



United States Department of Agriculture

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

IOWA NRCS

FALL 2022



USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE



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A NOTE FROM THE STATE CONSERVATIONIST

I spent much of the last few weeks back on the family farm in Illinois helping with corn and soybean harvest. I enjoy getting back out there and - not only helping my parents and siblings - but also seeing things from the producer's perspective. I think it's important in our positions to know the issues our customers deal with and then consider how we can help them overcome them.

Like much of Iowa, parts of Illinois are dealing with drought and thus yields are somewhat lower than we had hoped for and have grown accustomed to the last few years. Experiencing the all-too-common landowner-tenant relationship dynamic is interesting, too. There are financial and environmental considerations for both sides. I know you all see that dynamic in your work daily at the field office level.

Gaining Perspectives and Funding Options

On the topic of field offices, I know many of you are getting overwhelmed with conservation programs. The amount of funding at all levels flowing into conservation programs is at an all-time high. On one hand, it's a great thing that Congress, partner groups, and others see the need for more conservation assistance. The downside for us is that it's getting difficult to keep track of all of the programs, agreements, and other funding available.

This is a historically busy time at the national and partnership level for programs. There's the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Partnership for Climate Smart Commodities, and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that we will be implementing or involved with in the coming months. And then we have the many new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)



projects in Iowa, along with discussions about the next Farm Bill beginning to take shape.

My advice to all of you is to stay grounded. Focus on what you can do to help your local producers get conservation on the ground. Keep up on all of these programs, partnerships, and agreements as much as you can, but don't let it overwhelm you. Conservation planning and our core programs (EQIP, CSP, RCPP, ACEP, and some of the initiatives) continue to be our focus today.

I hope everyone is enjoying the beautiful fall. Thanks for all of the great things you accomplished in Fiscal Year 2022 and I look forward to working through our program delivery process in FY 2023!

Sincerely,

Jon Hubbert, State Conservationist

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Current Developments

Current Developments is a product of 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.

Stories and Photos

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State 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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OUTREACH REPORT: TANYA MEYER-DIDERIKSEN



GREAT EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY AND PARTNERSHIP SHOWN DURING WATERLOO FOOD DESERT CHALLENGE

A phone call in the fall of 2021 from James Bunch of Cordova, Tennessee, to NRCS State Outreach Coordinator Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen led to a tremendous urban agriculture outreach project in Waterloo.

Bunch, a retired NRCS employee, is the Director of the non-profit organization Bunchology, and has implemented several outreach projects in past years, especially in the southeastern states. In 2022, James selected Waterloo to be one of three such project areas which are being funded by an NRCS Conservation Outreach Racial Equity and Justice Conservation Cooperative Agreement.

The projects include partnering with local groups to build a high tunnel system, provide vegetable production and soil health education, and to increase the awareness of USDA agencies' programs, assistance, and career opportunities. The key local group in Waterloo

is Antioch Baptist Church, a predominantly black church.

The overall goal of the Waterloo project is to educate a socially disadvantaged community about food production, building capacity within a community that exists in a food desert. **A food desert is defined as an urban or rural area where the availability of affordable, healthy, fresh food is limited.** After many months of planning, a 30' x 72' high tunnel was built in the Unity neighborhood in Waterloo, utilizing 85 community volunteers. Mayor Quentin Hart, who kicked off the high tunnel-building event on July 29 with his remarks mentioned that it is no coincidence that this is happening in the community called Unity.

The staff from Bunchology worked tirelessly leading up to July 29 and then hour after hour on that long day as they provided the necessary direction for the volunteers to erect the high tunnel. The most significant part of the day, however, was witnessing the dedicated volunteers, some before 7am, to build the high tunnel on an empty lot owned by the church. Volunteers represented American Legion Post 138 of Waterloo, Antioch Baptist Church, Black Hawk County Veterans Affairs, Hawkeye Community College, Home Depot, Iowa Heartland Habitat for Humanity and USDA-NRCS staff.

The agency staff included State Conservationist Jon Hubbert and Acting Regional Conservationist Xavier Montoya. "Seeing the high tunnel take shape on July 29th was very rewarding and will be a memory that I will never forget," said Hubbert. "The engagement of 80+ volunteers coming

Cont. on next page

OUTREACH REPORT: TANYA MEYER-DIDERIKSEN



DESERT CHALLENGE CONT...

together from many different walks of life to raise the structure and to give to a Waterloo neighborhood and the Antioch Baptist Church, stepping up to make a difference, was inspiring. I look forward to hearing about the food, horticulture training and education, and community spirit that grows from this project in the years to come."

Pastor Charles Daniel of Antioch Baptist Church is very excited about this and future projects. "For us to close that gap (referring to people experiencing hunger), this is a small way to service the community and it's an opportunity to show youth there are careers and opportunities in agriculture," he said.

Ten teenagers from the church are working with Karen Moore, Master Gardener and church member, to grow food in the high tunnel and learn about gardening as well as opportunities to build a farm livelihood or other agricultural careers. The project will include two workshops for the youth involved, with the first one being Oct. 15. The workshops will include education from ISU Extension & Outreach staff and exposure to local NRCS and FSA staff and resources.

District Conservationist Shaffer Ridgeway has dedicated a lot of time and energy to this project, including time spent high on top of a ladder on July 29. "I think this is a great opportunity for the community," he said. "The energy on the day of the high tunnel build was just amazing. It was not just people from that neighborhood but from all over the city. People came out because they believed in the vision. If the kids take advantage of this opportunity, not



Volunteers such as State Conservation Jon Hubbert (digging) and from Habitat for Humanity, Home Depot, Antioch Baptist Church, active and retired military veterans, and other NRCS staff joined Director of Bunchology James Bunch to build a high tunnel in a food desert neighborhood of Waterloo, Iowa, July 29, 2022. (USDA/FPAC photo by Preston Keres)

only can it change things in the community, like provide more fresh food, but it could change their lives. There are skills that they can learn like entrepreneurship, how to grow produce and others."

The ultimate goal is to add an additional project that will include education on strategies and methods of marketing produce. "What I love most about the project is the opportunity to introduce our youth to agriculture," said Bunch. "It's important that we show urban communities how to utilize vacant lots for small scale farming. They also learn that the USDA supports their efforts in bringing fresh fruits and vegetables to their communities with funding through various programs."

» [Video from the project](#)

» [Pictures from the project](#)

OUTREACH REPORT: TANYA MEYER-DIDERIKSEN



NEW USDA GUIDE FOR HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED PRODUCERS

A useful new outreach tool was recently developed at the national level and is now available on farmers.gov.

Service Centers will receive 25 hard copies from the national office soon. The *USDA Guide for Historically Underserved Producers* is a 35-page booklet that will help Historically Underserved Producers and other new customers understand assistance and programs offered by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Risk Management Agency (RMA).

In addition to English, the Guide is also available in [Spanish](#), [Hmong](#), [Korean](#), [Vietnamese](#), [Thai](#), and [Chinese](#). Additional languages can be requested through the ASTC-FO, who can then contact the State Outreach Coordinator to make a request through Service Now.

The Guide serves as a great resource as a conversation starter when staff begin working with new customers. It is useful to producers as they explore conservation planning, farm loans, risk management and specific information about programs. It starts with first step actions such as obtaining a farm number to navigating eligibility for technical and financial assistance programs offered by the three agencies.



It also serves as a training tool for staff, including clear Historically Underserved Farmer and Rancher (HUFR) definitions and how they vary across agencies. It also highlights program benefits with HUFR considerations and serves as a cross-agency resource.

Additional print copies will be available soon through the NRCS Distribution Center. State Public Affairs Specialists will order any additional copies for the state.

DEFINING SOIL HEALTH

By LuAnn Rolling, District Conservationist (Waukon)

I've talked a lot about soil health over the past years, but what truly is the definition? One I found said, "Soil health is the vitality of a soil in sustaining the socio-ecological functions of its enfolding land." What does that mean?

Soil health can be broken down into 3 elements, according to H. Henry Janzen, David W. Jansen and Edward G. Gregorich writing in *Soil Biology and Biochemistry* in August of 2021. **The first would be functionality**, which they said can be defined as, "the condition of an organism in which it performs its vital functions normally or properly." They add that function cannot be evaluated by measuring soil composition but by observing how well its ecosystem thrives.

Their second element is vitality, which they define as, "the peculiarity distinguishing the living from the nonliving." While soil is not an organism, it is a living system consisting of interwoven processes.

The third element is sustainability or resilience. The authors say that a healthy soil is one that supports ecosystem functioning into perpetuity. They say soil health is a perpetually moving ideal, reflecting evolving conditions and demands. It can never be documented in a momentary snapshot and must be maintained over time despite ongoing stresses and upheavals.

Fertility used to be the measure of soil – the capacity of a soil to furnish high crop yields. Over time soil quality displaced fertility which included erosion control and protecting air and water by retaining pesticides and nutrients.

Now soil health includes broader societal functions including human nutrition, climate regulation, wildlife habitat, biodiversity preservation and aesthetic appeal. All of these functions are difficult if not impossible to "measure". Since soils persist indefinitely a functioning soil must be viewed across both short and open-ended time periods. The authors in this article say, "A soil may be very effective in withdrawing atmospheric CO₂ today, but that function will fade in time as its C stock approaches a steady state." They also say that an elaborate DNA profile of microbial communities within the soil will not help understand better soil management strategies without also understanding



their habitat. They suggest that a critical facet of soil health is to look at soil properties, tuned to the conditions and expectations of its setting, that maximize energy capture to allow for its sustainable storage and use.

To know if a specific soil is healthy it must be viewed from where it is located – a field, a forest, a garden and then ask what functions can this location support? Soil health will always be context dependent and that properties conferring health will never be the same from place to place. The authors say, "In short, health has no meaning for a soil divorced from its setting; no amount of analysis can assess a soil's health without acquaintance with its place."

In 1938 Aldo Leopold said, "The problem, then, is how to bring about a striving for harmony with land among a people many of whom have forgotten there is any such thing as land...". He already knew that it is essential to reconnect people to the soil in a way that promotes respect for soil, insight into its vitality and wiser ways of managing land to sustain its functions.

The authors of the article say that the continued usefulness of the term "soil health" depends, not on whether or not we can finally come up with a numerical value for "good" soil, but whether it causes us to have greater reverence for soil, understand the beneficial processes that it takes to maintain soil and then come up with wiser ways of managing soil.

IOWA TREE FARM FOLLOWS FAMILY TRADITION

From "Iowa Farmer Today", by Aaron Viner, Sept. 16, 2022

Family is one of the driving forces for Chuck Hinton. When visiting his Butler County tree farm, it's easy to see why.

Pulling in from the long, tree- and wildflower-lined driveway, there's an older house, a wooden dog house and multiple sheds that bring up memories of Hinton's father, who originally started the tree farm in 1972.

"He didn't live out here, but it was his weekend getaway," Hinton said. "He would come out here on weekends or after evenings at work. He was an attorney and would do some of his work out here instead of the office. It's a nice place of solitude."

Going through the trees and prairie he has set up on his 500 acres, Hinton's mind moves from the past to the future.

When his father passed away in 1998, he took over the farm located in Shell Rock, and the house his father spent time in is not being occupied at the moment. Hinton said he and his wife, Rhonda, have ideas of refurbishing it and moving out of nearby Cedar Falls and into the country. Then he dwells on the next generation.

"I was fortunate to have my father leave this to me and my hope is someday I'll pass it on to my kids," Hinton said. "I can't control what they'll do, but I hope it's something they can find enjoyment out of."

Hinton was recently named the 2022 Iowa Tree Farmer of the Year, but he said he couldn't do this work without the help of those around him, including the local FSA and NRCS offices and forestry divisions.

"If somebody owns a woods and doesn't know what to do with it, they should have awareness of the Conservation Stewardship Program," Hinton said. "I know a little bit, but I hope people are aware of the programs that exist and take advantage of them before we lose them."

The Coalition for Iowa's Woodlands and Trees said the Iowa tree industry has lost nearly 100,000 acres of forest due to development and clearing since 2009, which can lead to environmental concerns regarding soil erosion, flooding and loss of wildlife.



2022 Iowa Tree Farmer of the Year Chuck Hinton (left) with Iowa DNR Forester Joe Herring. (Submitted by Jason Hart, District Conservationist, Indianola)

Outside of the environmental benefits, he said there are plenty of societal and economic benefits as well.

"Trees in a community can improve air quality, provide natural sunblock and encourage social cohesion," They said. "The industry as a whole generates \$4 billion annually and a single tree can provide nearly a 250% return on investment over its lifetime."

The coalition said it is important more people explore agro-forestry or prairie land, particularly in areas that may be high-risk crop ground such as river bottoms.

"Trees and forests pay us back immediately and the benefits will grow over time," he said.

Those programs have helped Hinton turn this farm into his full time job, but plenty of work went into it before the switch. He remembers working a full-time job and only being able to plant trees on the weekend. In 2004, he said they planted 27,000 trees over a three-weekend span. That covered 40 acres of a windbreak.

2022 IOWA LATINO HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Submitted by Keith Feliciano-Cortes, Iowa NRCS HEPM Program Manager

Iowa NRCS participated at the 2022 Iowa Latino Heritage Festival in downtown Des Moines on Sept. 24-25. The event runs annually during National Hispanic Heritage Month - Sept. 15 through Oct. 15. The Latino heritage festival offers a combination of culture, art, cuisine, and musical performances.

One USDA

The NRCS booth was staffed by several USDA employees from different parts of the state. Iowa's HEPM and Denison Resource Team Lead Keith Marie Feliciano-Cortes coordinated the participation in the event.

Keith Marie (IA NRCS HEPM) and Gabriela Thompson (IA FSA HEPM) had the opportunity to discuss with visitors how both agencies are working together to reach Hispanic Farmers in Iowa. Two different agencies, but a common goal in mind. We are "Unidos".

This year's Hispanic Heritage Month national theme was "Unidos: Inclusivity for a Stronger Nation." The theme encourages us to ensure that all voices are represented and welcomed to help build stronger communities and a stronger nation.

Soil Health/Salud del suelo

The booth exhibit focused on soil health (salud del suelo) with a "Behold Our Living Soil" banner and a Mighty Mini Microbe's cutout. Visitors snapped pictures with Mighty Microbe and enjoyed learning about the different conservation practices, programs and career opportunities USDA has to offer.

Kids were excited to receive a Mighty Mini Microbe's Tale coloring book. Farmers and partners from different parts of the state were happy to see USDA participating in the event. Volunteers had the opportunity to translate materials to Spanish and explain to the visitors how to receive NRCS technical and financial assistance. The event was a great opportunity to create visibility in the Hispanic community and educate the public about USDA's mission.

Celebrating Heritage

Thank you to all the volunteers!

- » Caleb Santiago, Soil Conservationist, Storm Lake
- » Cristian Velez, Soil Conservationist, Osage
- » Gabriela Thompson, FSA CED, Algona & FSA HEPM
- » Keith M. Feliciano-Cortes, Resource Team Lead, Denison & NRCS HEPM
- » Rafael Gonzalez-Pagan, Soil Conservationist, Council Bluffs
- » Reyna Chavez, Soil Conservationist, Adel
- » Sarahy Castro, Farm Bill Specialist, Denison
- » Yohel Velazquez, Soil Conservationist, Thompson

NRCS Booth volunteer's heritage roots extended to the Caribbean and Central America.

- » Puerto Rico- Caleb, Cristian, Keith Marie, Rafael, and Yohel.
- » Mexico- Reyna, Sarahy
- » Honduras- Gabriela

5 Conservation terms in English and Spanish

1. Planning-Planificación
2. Livestock-Ganado
3. Soil-Suelo
4. Agriculture-Agricultura
5. Conservation-Conservación



NRCS had great participation from staff at the 2022 Latino Heritage Festival, including (L-R) Sarahy Castro, Keith Feliciano-Cortes, and Reyna Chavez.

SAVE MONEY AND PROTECT WATER QUALITY WITH SMART NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

by Terry Cosby, Chief, USDA-NRCS

With fertilizer prices significantly higher than last year, we have an important message for American farmers: **We see the challenges you face, and USDA has resources to support and strengthen nutrient management across your operation.**

Nutrient management [saves money on fertilizer](#) and improves water quality – a win-win.

To add another win to that list: **nutrient management is also an important part of climate-smart agriculture.** Excess nutrients on the land can lead to nitrogen losses to the atmosphere. Nutrient management maximizes crop-nitrogen uptake and has a compelling and cost-effective role to play in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture.

The Inflation Reduction Act will deliver \$19.5 billion in new conservation funding to support climate-smart agriculture, including for NRCS to improve opportunities for nutrient management. As part of USDA's broader effort to address future fertilizer availability and cost challenges for producers, NRCS will target funding, increase program flexibilities, launch a new outreach campaign to promote nutrient management's economic benefits, and expand partnerships to develop nutrient management plans.

Why the renewed focus on nutrient management? In March, NRCS released a [Conservation Effects Assessment Project \(CEAP\) report](#) on voluntary conservation outcomes across cultivated croplands. This highlighted national farmer-led successes in key areas such as soil health, carbon sequestration, and reduced fuel use. Despite many wins, the data revealed [national increases in subsurface nitrogen and soluble phosphorus lost to the environment](#) over a 10-year period. This impacts both water quality and farmer finances.



So, now more than ever, it's critical that we deliver voluntary conservation solutions to strengthen farmers' bottom lines, maximize crop yields and food production, and support natural resource conservation through site-specific, comprehensive nutrient management planning.

SMART Nutrient Management Planning

Farmers can save approximately [\\$30 per acre](#) on land currently receiving excess nutrients by implementing a SMART Nutrient Management Plan with NRCS.

A SMART Nutrient Management Plan includes the 4Rs of nutrient stewardship (**right Source, right Method, right Rate and right Timing**) and emphasizes smart activities to reduce nutrient loss by Assessment of comprehensive, site-specific conditions, recognizing that nutrient needs vary even within a field.

Visit Farmers.gov to read more about [SMART Nutrient Management](#).

FARM PROGRESS SHOW RETURNS TO IA

For the first time since 2018, Iowa hosted the Farm Progress Show (FPS) in Boone on Aug. 30 - Sept. 1.

Farm Progress owns several agricultural magazines across the country, including “Corn and Soybean Digest” and “Wallaces Farmer” here in Iowa. The company also hosts a handful of large farm shows, including Husker Harvest Days in Nebraska and the Farm Progress Show in Iowa and Illinois.

The Farm Progress Show, which alternates locations between Iowa in even years and Illinois in odd years, was cancelled in Iowa in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic.

Iowa NRCS exhibited alongside its USDA counterparts Farm Service Agency, Risk Management Agency, and National Ag Statistics Service in the Varied Industries Tent.

About 30 Iowa NRCS employees volunteered during the 3-day event. “The Farm Progress Show is a great event for us because it’s such a targeted farmer audience,” said Jason Johnson, State Public Affairs Specialist. “I felt like we connected with a lot of our customers, plus a lot of ag industry representatives.”

Johnson said Iowa NRCS emphasized soil health at its booth, including a slake test demonstration and handing out hand trowels (shovels) that included the theme “Dig A Little. Learn A Lot.”

“The hand trowels were very popular and really played on our message that encourages our customers to begin looking at their soils differently - as a living thing,” said Johnson.



Iowa NRCS Soil Health Specialists Alisha Sedlmayr (West Union), Hillary Olson (Des Moines), and JD Hollingsworth (Fairfield) and District Conservationist Rachel Wiest (Pocahontas) talk to Farm Progress Show attendees on Aug. 30 about the benefits of soil health management practices.



USDA Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack visited with USDA with employees during the Farm Progress Show on Aug. 30, including several Iowa NRCS employees.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Dennis Pate



Cheryl and Denny strategizing where to look next on the harbor and outside of the World Peace Prize building in Oslo, Norway.



Cheryl in front of Dennis in the middle; Sara and hubby, Eric, on left; Todd and wife, Kelly, on right; CA Grandson, Mason and Granddaughter, Avery, on outside; IA Granddaughters, Meara and Keelin, in the middle.



Dennis Pate retired from NRCS in 2004 after more than 36 years with NRCS

and SCS. He started his career in Minnesota - first in St. Cloud, then the Water Bank program took him to Morris and Willmar, MN. His first District Conservationist job was in Hallock, MN. He was later the District Conservationist in Warren, MN and Madison, WI. He first ventured into Iowa as the Area Conservationist in Ft. Dodge and ended his career as an Assistant State Conservationist in Des Moines. During his career he had numerous details to work in Wash, DC.

After retiring from NRCS, he worked for a private sector conservation group for about 5 years. "I really enjoyed seeing conservation from this different perspective, and it kept me in touch with many NRCS folks for an additional 5 years—they are good folks to hang with," Dennis says.

He and his wife, Cheryl, have a son and daughter-in-law with two kids living in Sacramento, CA, and a daughter and son-in-law with two children living in Cedar Falls. "We are blessed with good health so we are able to spend a good deal of time traveling to those places for visits as well as other great places in the US. We have also enjoyed cruises and tours in Ireland, Mexico, Italy, Costa Rica, Norway, the Danube River, the East Coast of the US and Canada, and one upcoming excursion to the Caribbean area," said Dennis.

"I enjoy gardening and golf, and still keep in contact with some NRCS folks at weekly golf outings," he says. "We recently moved from a home in Urbandale to a townhouse in Ankeny where we are getting settled in. Fall brings the football season and more opportunity to cheer on the Gophers and Vikings."

Iowa NRCS Retirees: Let us know where you are now! Contact Jason Johnson at jason.r.johnson@usda.gov.

BLACK EMPLOYEES MEETING



Iowa NRCS Black Emphasis Program Manager William Peek hosted a meeting for Iowa NRCS black employees on Sept. 9 at the State Office in Des Moines. The group met with State Conservationist Jon Hubbert and other leadership team members during the meeting and discussed other topics to help the program. Pictured (L-R): Joseph Debebe - Compliance Soil Scientist (Sgt. Bluff); Earniece Young - Resource Team Leader (Oakland); Peek; Brandy Buck - Soil Conservationist (Sgt. Bluff); Hubbert; Shaffer Ridgeway - District Conservationist (Waterloo); Andrew Frye - Soil Conservationist (Waverly); Jacque Harvey - Soil Conservationist (Harlan).

PFI FIELD DAY: GROWING CULTURAL VEGETABLES ON SMALL URBAN PLOTS WITH COVER CROPS

About a dozen Iowa NRCS staff members attended a field day on Sunday, Sept. 25, at Lutheran Services of Iowa's (LSI) Global Green Farms in West Des Moines.

The program connects former refugee farmers with land access, providing business development assistance and technical support.

State Resource Conservationist Mike Henderson presented the rainfall simulator to the group of nearly 100 attendees, showing the impacts of rainfall on different types of vegetative cover.



FABULOUS FIELD PHOTOS!



Field Photos



Spring planting was delayed in some parts of Iowa, so many farmers planted directly into cover crops that were taller than they would normally plant into.

1. Iowa NRCS State Biologist James Cronin (right) talks to staff - wetland specialists Russ Wolf, Jonathan Gordon, Joshua Golsen and Nicholas Zmoos - during a Plant ID training on July 20 at Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge in Prairie City. (*Jolene Bopp, Des Moines*)
2. Rolling hills pasture with interior paddock fencing in Cass County on Sept. 20. (*Jenae Waters, Atlantic*)
3. Fruit and vegetable producer Adam Junge harvests cabbage, peppers, and cucumbers on his farm near Underwood on Oct. 6. (*Jason Johnson, Des Moines*)

Thank you to those who submitted photos. For the next Current Developments, submit images at: https://usdagcc.sharepoint.com/:f:/r/sites/nrcs_iowa/PA/Shared%20Documents/Photo%20Submission?csf=1&web=1&e=aKV9q.

1



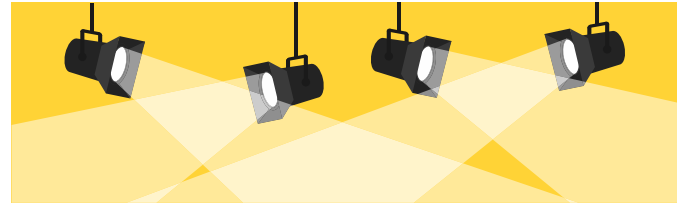
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NORTHEAST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



JACOB GROTH



Title: Resource Team Leader (Decorah)

College:

B.S., Iowa State University, 2003
Major: Animal Ecology

What is your career background?

In college, I worked a summer as a district employee for the Winneshiek SWCD and 2 summers for the Iowa DNR. After Iowa State, I spent 6 months working for Delta Waterfowl in Minnedosa, Manitoba, on a mallard and predator ecology project. I was then a state/district technician in Decorah for a year before getting on full time with NRCS. I was an SCT in Waverly from 2004-2008, SCT in New Hampton, 2008-2009, SC in Waukon 2009-2015, RC in New Hampton, 2015-2020, and the RTL in Decorah since 2020.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up on a farm northeast of Decorah. We had beef cattle, farrow to finish hog operation, and grew corn, soybeans, and alfalfa. Heather, my wife, and I have started taking over the operation from my parents. Currently, we raise corn, soybeans, small grains, and some poultry (laying hens, broiler chickens, and turkeys).

Why did you get into soil and water conservation?

My interest in conservation started from exposure to conservation practices on the farm growing up. When I was two, I escaped the house to watch terraces being built on the farm. I was caught running down the gravel road with a milkweed pod in my hand. I have been curious about conservation ever since.

My grandpa and dad never found gullies acceptable and made sure to keep areas seeded down that were susceptible to erosion and crop fields were rotated to alfalfa and pasture to give the land a chance to rest. I also enjoyed hunting and fishing growing up and those activities helped me see the direct impact that farming practices have on wildlife.

Working for NRCS provides a great mix of working with individual producers on their operation to have positive environmental impacts at the landscape level. I try to practice what I preach and our farm is 100% no-till with cover crops. We are growing small grains to diversify crop rotations, unproductive farmland is enrolled in CRP and managed for wildlife, and we are actively managing our timbered acres according to a forestry stewardship plan.

What do you like most about your job?

The diversity of work is the part I like the most about this job, especially working in the Driftless Area. Depending on the producer we can be working on a variety of land uses including cropland, pasture, forest, prairies, or habitat projects on cold water trout streams. I also get to meet a variety of producers that have innovative ideas on how to implement conservation practice on their operations.

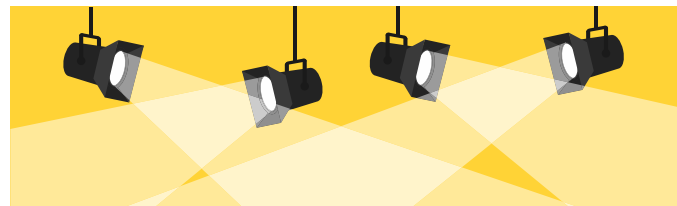
What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I spend my free time chasing a 4 yr old, irritating my wife, hunting deer, turkeys, pheasants, and waterfowl, trout fishing, and trapping.

Any family information you want to share?

Heather and I have been married for 6 years and we have Aubrey, our 4 year old daughter, and we are expecting a baby girl in November. We also have 3 older kids, Mariah (21), Mallory (19), and Camren (16).

NORTHWEST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



TAYLOR O'BRYAN



Title: Soil Conservationist

Location: Boone

College: Graduated from Iowa State University with a Degree in Agronomy and Environmental Science, 2016

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Columbus, Nebraska. Pretty average childhood! I dominated in hula hoop contests.

What is your career background?

I've worked at Solum soil testing labs as a lab tech and at Corteva as a Research Assistant working in soybean growth chambers.

How did you get interested in conservation?

I liked working in the field in the summers as well as going out in nature to summer camps, so I just naturally became interested in supporting those things.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I like how I don't have to do the same thing everyday, and that the job has a part that is customer service, but you aren't doing it 24/7. It's nice to have variety.

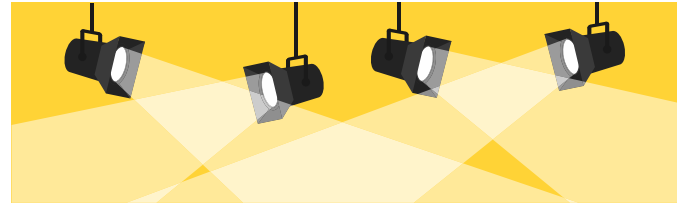
What are your hobbies?

Hiking, riding my bike, dancing with friends, and watching cheesy Asian dramas on Netflix

Any family you want to share about?

Nothing too new... my nephew just started to crawl!

SOUTHWEST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



RAFAEL GONZALEZ-PAGAN



Title: Acting District Conservationist

Location: Council Bluffs

College: B.A. in General Ag, University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez

What is your career background?

I was a soil conservationist in Lakefield, Minnesota. Before becoming the Acting DC in late September, I have been a soil conservationist in Council Bluffs since 2020.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Moca, Puerto Rico, a small town northwest of the island.

How did you get interested in conservation?

NRCS recruiting in college and a soils class got me interested.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I like figuring out what works with the landowner's interests and what works with our programs. It can be challenging and fun sometimes.

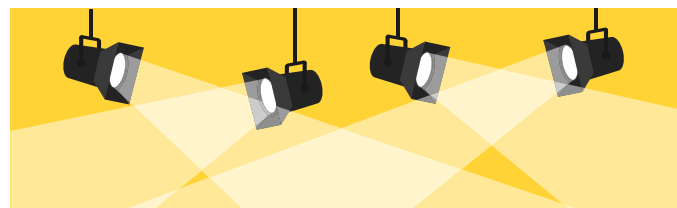
What do you do in your free time?

Bike riding, hiking and watching movies.

Any family you want to share about?

I'm the youngest of 3 siblings and all of my family still lives in Puerto Rico. I visit them every year for the holidays and try to visit most of my family and friends there while I'm there.

SOUTHEAST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



MADALYN HOLLINGSWORTH



Title: Acting District Conservationist

Location: Oskaloosa

College: I attended Iowa State University from 2015 to 2019 and graduated with my B.S. in Agronomy.

What is your career background?

I was a Pathways intern in the Muscatine FO in the summer of 2018. While finishing up at Iowa State I also interned in the Boone FO. After graduation, I worked in ag research for about a year before coming back on with the agency. I started in the Albia FO as a soil conservationist in 2020 and in September I started my temporary detail in the Oskaloosa FO.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up on a small acreage just outside of Elgin in the northeast part of Iowa.

How did you get interested in conservation?

I read the book "Empires of Food" by Evan Fraser and Andrew Rimas in high school and it got me really interested in food production and erosion. That led me to Agronomy at Iowa State where I learned more about the NRCS and was fortunate enough to get an internship.

What do you like most about your job?

Visiting with and learning from innovative farmers that are always troubleshooting and trying new things on their farm. I find it so interesting to hear about all the different things they've tried, successful or not.

What do you like to do in your free time?

In my spare time lately my husband and I have been working on renovating our farm house. I also enjoy gardening and biking.

Tell us about your family.

I live with my husband and pup Ryder in rural Hedrick. We are expecting our first child at the end of December.

STATE OFFICE SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE

TORI MARTIN



Title: Civil/Ag Engineer

Location: Des Moines

College: B.S., Iowa State University (2021), Biological Systems Engineering

What is your career background?

Throughout college, I worked at the Water Quality Research Lab at Iowa State under Dr. Soupir and I also led supplemental instruction sessions for students (similar to tutoring). After graduation, I moved to Florida and got a job at the NRCS as a CET in the Palmetto Area Office where I worked for about 10 months until I was offered the engineering position at the state office here in Iowa.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Marengo, Illinois – a small farming town on the outskirts of Chicago. My dad is a hardworking third-generation farmer and my mom is the kindest person you will ever meet. Growing up, you could always find my three brothers and me outside – no

matter the season. In the summer, we would catch lightning bugs, dance in the sprinkler, and chase each other through the corn. When the leaves began to change, we would make “potions” out of the ones unfortunate enough to fall to the ground, carve spooky faces into pumpkins from our garden, and make apple sauce from the apples we picked from our Lodi tree. The winter was full of snow forts, snow men, snowball fights, and begging our dad to hook the old sled to the four-wheeler and pull us around the yard until our eyelashes were frozen. And when spring finally came, we would make “chocolate cake” out of the muddy earth and attempt to convince each other to take a bite.

How did you get interested in conservation?

My interest in conservation, like many others in this agency, stems from my passion for the great outdoors and my desire to leave this world a better place than we found it. My agriculture background paired with my college education led me to the NRCS where I can only hope to make a difference!

What do you like most about your job?

So far, what I enjoy most about my job is the ability it grants me as an engineer to see a project through beginning to end. There is something special (and often frustrating and humbling) about watching your designs that started as “stretching-as-far-as-you-can-to-keep-your-boots-dry” flow line shots come to life during construction. Of course, I also love the outdoor aspect and the people as well!

What do you like to do in your free time?

I love to travel and visit new places – I adore exploring new cities as well as hiking through National Parks. My favorite hike I have ever done is Angels Landing at Zion NP – not a climb for the faint of heart but a view that is worth every second. I also enjoy cooking and trying new recipes, and on rainy days I love to curl up with a good book or binge the latest reality TV series I can find.

IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL CHANGES



Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Cornelius, Emily	Soil Conservationist	Name Change	7/8/2022	Denison RT
Hoepker, Abigail	Soil Conservationist	Name Change	7/8/2022	Red Oak RT
Anderson, Andrew	Soil Conservation Technician	Resignation	7/15/2022	Creston RT
Biodrowski, Michelle	Area Easement Specialist	Appointment	7/17/2022	Atlantic Area
Wang, Matthew	Area Easement Specialist	Appointment	7/17/2022	West Union Area
Sears, Daniel	Easement Specialist	Appointment	7/17/2022	Fairfield Area
Mercial, Wesley	Resource Conservationist	Appointment	7/17/2022	Webster City RT
Klein, Bailey	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	7/17/2022	Charles City RT
Schneider, Justin	Soil Conservationist	Promotion	7/17/2022	Garner RT
Allen, Matthew	Resource Conservationist	Reassignment	7/17/2022	Des Moines
Porter, Lance	District Conservationist	Resignation	7/22/2022	Leon
Johnson, Nickoles	Financial Resource Specialist	Appointment	7/31/2022	Des Moines
Ludwig, Alison	Area Business Tools Coordinator	Appointment	7/31/2022	Sioux City Area
Shaw, Chandra	Resource Conservationist	Promotion	7/31/2022	Des Moines
Probasco, Joseph	Program Services Assistant	Resignation	8/13/2022	Des Moines
Cabalka, Griffin	Soil Conservation Technician	Resignation	8/26/2022	Vinton RT
Huber, Layne	Wetland Specialist	Appointment	8/28/2022	Fort Dodge
Martin, Victoria	Civil Engineer	Appointment	8/28/2022	Des Moines
Hase, Anand	Asst. State Conservationist for Field Operations	Promotion	8/28/2022	West Union Area
Scholtes, Steven	Soil Conservation Technician	Retirement	8/31/2022	Decorah RT
Heavlin, Natasha	Soil Conservationist	Name Change	9/8/2022	Fort Dodge RT

IDALS-DSCWQ PERSONNEL CHANGES



Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Cooney, Randy	Mines & Minerals Project Coordinator	Retirement	7/1/2022	Central Office
Starkey, Ryan	Senior Project Coordinator - Mines & Minerals Bureau	New Hire	7/8/2022	Central Office
Stanevicius, Brianna	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	7/22/2022	Grundy SWCD
Seda, Ann	Urban Conservationist	New Hire	7/22/2022	Central Office
VandeLune, Cami	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	7/28/2022	Marion SWCD
Davis, Cindy	Financial Specialist	Retirement	8/4/2022	Central Office
Palas, Brenda	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	8/5/2022	Linn SWCD
Thomas, Kelly	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	8/9/2022	Dallas SWCD
Ben Roed	State Technician	Resignation	8/13/2022	Taylor SWCD
Alderson, Scott	State Technician	Resignation	8/18/2022	Keokuk SWCD
Whitman, Lydia	Conservation Assistant	Resignation	8/18/2022	Cedar SWCD
Shelton, Brett	State Technician	Resignation	8/26/2022	Madison/Warren SWCD
Vivan, Urmie	Conservation Assistant	New Hire	8/28/2022	Louisa SWCD
Shaul, Linda	Conservation Assistant	Resignation	8/30/2022	Hardin SWCD
Sweet, Abby	Environmental Specialist - Mines & Minerals	New Hire	9/1/2022	Central Office
Ramey, Tyler	State Technician	New Hire	9/2/2022	Clarke/Decatur SWCD
Bruun, Tracy	Contract Manager in Water Quality	New Hire	9/16/2022	Central Office
Dunnick, Shelly	Financial Specialist in Accounting Bureau	New Hire	9/16/2022	Central Office