



United States Department of Agriculture

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Winter 2018

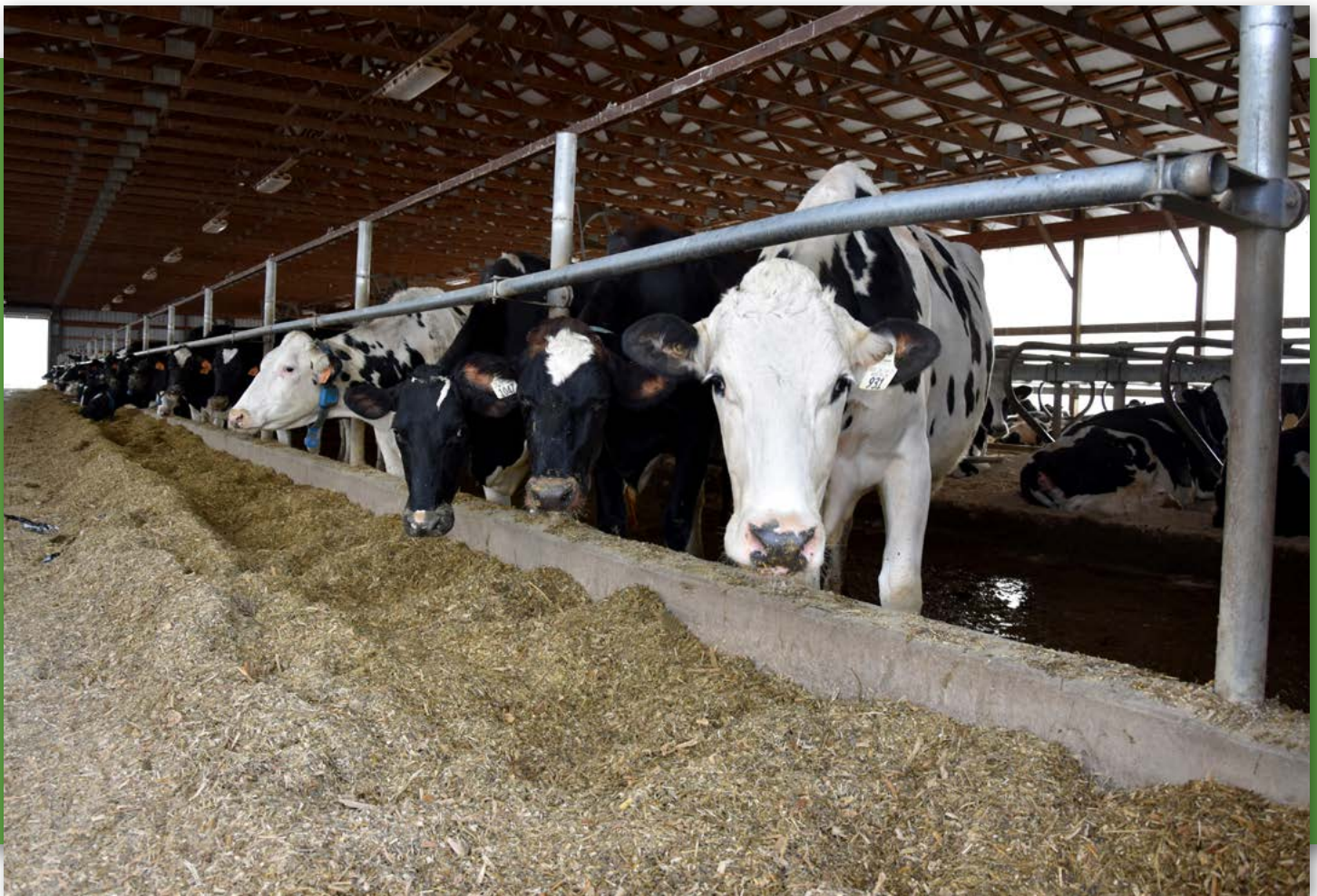
AVA HAUN BUSY ON
VETERAN'S DAY



HARVEY RECEIVES NATIONAL
RECOGNITION

NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE

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a **Message** from the **State Conservationist**



Kurt Simon,
State Conservationist

Simon Visited All 100 Field Offices in 2017

I enjoyed getting out to the field in 2017, and am proud to say I visited **every** Field Office last year - about half of those in November and December. Although our time together was brief, I feel it is very important to visit as many of you in the field as possible and to listen to your feedback. My first year, I completed 27 Listening Sessions throughout the state. I have been working with State and Area staff over the past couple years to address concerns you expressed to us at those sessions. I feel like we've addressed many of those concerns, and we are still working on some of the long-term issues.

A new year brings new challenges, and one issue that has been ignored far too long is the condition of many of our watershed structures. Many dams across the state are nearing their 50-year life expectancy, which means project sponsors are ultimately responsible for assuring their operation and maintenance. We are collaborating with several of our partners to host nine meetings throughout the state, where we will

meet with sponsors and community members to talk about the future and importance of properly maintaining our watershed structures.

Additionally, our lease agreement in the Federal Building expired last year, which meant a USDA audit of our space based on staff numbers. Because of the significant drop in full-time employees over the past decade, we are required to reduce our working space in the Federal Building by about 40 percent. So, beginning this Spring our office will not only undergo a reduction in size, but also a significant renovation. We are planning to host an event when the office remodel is complete. We will keep you posted on the Open House.



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 State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Crowell at laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov. Past issues can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2_008273



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VETERANS PROGRAM: NETWORKING LUNCHES ACROSS IOWA

*Submitted by Ava Haun, Veterans
Emphasis Program Manager*

The NRCS Veteran's Special Emphasis Program hosted networking lunches in each area, Dec. 4-8, 2017.

The idea behind the lunches was to allow for Veterans in each area to get to know other Veterans in their respective areas.

I provided some information on Veteran's benefits. There were benefits that some of the Veterans were unaware of and the meetings were beneficial in getting that information out to them. Groups also discussed the Veterans program and ideas for the program moving forward.

It was a great way for me to meet the people I serve, and valuable insight was gained that will benefit the Veteran's program moving forward. Thanks to everyone who attended!



Staff from Area 2 and the State Office gathered at Wallaby's Bar and Grille in Ames. (L to R) Ava Haun Veteran's SEPM, Joseph Thompson, Elmer Foxx, Tara Kinyon-Anderson, and Thomas Shileny. (In attendance, but not pictured, Kurt Simon and Kevin McCall.)

FEBRUARY: WOODSON CREDITED FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH

*Submitted by Rubyana Neely, Black Emphasis
Program Manager*

Americans have recognized black history annually since 1926, first as "Negro History Week", and later as "Black History Month." What you might not know is that black history had barely been documented when the tradition originated. Although blacks have been in America at least as far back as colonial times, it was not until the 20th century that they gained a respectable presence in the history books.

We owe the celebration of Black History Month, and more importantly, the study of black history, to Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Born to parents who were former slaves, he spent his childhood working in the Kentucky coal mines and enrolled in high school at age 20. He graduated within two years and later went on to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard. The scholar was disturbed to find in his studies that history books largely ignored the black American population-

and when blacks did figure into the picture, it was generally in ways that reflected the inferior social position they were assigned at the time. Woodson, always one to act on his ambitions, decided to take on the challenge of writing black Americans into the nation's history. He established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now called the Association for the study of Afro-American Life and History) in 1915, and a year later founded the widely respected Journal of Negro History. In 1926, he launched Negro History Week as an initiative to bring national attention to the contributions of black people throughout American history. Woodson chose the second week of February for Negro History Week, because it marks the birthdays of two men who greatly influenced the black American population, Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln to show its significance in black American history.

Vist www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov for more information.

AVA HAUN: REACHING OUT ON VETERAN'S DAY

Submitted by William Peek, Wetland Specialist and Area 2 Civil Rights Committee Representative, Fort Dodge

It was an honor to take part in the Veteran's breakfast hosted by the Story County Freedom Flight (SCFF) organization that our own Ava Haun, a Soil Conservationist in the Story and Marshall County Management Unit and Veteran Special Emphasis Program Manager, helped organized.

As part of their outreach to Veterans, the SCFF started helping serve food and busing tables at Hy-Vee in Ames on Veteran's Day in 2012 and have continued the tradition annually since. It's a great way to say thanks, reach out to Veterans that haven't been on one of the trips, and to visit with those that have.

Ava started as one of the first volunteers in 2012 and has continued with the non-profit to the present. She plans to continue her service to these Story County residence who so honorably served their county. The organization has given Ava purpose and community as well as allowed her to make a positive impact on the men and woman who dedicatedly served in our armed forces and our nation honorably.

What is the Story County Freedom Flight?

The Story County Freedom Flight honors County veterans from WWII, Korea and Vietnam for their service by sponsoring trips to Washington D.C. to visit memorials erected in honor of the service members who served in those wars. The organization started with a small of group of about 8 volunteers and has grown to more than 30 volunteers. Past DC visits took place in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. Each flight hosts approximately 150 Veterans and 12 volunteers to assist the disabled, as well as distribute food and water, take photos for the vets, and facilitate enjoyment of the trip in any way possible. Each hosted pilgrimage cost around \$110,000, all donated from the community. All of the proceeds goes towards the cost and overhead of the trips.



Ava Haun takes a picture with a couple Veterans at the Story County Freedom Flight breakfast at Hy-Vee in Ames. Haun volunteers by helping to serve food and bus tables.

In addition, the Freedom Flight has hosted golf tournaments, 5K runs, chili feeds, bags tournaments, a magic show, wine tastings, and other events over the years to make each trip a reality. Numerous businesses in Story County have also contributed to the organizations mission financially or in other ways.

New Way to Honor Veterans

SCFF is no longer sponsoring flights to DC as all the WWII, Korea, and Vietnam vets that were able and willing to go in Story County have made the journey. With that, the SCFF are planning to celebrate local veterans with a trip to see other monuments built to honor their service to the country. Over the past few years, the Freedom Flight has taken several hundred veterans to visit memorials in Washington, D.C. Under the new plan, the trip will focus on younger veterans. The committee is planning to take Story County Veterans to see the Middle East Conflicts Memorial Wall in Marseilles, Ill. The trip is planned for on a Saturday in April or May of 2018. Any Veteran who served from 1979 to present is eligible for the trip. The Story County Freedom Flight organization is hoping to take up to 200 Veterans.

HONORING VETERANS: HARVEY RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Submitted by Laura Crowell, State Public Affairs Specialist/Outreach Coordinator



NRCS Contract Specialist Matthew Harvey, of Des Moines, received the 2018 USDA Drum Major for Service Individual Award for his volunteer work to preserve and honor the history of the first black officers and women who trained for the U.S. Army at Fort Des Moines.

The Drum Major for Service award recognizes USDA employees who serve as helping hands, performing extraordinary acts of volunteerism with reliability and commitment, uplifting communities and people. The awards are included in USDA's observation of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service each January.

Harvey, a U.S. Army veteran and Bronze Star Medal recipient, has served the past five years as board president of the nonprofit Fort Des Moines Museum and Education Center. The first class of black Army officers trained at the site more than 100 years ago—breaking ethnic and racial barriers in the US Army. The first women trained there more than 75 years ago—breaking additional gender-based barriers. The museum honors these soldiers and their fellow veterans.

Harvey was nominated by his friend and co-worker, Iowa NRCS State Engineer Christian Osborn. According to Osborn, the 14-year-old museum was significantly in debt before Harvey became president. Under Harvey's leadership and through the work of inspired board members and volunteers,

the museum and education center has recovered financially and is planning a significant fundraiser to secure the long-term stability of the facility.

"Fort Des Moines Museum preserves the history of the people who served at Fort Des Moines and educates visitors about the issues that faced our military and our country many years ago," Harvey said. "The lessons we can learn from this history help us now and will help our country for generations to come."

Thousands of visitors stop at the museum and center, which now features new exhibits and education videos developed during Harvey's tenure. Volunteers provide educational programs at schools, libraries, veterans' organizations and other local community groups.

To help build awareness and to provide financial support, the museum also hosts veterans' art show and career fairs, meetings for black fraternities and sororities, Boy Scouts, wedding receptions and reunions.

"Matthew's personal sacrifice on behalf of the museum allows for the education of Americans across the country and many international visitors from around the world," said Osborn.



Fort Des Moines Museum

BACK IN THE DAY

Congratulations Paul Miller!



Paul Miller, who served as the district conservationist for NRCS in Polk County for more than 16 years, retired in January after 35 years of service.

Paul spent his career in several locations, including Council Bluffs, Humboldt, Newton, Des Moines and Ankeny.

Paul won't be resting, though. He has already started working as an Urban Conservationist for IDALS.

At left, Paul worked with the students, staff and parents from Greenwood Elementary in Des Moines in 2005 to build a rain garden to catch water runoff from their parking lot.

OPEN CALL: NOMINATE IOWA'S BEST CONSERVATION FARMER

Nominations are now being sought to find and recognize the 2018 Iowa Conservation Farmer of the Year. The prestigious honor includes a substantial prize; the winner receives use of a new John Deere 6E utility tractor for a year, courtesy of prize sponsors Van Wall and John Deere.

The award, co-sponsored by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) and the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF), honors an Iowa farmer who has a proven track record of excellence in soil conservation and water quality improvements and is committed to continuously working to improve the land and water.

The award, which got its start in 1952, is designed to help raise awareness about the importance of caring for Iowa's fertile lands and vital waterways and to acknowledge those who accept the challenge of continuously working to improve conservation.

The nomination process is easy; a farmer can apply or be nominated for the award by sending a brief letter, 100

words or less, summarizing the nominee's conservation efforts to the local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) by June 1. The local SWCD will choose one nomination to advance for consideration for a regional award, and the nine regional award winners then compete for the overall award, which will be announced during the Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners Annual Conference, September 9-11 in Des Moines. As part of receiving the award, the 2018 Conservation Farmer of the Year winner will receive free use of a John Deere 6E Series utility tractor, for up to 12 months or 200 hours of use. The prize, valued at more than \$12,000, is sponsored annually by Van Wall Equipment of Perry and John Deere.

Chris Teachout of Shenandoah won 2017 Iowa Conservation Farmer of the Year. Visit the [Conservation Districts of Iowa \(CDI\) website](#) for a full list of past recipients and other award nomination forms.

EMPLOYEE
SPOTLIGHT

**Andrea
Lohafer**



Andrea Lohafer

Title: District Conservationist, Le Mars

College Education:

- » Bachelor's Degree: Environmental Science, 2003, Iowa State University
- » Master's Degree: Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, 2007, Iowa State University

Career

After graduation, I joined the Iowa DNR-sponsored AmeriCorps. I was based out of the NRCS Sergeant Bluff FO, and worked there as an AmeriCorps employee for 2 years, a District Employee for 1 year. In 2010, I was hired on as a Soil Conservationist.

In 2012, I became a Resource Conservationist for the Osceola/Lyon shared Management Unit. In September 2017, I was chosen to be the District Conservationist for Plymouth County.

During my career in AmeriCorps/NRCS, I have worked in Monona, Woodbury, Plymouth, Sioux, Lyon, Osceola, and O'Brien Counties.

How Did You Become Interested in Conservation?

I grew up in Lawler, a small farming community in Chickasaw County. My mother owned a restaurant, and I worked there washing dishes and busing tables.

I always enjoyed the natural world, especially plants. Some of my favorite childhood books were the little Golden Guide identification guides. I got hooked on ecology in high school; my biology teacher, Ms. Reese, took our class on a number of field trips to different sites around NE Iowa. I loved these little hidden gems of native habitat surrounded by croplands, and that's really followed me throughout my career.

What is your favorite part about working for NRCS?

I love being able to help producers realize their natural resource goals, whether through technical assistance, financial assistance, or even just brainstorming ideas. I still like to see those little hidden natural areas on some of my field visits that only the landowner knows about.

I really like Plymouth County; I feel that it has such a diverse mix of cropland and wild areas, river bottoms and Loess Hills, city and country. Each component has its own unique conservation opportunities, and I really look forward to exploring those opportunities in the long term.

Family Life

I met my husband, Matt, at Iowa State—we were both in the Society for Creative Anachronism, a medieval reenactment group. He is originally from Plymouth County, and I was looking to move back to NW Iowa after college. It was a stroke of good luck for me to be stationed in the Woodbury office for my AmeriCorps stint. We have 2 sons: Karl, who is 2.5 years old, and Otto, who is 8 months old.

We just purchased the acreage that Matt grew up on from his parents, and moved out there in November. We're planning on transforming the old feedlot into pollinator habitat, and starting a new orchard this spring.



NRCS: Pasture Management

A new video developed by NRCS, in partnership with the Lexicon of Sustainability, on Pasture Management is part of a series of videos on organic farming.

Many are finding, however, that the video is applicable to all grazing operations, and can be utilized when working with livestock producers in the grazing management plan process.

The video series is available on [YouTube](#).



9-YEAR STUDY: YIELDS IMPROVE FOLLOWING CEREAL RYE



Cereal rye cover crops added to a corn-soybean rotation have little to no negative effect on yield, and actually increased soybean yields in eight site-years and corn yield in two-sites years, according to a nine-year study conducted by the Iowa

Learning Farms (ILF) and Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI).

In 2008 and 2009, 12 farmers across Iowa established replicated strips of winter cereal rye cover crop and strips with no cover crop within their corn and soybean rotation. The cover crop was either drilled after harvest or aerially seeded into standing crops each fall. At each site, the cover crop was terminated the following spring by herbicide one to two weeks before planting.

When the project began, the farmers were concerned that the winter cereal rye would impact their corn or soybean yields negatively. But after harvest was completed each year, the farmers reported that this was not the case. When properly managed, cover crops had little to no negative effect and, in some cases, actually improved yields.

For Taylor County farmer Kelly Tobin, the top benefits of adding a cover crop to his operation were

reduced soil erosion and improved soil health. "I had put in pattern tile three feet down that never worked until I had a cover crop for three years. The tile now removes standing water after heavy rains thanks to the roots and biological activity underground." Tobin also noted that although it has taken time, he has been able to achieve an increase in crop yields. In 2016, Tobin reported a 19 bu/ac advantage for corn, and in 2017, measured an 11 bu/ac increase in soybeans.

Proper management is key when incorporating cover crops into a corn-soybean rotation. Knowing what cover crop to use, when to plant, and how and when to terminate are the main components to successful implementation. Effective termination with herbicide requires an actively growing plant. Planter settings may also need to be adjusted to handle increased residue.

There are many resources to help farmers with answers to these management details online and in print, as well as the option of contacting a cover crop farmer in your area through the ILF or PFI network, local Extension field agronomist or NRCS field specialist.

The year nine update for this study is available online at the ILF website: <https://www.iowalearningfarms.org/content/cover-crop-research>.

Changes In IOWA NRCS PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Langholdt, Joshua	Soil Conservationist	Convert to Career Appt	11/12/17	Ida Grove
Spence, Joan	Soil Conservationist	Convert to Career Cond Appt	11/12/17	Cresco
Boone, Candace	Biologist	Name Change	11/26/17	Williamsburg
Page, Cynthia	Physical Science Tech	Retirement	11/30/17	Des Moines
Foubert, Matthew	Program Assistant	Career Appt	12/10/17	Manchester
Ackerman, Heidi	Soil Conservationist	Name Change	12/24/17	Adel
Mathes, Gary	Soil Conservation Technician	Resignation	12/29/17	Hampton
Grange, Deanna	Office Assistant	Retirement	12/31/17	Sioux City Area
Thomas, Janet	Engineering Technician	Retirement	12/31/17	Sioux City Engineering
Jones, Wendell	District Conservationist	Retirement	1/1/18	Iowa City
Miller, Paul	District Conservationist	Retirement	1/3/18	Ankeny
Kitzman, Heather	Soil Conservationist	Career Cond Appt	1/7/18	Sac City
Wedemeyer, Alan	Agronomist	Resignation	1/19/18	Fort Dodge Area

Changes In IDALS-DSCWQ PERSONNEL

NAME	TITLE	NATURE OF ACTION	EFFECTIVE DATE	LOCATION
Whitman, Lydia	Conservation Assistant	New Employee	12/1/17	Cedar SWCD
Gubbels, Nicky	Admin Assistant to the Director	New Employee	12/1/17	Central Office
Antisdell, Nancy	Conservation Assistant	New Employee	1/2/18	Adair SWCD
Bultman, Anne	Conservation Assistant	New Employee	1/2/18	Polk SWCD
Gillespie, Jim	Director of IDALS/DSCWQ	Retirement	1/2/18	Central Office
King, Sharon	Conservation Assistant	Retirement	1/3/18	Mitchell SWCD
Miller, Paul	Urban Conservationist	New Employee	1/12/18	Central Office