



United States Department of Agriculture

IOWA CURRENT **DEVELOPMENTS**

Winter 2021

**PHEASANTS FOREVER-NRCS AGREEMENT
TURNING RED ACRES GREEN**

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REMEMBERING KEVIN KORDICK**

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**NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE**
www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov



Above and Cover photos by Stacy Wickman, State Business Tools Specialist in Des Moines. To view more of Stacy's photos, visit <https://www.viewbug.com/member/SWick>.

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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 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*

To say 2020 was a memorable year is a major understatement. For the nearly 800 USDA-NRCS and partner employees in our offices who help Iowa's private landowners plan and implement conservation, it was not only memorable but also challenging and in some cases life-changing.

Iowa is one of the most important states for soil and water conservation in the United States, with major rivers bordering us to the east and west coupled with the intensity of row crop farming in between.

With the amount of natural resource conservation needed in Iowa, NRCS has been understaffed here for several years. For this reason, we added about 100 NRCS staff during the past year to help us serve our customers with conservation planning and program

delivery now and into the future. With nearly 500 employees, Iowa is second to only Texas in the number of full-time NRCS staff members.

Nearly one year ago, we began implementing our staff reorganization. As you may recall, the reorganization is highlighted by one District Conservationist for each of our 100 field offices and 25 four-county resource teams.

The reorganization will take a few years to be fully implemented, for several reasons. First, it is taking some time to find space for all our Resource Team members in our Resource Team office locations. Once building leases expire in Resource Team office locations, it will enable us to expand those locations or find new buildings in those communities with more space.

Another obstacle slowing our reorganization roll out has been filling job vacancies. We filled many of our new Resource Team Leader positions internally, and it is taking time to backfill their old positions. A positive for our staff is that the reorganization is providing many new career opportunities.

CHANGES, CHALLENGES HIGHLIGHT 2020-21 IOWA CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Cont...

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed the full implementation of our reorganization. Our vision for the reorganization requires a lot of face-to-face interaction, well-defined roles, with a team concept. Most of the team interaction right now is virtual, and although this is our best option for training and communication right now, it is not the same as in-person.

On the topic of COVID-19, I am very proud of all we accomplished in 2020. Even without the pandemic, the Iowa NRCS Leadership Team and I knew our staff faced many challenges in 2020. The reorganization meant disruption due to staff movement and changes. We also rolled out several new business planning tools that require training and time to learn.

With all that, we still obligated nearly \$60 million in financial assistance to Iowa farmers during Fiscal Year 2020 and wrote about 12,600 conservation plans to treat resource concerns on nearly 900,000 acres. That's remarkable, considering the many obstacles our staff and conservation partners faced in 2020.

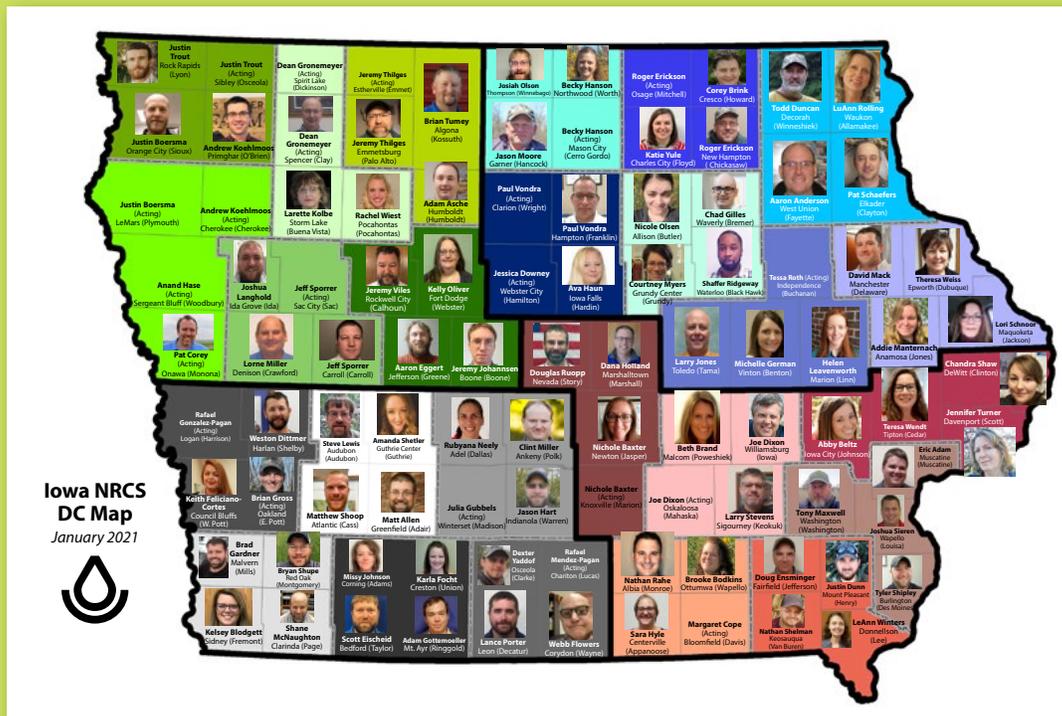
Moving on to 2021, our priorities must continue to be effective conservation planning and implementation,

program delivery and conservation compliance. To do those effectively, training and mentoring our new employees during 2021 will be vital to our future success. We also need to implement our reorganization as best we can by improving communications, staffing open positions, and improving our staff expertise and efficiency through training.

Lastly, we must continue to find ways to engage and partner with the Farm Service Agency (FSA), the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), and other private and public conservation interest groups to help us implement conservation in Iowa.

I am excited about the opportunity to be the State Conservationist in Iowa. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me through the appropriate channels if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Jon Hubbert, State Conservationist



Iowa map of NRCS District Conservationists as of Jan. 15, 2021

ARE 60-INCH ROWS NEXT BOOM FOR CATTLE PRODUCERS?

by Robert Pate, Soil Conservationist, Wayne County



Getting more production from your cropland acres is on the minds of many of today's agricultural producers. According to soil health and agronomic experts with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), interseeding

cover crops into wider corn rows can help convert fertile crop ground into grazing lands as a dual cropping system.

With pastureland at a premium, dual cropping is becoming an innovative asset for Iowa cattle producers. Farmers are employing cover crops for many reasons – weed control, moisture management, improved soil structure, build organic matter, and to cycle nutrients otherwise lost.

Many Iowa livestock producers are using cover crops to offset cattle production feed costs. As feeding resources are exhausted, especially during unseasonably dry periods, having one ton or more per acre of available cover crops grazed late in the growing season can add profits to any operation.

Interseeding cornfields creates valuable grazing opportunities for livestock with high quality vegetation by utilizing cover crops as a second crop in a single field. By growing a corn crop with various cover crops, the producer can harvest a cash crop and leave a field of green-growing legumes, brassicas, and grasses rich in nutrients for cattle. The forage becomes the second crop, and the corn stover is still present as a feed source for grazing cattle.

Jerod and Jess Flaherty hosted a field day last September, west of Osceola. They showcased how cover crops can add value to both their cattle and crop production system. By strategically utilizing cover crops, the Flaherty's productive cash croplands are becoming new pastureland.

Some producers may question whether cover crops and cash crops can grow simultaneously in the same field. The 60-inch corn row planting process requires a producer to double the seeding rate but only plant every other row, maintaining the same planting in



Jerod and Jess Flaherty show off cover crop growth between their 60-inch corn rows at a field day in Clarke County. The Flaherty's corn yielded 206 to 211 bushels per acre in 2020.

population per acre, as if planting all 30-inch rows. After corn emerges, between growth stages V2 to V6, a cover crop is planted between the corn rows with a drill modified to stay between corn rows.

Interseeded cover crop mixes are limited to tolerant species for the climate and herbicide programs will need to be adjusted. Herbicide carryover, for example, can have an impact on cover crop selection and survivability. Chemical residues can also adversely impact grazing cattle.

Field grazing productive crop ground also has increased nutrient benefits. When controlled grazing techniques are employed, such as strip or mob grazing, animals convert growing biomass into nutrient-rich manure left behind as they move from one paddock to another.

More research is needed to fine-tune the cover crop mix that provides the best grazing opportunities for producers and the best companion crop for corn/soybean rotations. Cattle producers who have tried the 60-inch rows have seen the benefits and will continue to experiment on more acres next season.

On the Flaherty Farm, where 60-inch rows have gained acceptance. "Today's 60-inch rows are where no-till farming was in the 1970s," said Jerod Flaherty. "It's just establishing a foothold in modern agriculture production."

ACKLEY HOSTS SOIL HEALTH FIELD DAY AT TAYLOR COUNTY FARM

Submitted by Scott Eischeid,
District Conservationist, Taylor County



Veteran southern Iowa farmer Paul Ackley represented the Taylor Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) at a field day in November, where he hosted Iowa Agriculture Secretary Mike Naig as part of Naig's Southwest Iowa Water

Quality Tour.

Taylor County has had a Water Quality project since 2016, focusing on seeding down side hills and other highly erodible land (HEL). Producers have seeded down more than 3,300 HEL acres with a pasture/hay seeding or a summer fall grazing mix.

Naig expressed his ongoing support for the project and gratitude for the dedication of the producers to support livestock and address conservation.

Along with showcasing the success of the project, the field day included a meal and outdoor field discussion. There was a lot of good discussion about successes and obstacles to get more soil health practices on the ground.



Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig (brown shirt) talks to Bedford Farmer Paul Ackley during his field day in November.

The field used in the field day is seeded as a Summer Fall Grazer. The seeding follows a small grain and planted in the summer as a warm season cover crop mix which is grazed in the fall. Ackley planted Triticale, vetch, turnips, and cow peas in September. He planted Sorghum Sudan earlier in the summer and grazed.

ATLANTIC FIELD OFFICE ANNOUNCES NEWS STAFF



Jenae Waters started in May 2020 as the new NRCS Soil Conservationist in the Atlantic Office. She is a graduate of Iowa State University with a degree in Agricultural Studies. For the past several years, she has lived in Atlantic working at home raising 3 children. Prior

to moving back to Iowa, she was a Profit Manager for Genex Cooperative working with dairy herds around Eastern Wisconsin. She is looking forward to working alongside producers and landowners in Cass County on all their conservation needs.



Matthew Shoop is the District Conservationist serving Cass County. He is providing technical expertise and conservation planning for farmers and forest landowners wanting to make conservation improvements to their

land. A graduate of Northwest Missouri State University majoring in Agronomy, he joined NRCS in 2016 as a Soil Conservationist in Platte County, Missouri. "Growing up in North Central Missouri I have always had an interest in improving land quality for agriculture and wildlife, says Shoop."

PHEASANTS FOREVER-NRCS AGREEMENT TURNING RED ACRES GREEN

A partnership agreement between NRCS and Pheasants Forever (PF) is helping Iowa's farmers and rural landowners learn about opportunities to improve profitability within their fields through a free analysis of their precision farm data.

Led by Josh Divan, precision ag and conservation specialist for PF in Iowa, the process helps producers identify under-performing crop acres and helps them identify how to increase field profits using targeted conservation practices that also benefit soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat.

Divan is working with Iowa NRCS and farmers statewide to evaluate in-field, financial performance by coupling crop yields with crop budgets to create spatial profitability maps. "The data gives customers a clear picture of where they are consistently profiting or losing money in their fields," says Divan. "That is invaluable when you are looking to improve the efficiency of your operation."

Through the PF-NRCS agreement, precision data analysis focuses on profitability, reduced risk, and sustainability at no cost to the farmer. Private, on-farm consultations with Divan and other PF specialists will provide:

- unlimited technical support in processing and analyzing data,
- a full suite of profit & ROI (Return On Investment) maps, scenario comparisons, and



Josh Divan (right) talks to Cherokee County farmer Nathan Anderson during a farm evaluation visit. (Photo courtesy of Big Foot Media.)

- alternatives that increase profitability, which are custom tailored to individual farm operations.

"Cropland can be 'red' for many different reasons," says Divan. "It could be an area that ponds water or it could be a sandy hill. No matter where you farm, the research tells us that nearly 10 percent of every field loses money every year."

Targeted enrollment of these marginal cropland areas into temporary conservation programs, such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), or applying conservation practices through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) are great alternatives to consider.

"It's impressive how much you can increase your profitability by looking at alternatives on only your most problematic acres," says Divan. "Enrolling sensitive areas into CRP or other programs also frequently improves the 'farmability' of the rest of the field."

To learn more about finding no cost solutions to poorly performing or environmentally sensitive cropland areas, contact Divan at 515-708-2371 or email him at jdivan@pheasantsforever.org.

DRONES STILL NOT TO BE USED BY NRCS DURING WORK HOURS

NRCS employees are still not allowed to use unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), or drones, while on work time.

“General Manual Title 170, Part 402 - Aviation Management - Unmanned Aircraft Systems, Subpart B - NRCS Unmanned Aircraft Systems” provides further procedures and guidelines for using and contracting out drones.

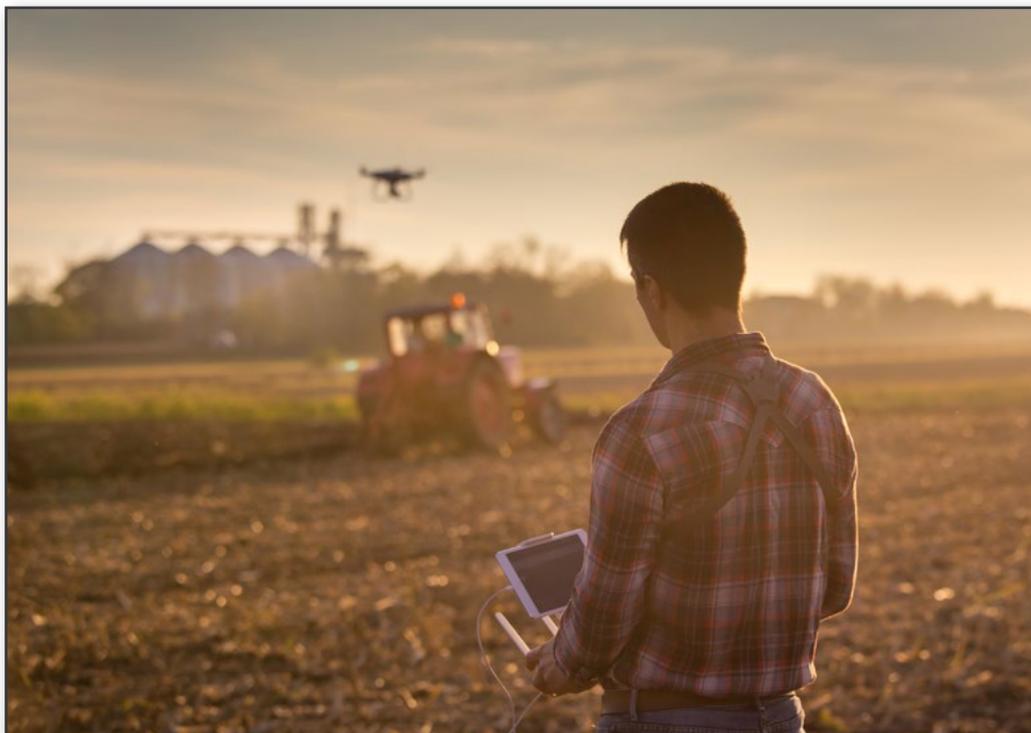
General Manual 170-402 isn't new, issued in April 2017, but with several local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and other NRCS conservation partners purchasing or contracting out unmanned aircraft systems, it's a reminder to NRCS staff with questions about drone usage.

Currently, only three USDA agencies - Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Animal and Plant Health Inspecting Service (APHIS), and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) have congressional authorization to own and operate UASs. Congressional authorization is required under congressional statute 31 U.S.C. 1343(d) for NRCS to own and operate UASs.

NRCS Digital Camera Usage

Some direction for NRCS staff regarding the use of cameras and cell phones to take pictures in the field:

- Use NRCS-provided digital cameras or NRCS cell phones to take pictures in the field.
- NRCS employees should not use their personal cell phones or cameras to take pictures on work time. (Personal devices used for official business can be taken from the owner and used for litigation purposes.)
- Personal equipment should not be plugged in to NRCS laptops to copy pictures.
- If you take a conservation picture with your personal phone or camera on your own time,



email the images to your work email.

- Every NRCS field offices should have a digital camera that is in good working condition. If your office does not have a digital camera or if your office needs a new digital camera, please contact Jason Johnson at jason.r.johnson@usda.gov.



BACK IN THE DAY

NRCS RESOURCE TEAM LEADER KEVIN KORDICK PASSES AWAY SUDDENLY AT AGE OF 55

Webster City Resource Team Leader Kevin Kordick passed away suddenly on Nov. 28 at the age of 55. Kordick worked for NRCS for 28 years in several capacities, including Soil Conservationist, District Conservationist and most recently as a new Resource Team Leader during the 2020 Iowa NRCS office reorganization.

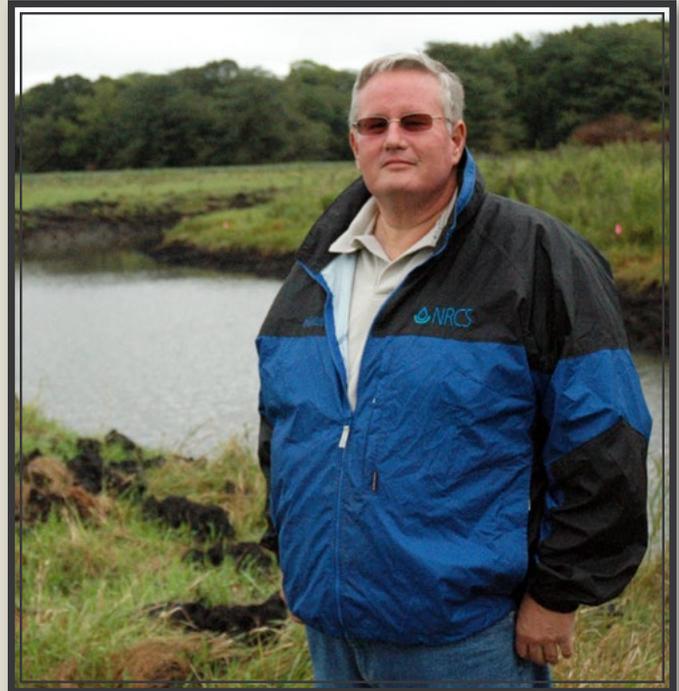
He started his conservation career working in the Red Oak and Oakland Field Offices before beginning his NRCS career in 1992 in Albia as a Soil Conservationist. He later moved to the Humboldt office, before becoming the District Conservationist in Jefferson. Eventually, Kevin served as the DC for the Jefferson/Boone Shared Management Unit. Last year, he accepted the new Resource Team Leader position in Webster City.

From his [obituary](#):

Kevin attended Corning Community Schools and graduated in 1983. He continued his education at Northwest Missouri State University and graduated with a degree in Agri-Business in 1987.

On February 22, 1992, Kevin married Julie Maher at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Corning, Iowa. Kevin and Julie made their home in Boone where they raised two sons, Matthew Austin, born July 26, 2001 and Andrew Ryan, born January 24, 2006.

Kevin's proudest moments were watching his sons play sports. His passion and love of the outdoors and conservation emanated through teaching his sons to hunt, fish and show respect for the land. He also made great contributions to the local 4-H shooting sports club and assisted with youth baseball in Boone. Kevin was very active in the National Wild Turkey Federation, joining in 2006 and serving as treasurer since 2008. Kevin loved the Kansas City Chiefs and was an avid Chicago Cubs fan. A favorite family vacation involved Julie scoring front row seats to a Cubs game. Most of all Kevin showed his love by spoiling his nieces and nephews and constantly telling jokes or playing pranks on his friends and family.



Top: Kevin Kordick stands in front of a newly renovated Greene County oxbow in 2009 for a project to help restore the Topeka shiner from the Federal Threatened and Endangered Species list.

Above: Kordick (left) takes a break at the 2018 Farm Progress Show with (L to R) Rubyana Neely, Neil Sass and Laura Crowell.

EMPLOYEE
SPOTLIGHT

**Bruce
Dake**



Bruce Dake

Title: Civil Engineering Technician
(Creston)

Career Background:

1977-79: Part-time Soil
Conservation Technician
(Sigourney and Washington)

1979-84: Soil Conservation
Technician (Wapello)

1984 to Present: Civil Engineering
Technician (Creston)

What are some of your day-to-day activities?

I do quite a bit of coaching with less experienced Soil Conservation Technicians and Civil Engineering Technicians, answering design questions for engineering projects. This includes how to operate design software. The projects I work on are the more complex designs of pond/grade stabilization structures, livestock pipelines, grassed waterways, and wetland restoration for CRP.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I enjoy nature and the stewardship of taking care of it. I also enjoy working with the younger staff, sharing experiences and helping them to figure out the planning

and design of the conservation practices. It keeps me young and sharp.

After 43 years, what has changed the most about your job?

The technology. When I started, I used a transit and Frisco rod for survey. If you have watched a western movie about the railroad from the mid to late 1950s, the instrument shown is what was used. We then went to total stations and now GPS units. Then throw in the coming of computers with all design and drafting completed on them. It is like riding a horse as a kid and becoming an astronaut to Mars. I think, for the most part, I have been able to keep up.

What recommendations do you have for our large number of new employees?

Take all the training you need to do your job and include talking to people with experience. I have

been fortunate to have engineers who took the time to answer my questions through the years. Also, use all the tools in the toolbox available to you.

What do like to do in your free time?

In the past, I have done refinishing of antique furniture and wood working. Today, with both my wife's and I's parents in their mid-80's to over 90, we spend time traveling home and taking care of family.

Tell us about your family.

Well, my wife and I have raised a teacher and a preacher. Our oldest daughter teaches instrumental band and our youngest daughter is a pastor both receiving their master's degree.

SPOTLIGHT VIDEO

Market to Market Episode Features Mississippi River Nutrient Flows

A [November 2020 episode](#) of Market to Market featured a story on the impacts of Mississippi River nutrient flows and the overall health of rivers and streams as keys to those trying to make a living off the water.

The story features Charlie Cretsinger's riverside Dubuque restaurant, "Catfish Charlie's", and highlights the impacts COVID-19 has had on his business and the long-term effects river health and water quality is having on the quality of the food served in his restaurant.

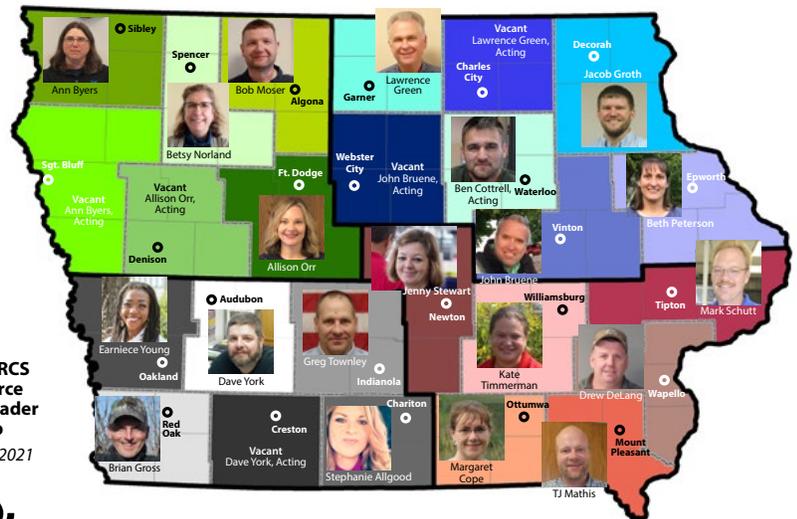


REORGANIZATION AND STAFFING UPDATE

About one year ago, Iowa NRCS began transitioning to a staff reorganization highlighted by a shift to one District Conservationist for every office and 25 four-county Resource Teams.

The Resource Team concept allowed for 25 new positions (Resource Team Leaders), who are collaborating with District Conservationists (DC) and leading the resource teams. Initially, many Resource Team Leader positions were filled by former DCs. However, many vacancies have been filled more recently filled by staff new to the state. Currently, 19 of the 25 Resource Team Leader positions are filled (see map at right).

Iowa NRCS Resource Team Leader Map
January 2021



Slight gains were made during the last three months to fill DC positions across Iowa. Currently, 80 of the 100 positions are filled - up 2 since November. Several of the DC positions have been advertised, but in some cases no eligible DC applicants made the panel to qualify for the position.

Overall, Iowa NRCS currently has 500 staff, which includes nine Pathways interns - six who will be converting to full-time this year and three returning for internships in 2021. Mission critical positions will continue to be advertised as needed.

Check out the Iowa Personnel Changes report to view staffing changes over the last several months. If you have questions about the reorganization or other staffing, contact your immediate supervisor, the assistant state conservationist for field operations (ASTC-FO) at the Area Office, or Jaia Fischer, assistant state conservationist for management and strategy (ASTC-MS), at the State Office (515-284-4525).

Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
MacDowell, Rachel	Soil Conservationist	Appointment	11/22/20	Denison RT
Brand, Mary	District Conservationist	Promotion	11/22/20	Malcom
Hollingsworth, JD	Area Soil Health Specialist	Promotion	11/22/20	Fairfield
Sedlmayr, Alisha	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	11/22/20	Decorah RT
Wendt, Teresa	District Conservationist	Promotion	11/22/20	Tipton
Decker, Brittany	Soil Conservationist	Reassignment	11/22/20	Fort Dodge RT
Koehlmoos, Andrew	District Conservationist	Reassignment	11/22/20	Primghar
Manternach, Addie	District Conservationist	Reassignment	11/22/20	Anamosa
Erickson, Roger	District Conservationist	Promotion	12/6/20	New Hampton
Rohrer, Deanna	District Conservationist	Retirement	12/18/20	Estherville
Moris, Adam	Civil Engineer	Appointment	12/20/20	West Union Area
Gorbet, Samantha	Civil Engineer	Appointment	12/20/20	Des Moines
Allen, Matthew	District Conservationist	Promotion	12/20/20	Greenfield
Bodkins, Brooke	District Conservationist	Promotion	12/20/20	Ottumwa
Crosby, Lynn	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	12/20/20	Ottumwa RT
Zaiger, Lucas	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	12/20/20	Oakland RT
Bultman, James	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	12/20/20	Indianola RT
Mack, David	District Conservationist	Reassignment	12/20/20	Manchester
Bienemann, Mark	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	1/1/21	Vinton RT
Collins, Lane	Asst. State Conservationist for Field Operations	Retirement	1/1/21	Fairfield Area
Funni, Kevin	District Conservationist	Retirement	1/1/21	Oskaloosa
Sande, Dennis	Resource Team Leader	Retirement	1/2/21	Charles City RT
Blomquist, Ruth	Area Soil Health Specialist	Appointment	1/3/21	Atlantic Area
Norland, Betsy	Resource Team Leader	Promotion	1/3/21	Spencer RT
Rague, Dylan	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	1/3/21	Spencer RT
Welsh, Matthew	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	1/3/21	Decorah RT
Young, Earniece	Resource Team Leader	Reassignment	1/3/21	Oakland RT
Young, Theresa	Admin. Support Asst.	Appointment	1/17/21	Des Moines
Burke, Grant	Business Tools Coordinator	Appointment	1/17/21	West Union Area
Dunton, Jessie	Engineering Technician	Appointment	1/17/21	Tipton RT

RT = Resource Team

Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Freilinger-Mohs, Angela	Wetland Specialist	Reassignment	1/31/21	Decorah
Zmoos, Nicholas	Wetland Specialist	Appointment	1/31/21	Webster City
Drum, Davis	Wetland Specialist	Reassignment	1/31/21	Williamsburg
Frederiksen, Ross	Wetland Specialist	Reassignment	1/31/21	Spencer
Hines, Kirsten	Wetland Specialist	Appointment	1/31/21	Tipton

Changes In IDALS-DSCWQ PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Namanny, Derek	Urban Conservationist	Resigned	12/4/20	Des Moines
Kimsey, Belinda	Conservation Assistant	Retirement	12/31/20	Mills SWCD
Hefley, Sherri	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	1/25/21	Webster SWCD
Gifford, Corey	State Conservation Technician	New Hire	1/28/21	Marion SWCD

Deadline for nominations
May 1, 2021

KNOW A DESERVING FARMER?

Woven throughout our communities are farmers who have made outstanding contributions to soil conservation and water quality. Help us recognize those efforts.

Nominate them by May 1, 2021 for the:

2021 Conservation Farmer of the Year Award

Nominating is easy! Provide a name and brief summary (100 words or less) of a farmer's conservation efforts to your county Soil & Water Conservation District office.



**Winner receives
a John Deere
6E Utility Tractor
for a year!***

(or its equivalent)

*12 months or 200 hours

Help Us Showcase the Conservation Efforts of Iowa Farmers

The Iowa Farm Bureau and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship would like to celebrate the conservation efforts of Iowa farmers through the annual **Conservation Farmer of the Year Award**.

This award recognizes farmers across the state for their outstanding achievement in conservation practices and the positive impact those practices are making on the environment.

Do you know a farmer deserving of this conservation award? Simply provide a name and brief summary (100 words or less) to your county Soil and Water Conservation District office noting the farmer's conservation efforts, how they protect our soil and water and manage nutrients and wildlife.

Nominations are due May 1 and can be emailed or dropped off at your county Soil and Water Conservation District office.

The winner will receive free use of a John Deere 6E Series Utility Tractor or its equivalent for 12 months (or up to 200 hours) courtesy of Van Wall Equipment of Perry and John Deere (valued at as much as \$12,000). The winner will be announced at the 2021 Iowa State Fair. They also will be honored at the Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners Annual Meeting in August in Ames, Iowa.

Don't hesitate. Send a name in today and show that Iowa farmers do care about our state's soil and water.

Prize courtesy of:



JOHN DEERE

VanWall
of Perry

Award sponsored by:



**IOWA DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE &
LAND STEWARDSHIP**



IOWA FARM BUREAU
PEOPLE. PROGRESS. PRIDE.®