779, marshall.jean@usda.gov).

NEW COVER CROPS APP AVAILABLE NOW

In late July, Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) announced the release of a new cover crop app designed to help farmers easily locate cover crop seed, services and suppliers in time for fall 2021 planting decisions. The app, [Find Cover Crops](#), is free to download and use, and is available in both the Apple App Store and Google Play Store.

"Whether farmers are looking to source cover crop seed or hire someone to seed their cover crop, the Find Cover Crops app can help," says Rebecca Clay, PFI's strategic initiatives and agronomy coordinator.

"Not everyone has the equipment or supplies to seed cover crops themselves – and harvest time gets busy quickly. Having an app that connects farmers instantly to services near them can make a big difference to ensuring they get their cover crop planted during that busy time."

Practical Farmers worked with North Carolina-based Onyx Ocean Technologies, a Black woman-owned mobile app and web design company, to develop the app, which is funded by a three-year Gulf of Mexico Division Farmer to Farmer grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The Find Cover Crops app lets users:

- » Search by location or GPS for at least 44 cover crop seed dealers, seed cleaning and custom spraying services located across Iowa, as well as locations in surrounding states.
- » Request aerial application, custom drilling and high-clearance seeding services right from their phones, or from their computer at <https://findcovercrops.com>.
- » Access advice and management recommendations – including embedded how-to videos – for seeding, grazing and terminating cover crops
- » Precisely identify the boundaries of fields to be cover cropped using the app's "Find My Field" feature, which lets users search for, mark and send images of a field to businesses or to PFI for cost-share purposes

"Parcel data from the USDA has been incorporated for all fields in Iowa so that a user in Iowa can zoom to their field and find its boundaries," says Michael Borucke, data analyst for PFI who worked with the developer on the app.

"The app allows for further modification of the field boundaries to let the cover crop business know which part of the field should be planted to cover crops. The app also includes parcel data from neighboring states."

A modern tool for a burgeoning crop

The new Find Cover Crops app enters the market at a time when mobile phones have become ubiquitous and essential tools for farmers – and when more farmers are integrating cover crops into their farming systems.

Cover crop apps are few, however, and the Find Cover Crops app is one of the first custom-designed apps dedicated to connecting farmers to cover crop services – and among the first to offer geo-location search capacity, real-time USDA parcel data and in-app service request functionality.

"We designed this app based on what farmers have told us are their biggest questions and challenges with cover crops," says Sarah Carlson, PFI strategic initiatives director.

"The Find Cover Crops app will empower farmers with a new 21st century tool that can simplify cover crop planning and management, and should make it easier for farmers new to cover crops to access the many benefits of cover crops."

Dan Bahe, of Stanley, Iowa, operates Bahe Cover Crop seed, which offers cover crop drilling, several types of cover crop seed and conservation mixes (such as for Conservation Reserve Program land) and drilling – and is one of the service providers listed in the app.

"Harvest time is a super busy time of the year, so people can't always make the time to seed cover crops themselves," Dan says. "We pride ourselves on being timely and doing a quality job. I'm excited to have a medium to connect farmers to cover crop businesses and sound advice."



SUICIDE PREVENTION: STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO HELP

By Samantha Gorbet, Ag Engineer, Des Moines

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month – a time to raise awareness on this stigmatized, and often taboo, topic. In addition to shifting public perception, FPAC would like to use this month to spread hope and vital information to people affected by suicide. Our goal is to ensure that our employees, customers, and partners have access to the resources they need to discuss suicide prevention and to seek help.

Suicidal thoughts, much like mental health conditions, can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, or background. While we often think that mental health conditions are a cause or predictor of suicide, it is striking to note the suicide is not limited to those with mental illness. In fact, more than 50% of Americans who took their own lives did not have a known mental health condition.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institute of Mental Health, suicide rates have increased by 35% since 1999. Nearly 48,000 lives were lost to suicide in 2019 alone and suicide was ranked as the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. To put that into perspective, there were over 2.5 times more deaths by suicide than by homicide in the U.S. in 2019.

In recent years, the stress of increasing debt, climate change, natural disasters, drought, and COVID-19 has put an immeasurable amount of pressure on our colleagues, customers, and producers throughout the country. Research has shown that farmers and ranchers had a suicide rate that was, on average, 3.5 times that of the general population.

Pain isn't always obvious, but most people contemplating suicide show some signs that they are thinking about ending their lives. The signs may appear in conversations, through their actions, or in social media posts. If you observe one or more of these warning signs, especially if the behavior is new, has increased, or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change, step in or speak up:

- » Reckless behavior
- » Increased alcohol or drug use
- » Sudden mood changes
- » Anxiety or agitation
- » Giving away possessions
- » Uncontrolled anger
- » Talking about death or suicide
- » Seeking methods for self-harm, such as searching online or obtaining weapons

- » Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

It can be frightening if someone you love talks about suicidal thoughts. It can be even more frightening if you find yourself thinking about dying or giving up on life. Not taking these kinds of thoughts seriously can have devastating outcomes, as suicide is a permanent solution to often-temporary problems.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline recommends taking the following five steps if you believe someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide:

1. Ask - Research shows people who are having thoughts of suicide feel relief when someone asks after them in a caring way. Findings suggest acknowledging and talking about suicide may reduce rather than increase suicidal ideation.
2. Be There - Individuals are more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking to someone who listens without judgment.
3. Keep Them Safe - A number of studies have indicated that when lethal means are made less available or less deadly, suicide rates by that method decline, and frequently suicide rates overall decline.
4. Help Them Stay Connected - Helping someone at risk create a network of resources and individuals for support and safety can help them take positive action and reduce feelings of hopelessness.
5. Follow Up - Brief, low-cost intervention and supportive, ongoing contact may be an important part of suicide prevention, especially for individuals after they have been discharged from hospitals or care services.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call the toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The service is available to anyone. All calls are confidential.

For veterans, you can also reach out to the Veteran Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press option 1, send a text to 838255, or chat with a representative at <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>.

As an FPAC employee you also have access to counselors, resources, and training through the Employee Assistance Program. Please visit the EAP at <http://www.foh4you.com>. You can also access an EAP counselor 24 hours a day at 1-800-222-0364.

IT PROVIDES CLARIFICATION ON XEROX PRINTERS

With all the issues with the printers lately (supplies not being auto ordered, extra supplies in a few offices, and other printer issues) the Xerox MPS Core team have been engaged and are investigating these issues. There are processes in place to investigate and pinpoint why the On Demand process is not working. Here is how the Xerox Contract works:

IT Specialists are the only people allowed to contact Xerox.

The printers work on an "On Demand" system, which means that supplies will be ordered automatically from the machine when they hit a certain low level. These levels are based on matrices and algorithms that Xerox use. Once the supply gets low enough in the printer, the supply is automatically ordered and shipped to the site as long as the site does not show one on hand on the scorecard.

It is not common for the site to have supplies on hand. If the supply does not get there in time and the machine goes down, we have to order the supply and report it on the outage report. When the supplies arrive, they are for the printer it was ordered for (serial numbers should be verified.) The only supply not auto-ordered are the staples.

If the supply/part is manipulated, the printer reports that to the Xerox servers. When that information is reported to the Xerox servers, it manipulates the algorithms and matrices and causes further issues for not only that site but other sites as well. This will cause a delay or cancellation of the delivery.

No manipulation of the supplies is allowed, unless instructed by a Xerox representative. This includes but is not limited to:

- » Emptying out the waste toner cartridge to be used again
- » Taking out the toner to shake it and put it back in
- » Taking out the toners and cartridges to look at them and "feel" if they are empty/full
- » Taking on hand supplies from another machine/agency



As a note: If your office is going to have a large print job coming up, notify your state office and obtain approval to order an extra set of supplies for their large printer. Send your IT Specialist a copy of approval (email is best) and then the IT Specialist can order the supplies. Xerox will then only send a replacement of supplies AFTER the supply on hand has been used and depleted and will then go back to an "ON DEMAND" system.

If your printer does go down because of a supply issue, submit a ticket, then email Jeffrey Tibbles, Iowa GM, with the ticket number for escalation, and proper escalation to IT Staff. Also, if your office does have extra supplies, please notify your IT Specialist so it can be reported.

BACK IN THE DAY

Late 1990s - Early 2000s

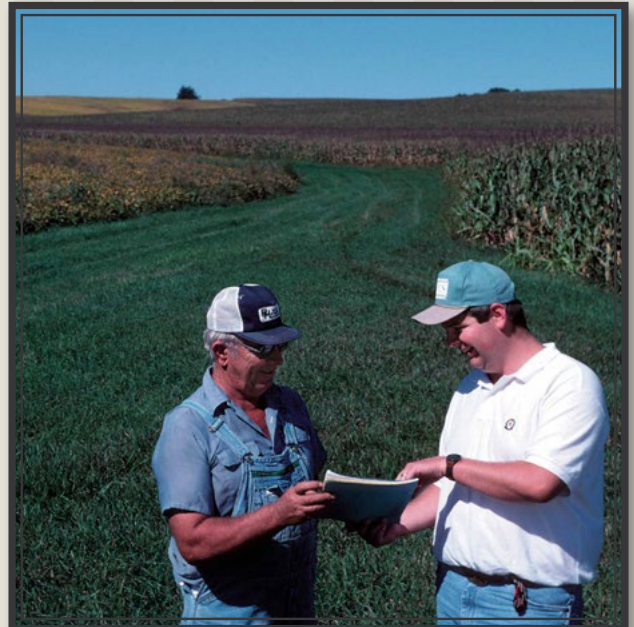
Top Right Photo: Current Atlantic Resource Team Leader Dave York talks to a Breda, Iowa, farmer in the late 1990s while serving as the District Conservationist in Carroll County. "We were just getting our Buffer Program started, which was a huge success" says York.

He says the Carroll USDA Service Center worked in conjunction with staff at Lake Panorama, Carroll County Pheasants Forever Chapter, and the Carroll Area FFA Chapter to contact landowners in the Lake Panorama Watershed (Middle Raccoon Watershed) to promote installing conservation buffers on their land and reduce soil erosion. "In the picture, we were showcasing one of the first waterways enrolled in CRP in Carroll County as part of that program," says York. "We are holding an older, yet still valid conservation plan for that exact farm."

Bottom Right Photo: Current SW Area Program Specialist Kristy York models a new GPS unit in Audubon County. Kristy was a soil conservationist there at the time.

Bottom Left Photo: Along Hwy 30 on the Carroll/Greene County line near Ralston, Dave shows off the technology they used in the early 2000's. "We used the Apple Newton's to collect CRP status review data, among other things," he says. "I remember how the producer sold his cattle and rather than tearing up the pasture, he decided to enroll it into a Riparian Forest Buffer in CRP. Those trees, on advice from DNR District Forester, were actually planted the week of Thanksgiving. The trees quickly became his "livestock" and he took exceptional care of each tree and shrub that was planted."

Dave and Kristy York have been married for 26 years. They have two children: the youngest, Bryan, is a senior at Atlantic and their oldest, Katie, is student teaching now in Shenandoah and is set to graduate from Northwest Missouri State in May.



EMPLOYEE
SPOTLIGHT

**Amy
Fischer**



Amy Fischer

Title: Assistant State
Conservationist for Field
Operations (Fairfield)

Education:

B.S., Oregon State University
(2011), Natural Resource
Management and Applied Earth
Science with a Soil Science Minor

I was a non-traditional student. I decided to go back to school in my late twenties and moved to Oregon to attend OSU. I enrolled in the College of Forestry thinking about being a park or forest ranger, but it turned out I really liked my ecology courses. I found out about NRCS at a career fair my sophomore year and decided that is who I wanted to work for, so I adjusted my degree so that I would be eligible to work for the agency.

Where did you grow up?

We moved a lot growing up, mostly we lived in small towns in north-central California, then moved to north Idaho when I was in high school.

Career Background:

- » Multiple NRCS offices as a student in Oregon
- » Term position in South Carolina
- » Permanent position in Oregon
- » District Conservationist in Connecticut, 2015
- » State Program Manager in Oregon, 2019

What are your career goals?

It's been my goal to be an Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations for the last 8 years. I am so excited to have reached that goal and for it to be here in IA! I may want to be a State Conservationist one day, but for now I'm just excited to learn this position and hopefully be a positive addition to the IA team.

Has anyone strongly influenced your career?

I've been really blessed to

have some amazing people in my corner. I had an amazing District Conservationist, Dean Moberg, who taught me a lot and encouraged me to volunteer for collateral duties and networking opportunities. Side note, I think everyone should spend time in the Civil Rights Advisory Committee, I've also been lucky enough to work with some amazing women who got me involved with Women in NRCS, which opened a lot of trainings and other opportunities up to me.

What are some of your hobbies?

Reading (mostly crime dramas and mystery), watching documentaries, walking and hiking.

Do you have a family?

Most of my family is in Idaho and Oregon. I try to visit each once a year.

**EMPLOYEE
SPOTLIGHT**

**Courtney
Myers**



Courtney Myers

Title: District Conservationist,
Grundy Center

Education:

B.S., Iowa State University (2005),
Environmental Science

Where did you grow up?

Grundy Center, IA

Career Background:

- » Soil Conservationist in
Burlington, Maquoketa,
Epworth, and Waterloo.
- » District Conservationist in
Grundy Center, 2019

**Why did you choose to join
NRCS and become a district
conservationist?**

My dad, grandpa, and great uncle all farmed together when I was growing up. My dad was very active in Practical Farmers of Iowa, and loved experimenting with different ways to farm. My dad has always been a soil commissioner for as long as I can remember! If anyone is familiar with Grundy County, we don't have much water or wildlife habitat, so I did not grow up hunting and fishing. Instead, my connection to the land is through the garden and the food we can grow and preserve. I am very much an advocate for local, healthy food and outdoor exercise.

**What are you currently working
on?**

My goals for the Grundy County office are to let people know we exist. Our county is intensively farmed, and the leading seed corn producer in the state. We grow about 18,000 acres of seed corn a year, and for those not familiar, it's like silage being chopped off 18,000 acres every September.

There are huge conservation challenges that come with this system, but many opportunities. Seed corn fields are well-suited to cover crops and the large agribusiness companies that use them are beginning to focus on their impact. Luckily we don't have many HEL or wetland issues, and we get to focus on building our customer relationships. I am all about building trust and relationships with our producers. I feel it is our job to encourage them to try new things, connect them with others who are, and keep in touch with them on their journey.

What are your career goals?

I am pretty much where I want to be. My last move away from Dubuque was pretty traumatic, so I am not looking to move for a long time.

**Has anyone strongly influenced
your career?**

I have had the pleasure to work with some great DCs over the years, including Lori Schnoor, Theresa Weiss, and Shaffer Ridgeway. All continue to provide me with guidance and ideas. In addition to co-workers, I have met some pretty great farmers whom I still rely on for advice.

What are some of your hobbies?

Running, gardening, baking, cheering on the Cyclones, and finding new craft beers from Iowa breweries.

Do you have a family?

Husband, Dave, works as an electrical engineer for John Deere. We have three kids:

- » Porter (12)
- » Marshall (9)
- » Jenna (5)

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Joe Probasco



Joe Probasco and his family

Title: Program Services Assistant, Des Moines (Partnerships)

Education:

- » Bachelors Degree: Business Administration with a minor in Economics, William Penn University, 2020
- » Masters Degree (In Progress): Business Administration, Anticipated graduation August 2022.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up mostly in Des Moines. My father worked in the cable television industry as a Systems Engineer so I also got to live in Colorado for 2 years (1982-1984) and Wisconsin for 2 years (1992-1994).

Tell us a little about what you do on the Partnerships team?

In partnerships I track all of our open agreements with partnering entities, making sure that the partners are reporting how they are completing the IPC, CIG, and WFPO agreements. I answer questions that partners have and help them promote local conservation efforts using grants and agreements.

How did you get interested in natural resources conservation or in NRCS?

It was completely by accident that I found out there was a job opening within the department. I did similar work for another agency and thought I could help the department and its customers.

What type of jobs have you had before this one?

In August 1995 (a couple of months after graduating high school), I enlisted

in the Army served from 1995 to 2007 as an M1A1 Abrams Tank Crewman for my first three years then transitioned to Military Police for the rest of my time. When I left the Army I transitioned the Department of the Army as a civilian Police Officer where I worked general Patrolman and a few specialized assignments in our liaison office, where I worked with other law enforcement agencies and the general public putting on events like National Night Out against crime for the Fort Riley community. I also had duties as a Desk Sergeant, which was the dispatch and police operations supervisor for each shift.

In August 2008, I moved back to Iowa and shortly after I started working for Veteran Affairs as a Police Officer and ranked up to Detective. In 2013, I could no longer work as a police officer due to medical issues so I transitioned to Medical Support at the VA Medical Center. I continued with this line progressing up to Senior Medical Support Supervisor where I supervised the medical support for all of surgical services and extended care/rehab departments for the VA Medical Center.

In October of 2019, I made a leap of faith and started working for NRCS as a Farm Bill Specialist in the Chariton Resource Team.

Has anyone been a mentor or a positive influence on your career?

While I was at the VA, I had a senior leader there that directed me in the best direction. Dennis Walker, who is now the Director of Undergraduate

Affairs at Des Moines University, told me that painting yourself as only wanting to do one thing will only limit you. At that time I only saw myself as wanting to work for the VA and I thought I was happy. But as time grew on I needed change and to have that change, I needed to not paint myself as doing only one thing, but working outside of my comfort zone and expanding my horizons. This led me to applying on a whim and being selected to start working for NRCS in Chariton.

What do you like to do in your free time? Hobbies?

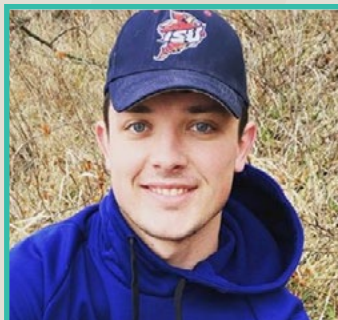
In my free time I am President of the High School Band Boosters where we support the Band Program by buying needed instruments and help the kids go on trips though fundraising. I also love fishing anytime that I can.

Any family or other information you want to share?

I have been married to my wife, Melanie, now for 8 years. We have a blended family (his, hers, and ours) with a grand total of seven children Kalee (21), Mackenzie (20), Chloe (19), Corran (17), Michael (16), Mara (15), and Anastasia (9). Kalee is graduating from University of Kansas with a Bachelors Degree in English and a minor in communications this year. Mackenzie is currently enrolled in Kansas State University studying for her Bachelors in Bio-chem. Chloe works as a CNA in Minneapolis, Kansas. Corran, Michael, Mara attend Chariton High School and are a Senior, Junior and Sophomore respectively and Ana in elementary school.

EMPLOYEE
SPOTLIGHT

**Andrew
Welch**



Andrew Welch

Title: Soil Conservationist, Malvern

Education:

» Bachelor's Degree in Agronomy,
Minor in Precision Ag, 2019,
Northwest Missouri State
University

Where did you grow up?

Hamburg, Iowa

**How did you get interested in
natural resources conservation?**

I've always had a conservation sense, from a very young age I understood the importance of conserving resources. Once I saw an opportunity to work for the NRCS, I knew I would be a good fit for the job.

**What types of jobs have you had
prior to this one?**

During college, I worked at MFA in Maryville, MO as an Intern.

After graduating from Northwest, I worked at Agriland FS in Clarinda as a Crop Specialist for a little over a year before coming to the NRCS.

**What types of work do you do in
Malvern?**

I work on everything from CRP planning to working with our EQIP/CSP programs. I also provide our office and SW sub area with technical work such as designing and laying out terraces for state cost-share.

What are your career goals?

As far as career goals are concerned, I am very content with my job at the moment. I find the work very rewarding and the personal satisfaction from helping landowners solve resource issues keeps me very motivated. I'm always excited to complete a project and ready for the next opportunity to help the next person.

**Although it's early in your career,
has anyone been a positive
influence on your career?**

I think I was able to move in to a great environment for learning here in Mills County. Bradley Gardner, our District Conservationist, and Lucas Forney, our Resource Conservationist, have been great to learn from. I owe plenty of thanks to both of them.

**What do you enjoy doing in your
free time?**

I enjoy hunting and fishing in my free time.

SPOTLIGHT VIDEO

Prairie Strips: Build Benefits Naturally

Prairie strips are small portions of cropland that are taken out of production and planted with native prairie plants for conservation benefits. Learn more about this innovative conservation practice by visiting the [Conservation Media Library](#), a multimedia storing house for conservation photos, graphics, informational videos, fact sheets, PowerPoints, and other resources.

The Library is open to all, and all materials can be downloaded and circulated free of charge. This project was made possible by a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) from Iowa NRCS. The Soil and Water Conservation Society



(SWCS) and Conservation Districts of Iowa (CIG) worked collaboratively on the project.

NO ERRORS HERE: RESOLVE YOUR IT ISSUES QUICKLY AND EFFICIENTLY

In February 2021, the Client Experience Center (CEC) announced changes to the information technology support process. FPAC employees can submit support requests to the Help Desk Icon located on their desktop, [CEC Digital Workplace \(DWP\)](#), or by calling the Centralized Help Desk (CHD) at 877-873-0783.

There are multiple benefits of this support model, including:

- » **Self-service:** Customers can answer their own questions and resolve their own issues without IT intervention.
- » **Reduced confusion:** Customers always contact the CHD. This is their first point-of-contact.
- » **Any time, any location:** CHD and DWP are available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.
- » **Tracking:** When submitting a ticket via CHD or DWP it will create a ticket that can track requests to ensure a ticket is actively worked and status information is provided along the way.
- » **Availability:** When an issue can't be resolved immediately, the CHD can escalate to the next available specialist for assistance providing faster response and resolution.

FPAC employees should no longer contact their local IT specialist directly. This process allows CEC to track all requests and reduces the risk of items getting lost in an email. The Centralized Help Desk (CHD) is also available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The green HELP Icon has additional support information.

Once a support request is submitted, CEC Tier One and Two staff will help. If they are unable to help resolve the issue, they will then escalate to the next tier.

More information can be found on this [flyer](#) or by visiting the CHD page on the [CEC Customer SharePoint site](#) to watch a video that explains how it works.



Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Jackson, Halie	Soil Conservationist	Appointment	7/18/21	Epworth RT
Jensen, Johnson	Soil Conservationist	Appointment	7/18/21	Creston RT
Bopp, Jolene	Public Affairs Specialist	Appointment	8/1/21	Des Moines
Onstot, Cameron	Soil Conservationist	Resignation	8/4/21	Indianola RT
Eatwell, Quinlan	Soil Conservationist	Resignation	8/12/21	Garner RT
Neely, Rubyana	EQIP Coordinator	Promotion	8/15/21	Des Moines
Probasco, Joseph	Program Services Assistant	Promotion	8/29/21	Des Moines
Hawks, Michaela	District Conservationist	Name Change	9/9/21	Sac City
Hilgersen, Samuel	Soil Conservationist	Resignation	9/10/21	Elkader
Heisner, Frank	Wetland Specialist	Appointment	9/12/21	Mount Pleasant
Zmoos, Nicholas	Wetland Specialist	Appointment	9/12/21	Charles City
Huddleston, Brendan	Soil Conservationist	Resignation	9/15/21	Mount Pleasant RT
Harris, Kelly	Administrative Specialist	Reassignment	9/26/21	Des Moines
Wolf, Russ	Wetland Specialist	Reassignment	9/26/21	Epworth
Sedlmayr, Alisha	Soil Conservationist	Reassignment	9/26/21	West Union
Krueger, Rachel	Soil Conservation Tech	Reassignment	9/26/21	Williamsburg RT
Skiles, Michael	Engineering Technician	Appointment	9/26/21	Oakland RT

RT = Resource Team

Changes In IDALS-DSCWQ PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Albaugh, Heidi	Conservation Assistant	Resignation	8/19/21	Ringgold SWCD
Vannoy, Michael	State Conservation Tech.	Resignation	8/20/21	Jefferson SWCD
Hullinger, Debby	Conservation Assistant	Resignation	8/27/21	Woodbury SWCD
Mork, Marcia	Conservation Assistant	Resignation	9/2/21	Cerro Gordo SWCD
Hopkins, Becky	Conservation Assistant	Retirement	10/1/21	Davis SWCD
Krantz, Kristi	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	10/1/21	Woodbury SWCD
Harms, Megan	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	10/4/21	Franklin SWCD
Reed, Austin	State Conservation Tech.	Resignation	10/8/21	Madison/Warren SWCD
Steele, Dallas	State Conservation Tech.	Resignation	10/8/21	Montgomery SWCD