



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

IOWA NRCS

SUMMER 2025



USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

 @IowaNRCS

[NRCS.USDA.GOV/IA](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/ia)

A NOTE FROM THE STATE CONSERVATIONIST



As we continue celebrating 90 years of conservation, it is important to reflect on how far we've come and what it will take to keep growing stronger. Our legacy is something to be proud of, built on trust, science, and a commitment to helping farmers care for the land. That foundation remains solid, but the road ahead calls for even more.

We're in a time of change, both within our agency and in the world around us. We need to stay open to new ideas and responsive to the changes shaping agriculture today. To keep delivering meaningful conservation, we must remain informed, adaptable, and focused. That means continuing to ground our work in science. It means staying connected to our customers by connecting with their needs and providing excellent customer service to help them adopt conservation on their land.

The work isn't always easy, but it is always important. Our impact on the land, our support for producers, and the way we show up for each other all matter. As we look toward the future, I know we'll keep rising to the challenge, together.

Thank you for all that you do. Keep up the momentum, take care of one another, and don't lose sight of the mission that connects us and delivers outcomes for a better today and a better future.

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 quarterly 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/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/iowa/current-developments>.

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OUTREACH REPORT: ANDREW THOMASON

Summer is in full swing and likewise, so is field season. There have been many events already and more on the way. Despite the changes with the Outreach and Partnerships Division, the focus on reaching new customers has not changed.

I had the opportunity to attend the Rodale institute's Midwest Organic Field Day, two ISU Urban Ag Catalyst project field days, and other events across the state. These events were a great way to learn more about the producers that NRCS serves and the opportunities we have with organic, urban, and small-scale producers.

There are many more events coming up around the state. Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) have begun their field days and those continue until the middle of November. They cover a wide range of topics and are great educational and outreach opportunities. You can find the full list of field days on the PFI field day webpage.

ISU Extension also has many upcoming field days and events at various farms around the state.

You can find a list of these events on the ISU Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources Event page. Often there are even more events at the county level, so keep your eyes peeled! I encourage everyone to attend events when they can for learning and outreach.

Lastly, I would like to remind everyone that we are still reporting on what outreach events that we have attended. Please remember to submit an [Outreach Reporting Form](#) after you've attended an outreach event. I greatly appreciate the time and effort everyone spends on outreach. Iowa is a big state to cover and it's a team effort to ensure that we reach as many people as we can.



Above: Greenfield robotics demonstrating their AI-powered robots in action at the Midwest Rodale Institute.



The Urban Ag Leadership Team held a meeting at LSI Global Greens in West Des Moines in June. They discussed the importance of incubator farms for urban and small-scale agriculture.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OUTREACH REPORT: CASEY GATHJE

Spring and summer have been busy with education events across the state. In May, I had the opportunity to help host and photograph several third- and fifth-grade field days with the Education Coordinator in Pottawattamie County. Each of these field days had several different stations covering a wide range of topics including forestry, soil health, pollinators, and more. Jolene Bopp and I were able to attend, 'Take Care of Your Soil and Yourself' in Waverly, hosted by the Black Hawk, Bremer, Butler, and Grundy Women, Land and Legacy chapters.



Jenna Curran, Black Hawk County Conservation Assistant (right center), and other attendees participate in a silly string demonstration highlighting the different roles of how soil aggregates are built at the Take Care of Your Soil and Yourself Event hosted by the Black Hawk Resource Team Women, Land and Legacy Chapter.

June was a busy month, starting with attending a Monarch and Pollinator Workshop hosted by Iowa Learning Farms in Clarinda, followed by the World Pork Expo in Des Moines. Webster County hosted the Lizard Creek Workshop with several presenters, followed by a tour of a certified tree farm. I was invited to join the Master Conservationist class while they toured a public lands location with several Fens, the presentation was led by Clay County District Conservationist, Marshall Wernimont. Madison County SWCD

hosted a Soil Health Field Day on World Soil Health Day at McLaughlin Farms near Cumming. IDALS and NRCS shared a booth at the Ag Educators Conference in Ankeny, where we had the privilege of connecting with several FFA advisors from across the state.



June finished out with Southwest Iowa Soil Health (SWISH) hosting their annual Summer Soil Health Field Day at the ISU Armstrong Research Farm near Lewis.



West Pottawattamie County District Conservationist, Laura Ferguson (right) exams soil cores during the Southwest Iowa Soil Health (SWISH) Agronomy and Soil Health Summer Field Day at the Armstrong Research Farm in Pottawattamie County.

July has brought in county fair season; many counties have exhibitor booths or conservation events they are hosting throughout the month. Regenerative Practices in Row Crop Farming

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OUTREACH CONT.



Brianne Bloom, Environmental Education Coordinator/Naturalist at the Clay County Conservation Board, shows a Master Conservationist student soil from within a fen.

Field Day was hosted at Middleswart Lodge near Indianola with several different speakers, including Hillary Olson, J.D. Hollingsworth, and Ruth Blomquist. Andrew Thomason and I set up an exhibitor table at the Iowa Hunger Summit hosted at the World Food Prize, with about 250 in attendance.

All these events have provided me with the

opportunity to connect with people of all ages and backgrounds, which presented conversations on the multiple ways that NRCS can help with conservation, from teaching young people to offering new ideas to seasoned producers.

Women, Land and Legacy chapters have been doing big things. There are several events planned for the upcoming fall and winter months; chapters have been busy getting all these events planned and advertised; be on the lookout for these in the August newsletter.

The State Team met in June to discuss how we can continue to be of the best service to the local chapters, as well as new ways to continue growing. Discussions have started with five different areas about starting new chapters, so I am continuing to work with them to move forward with this process. We are currently revamping the website, so be on the lookout for the new updates, <https://www.womenlandandlegacy.org/>!



Fifth grade students from Riverside Elementary participate in the River Study Station at Fifth Grade Field Day located at Botna Bend Park in Pottawattamie County hosted by Laura Monson, County Education Coordinator



(Right to left) Ernie Kersten (tour host and landowner), Jason Orton, and Wayne Petersburg answer questions from the participants of the Lizard Creek Landowner Forestry Workshop during the timber walk portion.

TRAINING & EVENTS

Below: SW Area Soil Health Specialist Ruth Blomquist and State Soil Scientist Hillary Olson discuss soils and root systems in rotational grazing fields with participants during a soil health event in Madison County.



Above: (Top left to right) Lauren Netz, Dawn Henderson, Keith Marie Feliciano **(Bottom left to right)** Jess Kline, Gabby Hackley and Jodi Williamson and Jon Hubbert. NRCS employees graduated the Land Stewardship Leadership Academy on May 22.



Above: Kelsi Sieren, Beth Brand, Ben Kuennen, Emily Ludwig, Kristy York, Stacie Lowe and Jolene Bopp graduated the Cultivating Future Leaders program on June 27.

Compliance Newsletter

**COMING
SOON**

Feeling bogged down and drained by acronyms, rules and requirements? We know compliance can be a nightmare. The newsletter will help breakdown complex topics, answers to bone chilling questions from the field and more. The first newsletter will be sure to lure you in on Sept. 30, 2025.

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES TO PLANT CEREAL RYE AHEAD OF CORN: HAIRY VETCH, CAMELINA, AND MORE

by Mark Licht, Iowa State University Associate Professor and Extension Cropping Systems Specialist

Over the past year, one of the most frequently asked questions I've received about cover crops is: "What alternatives are there to cereal rye ahead of corn?"

Cereal rye has long been the go-to cover crop for Iowa farmers due to its excellent winter hardiness, high biomass production, superior erosion control, and ability to limit nutrient loss. However, concerns about corn yield drag following cereal rye have prompted growing interest in alternative cover crops that may offer better compatibility with corn.

Two promising alternatives are hairy vetch and camelina. These are particularly noteworthy because they include varieties that commonly overwinter in Iowa.



Above: Pure stand of fall seeded hairy vetch on May 7.



Above: Camelina and oats mixed following fall drill seeding on November 6.

Hairy vetch is a legume known for its ability to fix nitrogen, making it a valuable asset ahead of nitrogen-hungry corn. When terminated later in the spring, hairy vetch can contribute 60–120 pounds of nitrogen per acre, reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers. It also provides good ground cover and erosion control. However, it requires careful management to avoid becoming weedy or difficult to terminate. If not properly managed, hairy vetch can reseed and persist in subsequent crops, especially in no-till systems. Its hard seed coat allows some seeds to remain dormant in the soil for years, leading to volunteer growth in future seasons.

[Read Full Story](#)

SOIL AT THE HEART OF CONSERVATION DECISIONS

By Jason Johnson, State Public Affairs Specialist, USDA-NRCS, Des Moines, Iowa

Soil scientist – to many people – may sound like a less than exciting career choice. Digging around, looking at different soil identifiers like colors, moisture levels, and textures might seem a little boring.

But for the soil scientists across the country working for the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), soil is exciting! To them, soil is literally and figuratively the foundation for many decisions made by farmers.

NRCS staff recently celebrated the agency's 90th anniversary. Formed out of the Dust Bowl era, NRCS has – from its very infancy – focused on reducing soil erosion on private lands. Jason Steele is an area resource soil scientist for NRCS, covering the southeast part of Iowa. He has been a soil scientist for NRCS in some capacity for nearly 25 years.

He grew up on a farm and still works there every night after work. His family raises corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and pasture for their cow/calf operation.

"Since I actively farm, it helps me communicate well with our farmer landowners," said Steele. "I can talk to farmers about planting, harvesting, haying, agronomic concerns, and even economic scenarios. I feel that it builds trust between NRCS and our farmers."

[Read Full Story](#) | [More Photos](#)



Above: NRCS Soil Scientist Jason Steele (left) looks at the base of a cylinder after using it for a water infiltration test during Soil Health and Sustainability training for NRCS staff on June 10, 2025, near Ainsworth.



Above: NRCS Soil Scientist Jason Steele (left) and Soil Health Specialist JD Hollingsworth review soil colors during a soil health training near Ainsworth on June 10, 2025.

BEYOND THE SURFACE: HOW NRCS ENGINEERS HELP PLAN AND MAINTAIN IOWA WATERSHEDS

By Jolene Bopp, Public Affairs Specialist, USDA-NRCS, Des Moines, Iowa

In early May, engineers with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) launched a boat into a body of water held by one of the Badger Creek Watershed structures in Madison County, Iowa. Instead of bait and tackle, the boat carried a survey rod and a GPS unit to help determine how well the structure is functioning, and what may need to be done to keep it working in the future.



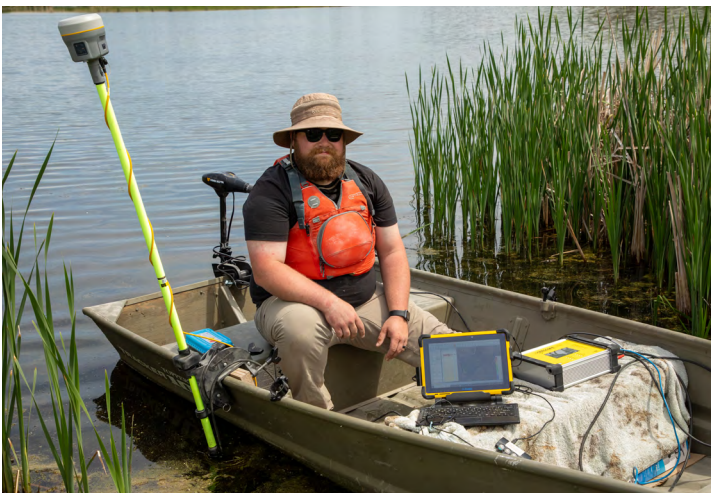
Above: NRCS Civil Engineer Technician Hayes Durbin conducts bathymetric survey in Madison County, Iowa.

Although this structure is over 50 years old, it continues to help manage 300 acres of upstream drainage by reducing flood risk, controlling gully erosion and trapping sediment before it reaches Badger Creek Lake. NRCS worked closely with local sponsors to design and implement

solutions to protect the land and improve water quality. Thanks to good stewardship and strong partnerships it continues to do just that.

The project was a collaborative effort between NRCS and local sponsors including the Dallas, Madison and Warren County Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Madison County. The watershed plan was signed in 1960. The structure was completed in 1973 under Public Law 566, now known as the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program.

"This might have been an equipment test run, but the information we gathered is valuable and usable right now," said Hayes Durbin, civil engineering technician with the NRCS in Iowa. "We can start assessing whether this site needs repairs, rehabilitation or if it's still operating as designed."



Above: NRCS Civil Engineer Technician Hayes Durbin conducts bathymetric survey in Madison County, Iowa.

[Read Full Story](#) | [More Photos](#)

IDALS MOVES: NEW CONTACT INFORMATION

As of July 1, 2025, IDALS is officially headquartered on the fifth floor of the Hoover State Office Building, located in the southeast corner of the Iowa Capitol Complex.

New Contact Information

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
Hoover State Office Building
1305 E. Walnut Street, Fifth Floor
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
Main Phone: (515) 281-5321
Fax: (515) 281-4282

The addresses for IDALS employees based at the State Laboratory in Ankeny and field offices will not change.


Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality Contact Information

If you are unable to reach your primary IDALS contact via phone or email, you can call the main office line, and you will be forwarded to the appropriate person.

Visiting Hoover

Free visitor parking is available in Lot 2, located west of the Hoover Building, and Lot 26, located southwest of the Hoover Building. Please visit the Iowa Department of Administrative Services' website for more information about visitor parking at the Iowa Capitol Complex.

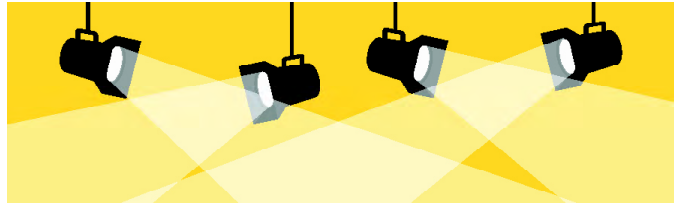
Enter through the main entrance (northwest corner) of the Hoover Building and proceed to the right until you reach the elevators. Take the elevator to the fifth floor and check-in at the reception window.

Division of Soil Conservation & Water Quality			
Internal Contact Information			
Director: Susan Kozak		Deputy Director: Kate Bussanmas	
C: 515-423-3069		C: 515-306-7014	
		Nicky McEuen C: 515-281-5851	
		Franny Myers C: 515-499-2166	
Field Services Bureau		Water Quality Initiative	
Will Myers	C: 515-321-0758	Matt McDonald	C: 515-306-7013
Sadi Hawk	O: 515-281-5258	Matt Lechtenberg	O: 515-281-3857
	C: 515-776-2565		C: 563-380-7020
Mike Franklin	O: 515-281-6145	Water Resources Bureau	
	C: 515-322-7705	Jake Hansen	C: 515-418-3409
Derek Namanny	C: 515-344-8196	Jeremy Brill	C: 515-336-4697
Urban Con - VACANT	C:	Tracy Bruun	C: 515-344-6279
Ann Seda	C: 515-401-4908	Brandon Dittman	C: 641-208-5645
Amy Bouska	C: 319-330-6785	Casey Judge	C: 515-822-1851
Bobby Kuennen	C: 515-322-0721	Shane Wulf	C: 515-322-7662
Deborah Morgan - Lennie	C: 515-499-4941	Jerry Neppel	C: 515-776-2838
Kyle Ament	C: 515-422-8809	Emalyn Polz	C: 515-322-9073
Michelle Timmer	C: 515-805-6555	Tanner Puls	C: 515-344-9319
Perrin Taylor	C: 515-306-7015	Sara Smith	C: 515-422-7335
Mines & Minerals Bureau		Dan Case	C: 515-499-6643
Vince Sitzmann	C: 515-499-4008	Bob Waters	C: 515-306-7012
Mary Baker	O: 515-281-4246	Felicia Nails	C: 641-208-5645
Mike Bourland	O: 515-242-6130	James Martin	C: 515-250-5602
	C: 515-250-5988	 IOWA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & LAND STEWARDSHIP	
David Suchan	C: 515-321-2852		
Abigale Sweet	O: 515-306-1636		
Wally Greentees	C: 515-669-9177		
Abbie Williams	C: 515-446-0878		
Ashley Wos	C: 515-499-6237		
Katie Coleman	C: 515-322-6997		
Angie Sebastian	C: 515-882-1538		



NORTHWEST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE

RILEY WHITE



Title: Soil Conservation Technician, Spencer

College: Iowa Lakes Community College, Associate of Applied Science in Environmental Studies, 2017-2019

What is your career background?

Cherokee, IA as a district technician from January 2020 - July 2020.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up on an acreage 10 miles south of Spencer near Greenville. As a kid I was big into 4-H where

I showed chickens, ducks, geese, hogs, and sheep. Even though we didn't farm, all of our animals and projects on the acreage kept my four siblings and I very busy.

How did you get interested in conservation?

I started getting seriously interested in conservation during my later years of high school. I love the area I grew up in and always wanted to make a difference for the community. I realized that having a job that helps preserve and protect the land for future generations is one of the most gratifying ways to do so.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

My favorite part has to be talking to producers and learning more about their farm is always interesting. When they have a concern, sitting down with the farmers and creating an end result that is good for the land and makes them happy is a great feeling.

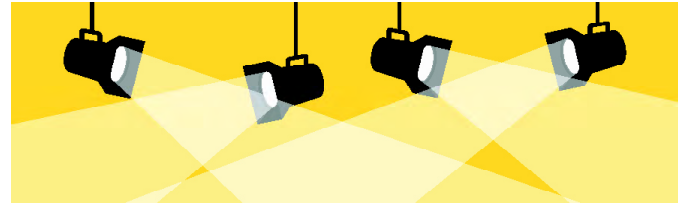
What are your hobbies?

My favorite hobbies include being outdoors, spending time with my family, and watching Minnesota Vikings football.

Any family?

I have such a great little family. I have a wonderful wife (Andee), a beautiful 6-month-old daughter (Olivia), and two wonderful dogs (Finley and Remi). They are my whole world, and I don't know what I'd do without them!

NORTHEAST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



BEN KUENNEN



Title: Wetland Specialist, New Hampton

College: Iowa State University, BS Forestry and Environmental Studies, MS Agriculture Education. University of Missouri, enrolled in Agroforestry Graduate Certificate Program.

What is your career background?

This is all I have done with the NRCS although the counties I have covered have changed thru the years.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up on a farm between St. Lucas and Fort Atkinson

How did you get interested in conservation?

I grew up being outdoors all the time as a kid in the woods or playing on the Turkey River and enjoyed being a farm kid. Then I read "A Sand County Almanac" by Aldo Leopold and "Walden" by Henry David Thoreau.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I like that my job allows me to cover multiple counties and go out in the field to see a lot of different things.

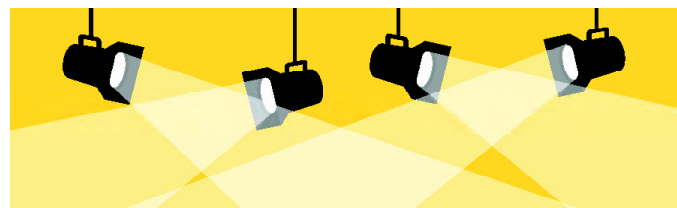
What are your hobbies?

Staying active by playing sports and cattle farming. I also enjoy reading and traveling.

Any family?

I have been married for 17 years to Kelly and have three daughters, Ava, Annika, and Greta

SOUTHWEST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



JORDAN SUMMERS



Title: Soil Conservationist, Clarke County

College: Iowa State University, 2015,
Bachelor of Science in Agronomy and Seed
Science

What other positions have you had?

I served as the Acting District
Conservationist in Clarke County.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Warren County on a row crop

farm. Some of the best times were spent in a combine with a bag of tootsie pops trying to figure how many licks it took to get to the center. I still couldn't tell you...

How did you get interested in conservation?

Watching how much both of my grandpas took care of the land. They treated the land like it was an extension of themselves and to care for it was just as important as eating/breathing. I realized from them everyone is tied to the land in one way or another and to protect the land is to keep all things eating/breathing.

What do you like most about your job?

Seeing the positive impacts conservation has on all things. Even if the goal was to accomplish a single task the impacts that single accomplishment has reaches much further.

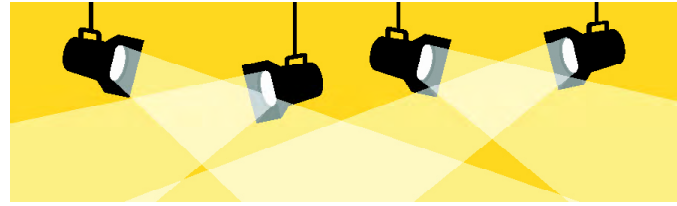
What do you enjoy away from work?

Being outdoors, spending time with family/friends, and baling hay.

Any family?

I'm thankful each day for having such a great wife and wild bunch of dogs in my life.

SOUTHEAST AREA SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE



STACY PRASSAS



Title: Resource Team Lead, Ottumwa Office

College: University of WI River Falls, majored in Soils, 2001

What is your career background?

I was a Southeast Grassland Specialist, Soil Conservationist in Bloomfield, Albia and Donnellson; Intern in Sparta, WI.

Where did you grow up?

La Crosse, WI. My neighbors babysat me starting at two days old and I fell in love with horses, cows and farming.

How did you get interested in conservation?

My farm family and having the NRCS staff out at the farm.

What do you like most about your job?

I enjoy helping our farmers and landowners.

What are your hobbies?

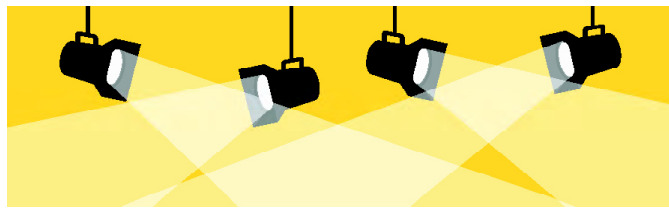
Cows, Horses, updating my house, and kids ball games.

Any family or pets?

I have twin boys and live adjacent to their dad and stepmom. We all work together to raise them. I have seven horses, two draft, and five saddle quarter horses. I got 14 heifers this summer. I have three dogs and two cats. I grew up horse pulling with my farm family and continue to help with horse pulls.

STATE OFFICE SPOTLIGHT EMPLOYEE

SAMANTHA GORBET



Title: Civil/Agriculture Engineer, Des Moines

College: Iowa State University, Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering, 2008-2013. American Military University, Master of Science in Environmental Policy and Management (NEPA Concentration), 2016-2018.

What is your career background?

I started out my career with the US Forest Service as a student trainee. In 2016, I moved to New Mexico for a position as a Civil/Agricultural Engineer with NRCS in the North Area. After four years in New Mexico, I moved here.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in the small town of Oroville, nestled along the Sierra Nevada Mountains of Northern

California. Fun fact, Oroville is home to the tallest dam in the US (and no, it is NOT the Hoover Dam). The dam, at 770ft high and 1.3 miles long, impounds Lake Oroville, the second largest reservoir in California. There are 167 miles of shoreline, and the lake holds over 3.5 million acre-ft of water.

How did you get interested in conservation?

Growing up next to the beautiful Lake Oroville, I spent much of my childhood on the water. My dad used to work as a fishing guide and also competed in professional fishing tournaments. This shared love for fishing, hunting, and the outdoors is really what sparked my love for conservation.

What do you like most about your job?

One of the most rewarding aspects is collaborating with farmers to understand their needs and develop effective solutions. It's fulfilling to see the positive impact that my work has on both their land and their way of life. I also love the variety of projects I get to work on. Every day brings a new challenge.

What are your hobbies?

As my husband would say, my favorite hobby is starting new hobbies! Fishing would probably be at the top of my list. You can always find me out on the water. I also build my own fishing rods, continuing a family business going back five generations.

Any family information you want to share?

I live in Ames with my husband, Dana, as well as our 2 dogs (Odin and Gandalf) and 3 cats (Leeroy, Lucky, and Shadow).

IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL CHANGES



Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Ogle, Amanda	Student Trainee Engineer	Resignation	05/12/2025	Atlantic
Lund, Sarah	Soil Conservationist	Resignation	05/17/2025	Charles City RT
Overton, Mabel	Student Trainee Soil Conservationist	Resignation	05/21/2025	Williamsburg RT
Tucker, Nainette	Student Trainee Engineer	Appointment	06/15/2025	Sergeant Bluf RT
Tesdell, Jonathan	Soil Conservationist Technician	Retirement	06/27/2025	Audubon RT
Klein, Bailey	Resource Conservationist	Resignation	06/28/2025	Charles City RT

IDALS-DSCWQ PERSONNEL CHANGES



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF
**AGRICULTURE &
LAND STEWARDSHIP**

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Bruscher, Michelle	Conservation Assistant	Appointment	04/2025	Plymouth SWCD
Nearman, Tina	Conservation Assistant	Appointment	04/2025	Woodbury SWCD
Ament, Kyle	Statewide Field Representative for Environmental Specialist & District Employees	Appointment	04/2025	Central Office
Grovin-Krueger, Terri	Conservation Assistant	Appointment	05/2025	Iowa SWCD
Greving, Mary	Conservation Assistant	Appointment	05/2025	Sac SWCD
Bodisch, Korina	Conservation Technician	Appointment	05/2025	Davis SWCD
McArdle, Britany	Conservation Assistant	Appointment	06/2025	Montgomery SWCD
Gifford, Brooke	Conservation Assistant	Appointment	06/2025	Jasper SWCD
Bulechek, Julia	Conservation Assistant	Appointment	06/2025	Johnson SWCD
Gretchell, Jennifer	Conservation Assistant	Appointment	06/2025	Louisa SWCD
Sontag, Aurora	Conservation Technician	Resignation	06/2025	Plymouth SWCD
Bruscher, Michelle	Conservation Assistant	Resignation	06/2025	Plymouth SWCD
Hoogland, Morgan	Conservation Assistant	Resignation	06/2025	O'Brien SWCD