

Iowa Current Developments

October 2011

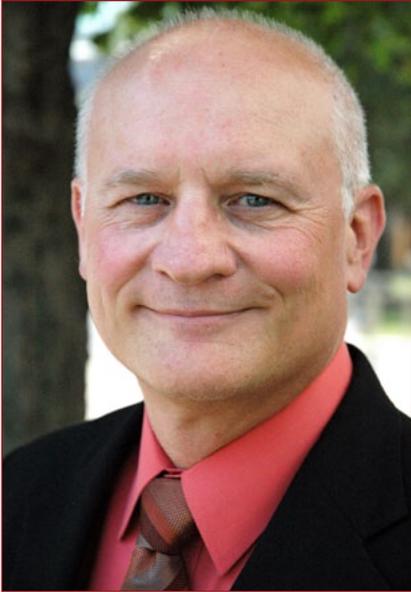


United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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A Message from the: **State Conservationist**



Richard Sims, State Conservationist

Accomplishments

This is the time of the year I like to reflect on our state's accomplishments. There are usual ones such as progress goals met, new initiatives established, and dollars brought into our state.

However, this year there were additional issues and accomplishments that affected us as a team and as individuals:

- » We hired several new folks and said goodbye to just as many, creating opportunities for personal and professional transitions for many people.
- » Changes caused by the elimination of programs affected many of our friends and we continue to manage this change that was out of our control.
- » We welcomed many new and returning college and high school interns, and your efforts to instill a conservation ethic will stay in their memories of Iowa.
- » And every field office hosted at least one volunteer this year and the word "service" continues in our hearts and actions.

Thank you for all your accomplishments this year and what you have done towards meeting our goals.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Sims".

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 Greiner at laura.greiner@ia.usda.gov.

Past issues can be found at www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/currentdevelopments.html.



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Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Graphic Designer: Phillips Illustrates Windbreak for NRCS Poster

Using his talents as a young graphic artist, Logan Phillips - a senior at Prairie City-Monroe High School - produced an illustration of a windbreak protecting hog confinements upon request of the Iowa NRCS Public Affairs staff.

Phillips served as an Earth Team Volunteer in completing the project. He is the son of Iowa NRCS GIS Specialist Jim Phillips.

"We had a request from the field for an image showing a windbreak surrounding confinement buildings," said Jason Johnson, public affairs specialist. "We didn't have any great pictures of this on-hand, so I thought an illustration would work well in this case."

Johnson talks with Jim Phillips at lunch daily, and knew of Logan's talents from conversations. "Jim told me about some of the neat things Logan has produced, and I figured this would be pretty simple for him," said Johnson. "He did a really nice job. We have another project or two in mind for him."

Jim Phillips said he is a proud father. "Most of the drawings Logan does are much different than this," he said, "so it is pretty neat to see what he can do when asked to do something conservation-oriented."



Logan Phillips, a senior at Prairie City-Monroe (PCM) High School, shows off the illustration he produced for USDA-NRCS. (Submitted Photo)

Earth Team: Volunteers Contribute to Iowa Conservation



For the second consecutive year, Iowa NRCS ranked at or near the top in the nation in attracting volunteers to assist us in putting conservation on the land. Here is how Iowa NRCS ranked:

Rank		Total
2nd	# of Offices Using Volunteers	116
5th	% of Offices Utilized	95
9th	# of Volunteers	693
9th	# of Total Volunteer Hours	13,552

14-Week Rotations: BMLP Participants Experience Iowa

USDA's new Business Management Leaders Program (BMLP) launched in FY2011 and brought four individuals to Iowa for 14-week stints.

Iowa's BMLP participants include: Lee Salinas (Des Moines), Jerry Jones (Des Moines), Waymon McNeal (Adel) and Elissa Newton (Ankeny).

The BMLP is an intensive two-year program that provides a combination of formal training with rotational work assignments in financial management, human resources, contracting, and field offices.

Upon successful completion of the program, individuals can be non-competitively placed in a permanent

position within NRCS. A minimum of a bachelor's degree is required to qualify for the program.

The program seeks to fill positions in various job series, including Safety and Occupational Health, Human Resources, Accounting and Budget, Acquisitions, and Information Technology.

Polk County District Conservationist Paul Miller thinks it's a benefit for BMLP to start out working in the field offices. "When they begin full-time work in business management, they can remember the field office experience and use that to make decisions that will help the field."



Lee Salinas, left, completed a 14-week assignment in September for the human resources department at the NRCS State Office in Des Moines. Salinas is a fluent Spanish speaker and spent a lot of his free time conducting outreach projects.



Jerry Jones, left, recently started his rotation in Iowa NRCS' financial management area. He will mostly be working with people like Matthew Harvey (center) and Justin Niceswanger, who do contracting work for the agency.



Waymon McNeal spent 14 weeks in the Adel field office in early 2011. McNeal participated in several field days, learning about the technical expertise we provide and then teaching students about natural resource conservation as well.



Elissa Newton: Polk County District Conservationist Paul Miller said it was a pleasure to have Elissa in Ankeny. "The staff enjoyed working with her and she was willing to learn and help in all field office operations," he said.

18 Years: Fayette SWCD 3rd Grade Field Day on Dick Jensen Farm

For the 18th consecutive year, the Fayette Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) hosted a field day for third graders at Dick and Dorothy Jensen's farm east of West Union.

The field day, in fact, was three days, Sept. 13-15, involving 14 schools, approximately 450 students, and 36 teachers and helpers.

Dick Jensen said he enjoys the annual event and sees a real benefit for the students. "We're providing the students a joyful experience that has long-term educational benefits," he said. "Children these days are much like their parents - so plugged into electronics. Anything we can do to bring the child back to the land, to give them an understanding of

where their food comes from, and to help them understand the value of the land we've inherited is going to benefit all of us down the road."

Tamara Buitenwerf, soil conservationist in West Union, says outdoor education can be fun and a learning experience at the same time. She says that's one of the District's goals. "We hope the students are left with a lasting impression that makes them want to learn more and encourages them to share with others," she said. "That's why we continue to the field day each year. When a student tells me that she learned that what we spray on the land can affect bees that pollinate the apples she eats, we know she has learned something valuable."



Fayette SWCD Commissioner Dick Jensen shows third grade students from Valley Community Schools (Elgin) how water flowing on bare soil creates erosion. Jensen's family recently hosted their 18th straight field day.



Congratulations!

East Boyer Watershed Structures Complete

Crawford and Carroll Counties recently celebrated the completion of 32 structures and other practices in the East Boyer Watershed. The project started in 1999 and completed in 2010.

This project was the first project in Iowa to be approved for Watershed Protection Funds through IDALS-Division of Soil Conservation, which paid 75 percent of the cost of structures and other practices.

Kossuth County Wins 2011 Food Drive

The Kossuth and Humboldt County field offices earned pizza parties from USDA-NRCS, Rural Development, and Farm Service Agency for finishing 1st and 2nd in the 2011 Feds Feed Families Food Drive.

Kossuth County led in total lbs. per employee with 269.5, while Humboldt County led in total lbs. with 4,007. Woodbury County finished third overall.

LT Member Changes: Two Former Iowa NRCS Employees Return

Damaris Mortenson, area resource conservationist in Michigan, begins her duties as assistant state conservationist for field operations in Sioux City on Nov. 21.



Mortenson replaces Sheila Cox, who retired in October.

Mortenson worked in Iowa as a soil conservationist trainee, water quality project manager, and district conservationist.

Rick Bednarek returns to Iowa after serving as assistant state soil scientist for South Dakota NRCS the past six years. Bednarek will replace Mike Sucik as state soil scientist working out of the State Office in Des Moines.

Bednarek worked in the Atlantic Area Office as area soil scientist prior to leaving for South Dakota.

Sucik now works with the National Resources Inventory (NRI) in Ames.



Bednarek, right, with now-retired District Conservationist Marvin Lundstedt at no-till farmer Randy Caviness' farm in Adair County in 2004.

Hatch Act: Campaign Season Is Upon Us! What You Need to Know

According to the Hatch Act, can a Federal employee hand out campaign literature? If there is a website for a campaign on its literature, is this a problem?

Less restricted Federal employees such as all GS employees **MAY** lawfully pass out campaign literature in their personal capacity. However, **Federal employees MAY NOT lawfully pass out literature designed to raise funds for political parties, political groups, or campaigns.**

When does campaign literature become fundraising literature?

Below are three typical scenarios for handing out campaign materials:

» Scenario 1 - If there is no reference to fundraising or websites in campaign materials, **it is OK for Federal employees to pass them out.**

» Scenario 2 - If there is no reference to fundraising on materials, but there is a reference to a cam-

The Hatch Act limits certain political activities of Federal employees both on and off duty. Violations of the Hatch Act may result in disciplinary action, up to and including removal.

campaign web page that is not a place to make donations, such as the main website for a campaign, **Federal employees may pass these materials out.** This is true even if the web page has a link to another web page where contributions can be made.

» Scenario 3 - There is either a request for campaign contributions or a direct link to a website where contributors may make political donations. **Federal employees may not pass out materials of this type. It would be fundraising.**

Contact Chris Knudsen, human resources officer and state ethics advisor, if you have questions about the Hatch Act.

Pufferbilly Days: Boone & Greene SWCDs Participate in Annual Event

The Boone and Greene Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) participated in the annual Pufferbilly Days Parade in Boone, Sept. 10.

The term "Pufferbilly" stems from the little steam engines that were used in coal mines. Boone has a strong railroad heritage.

The celebration is rated as one of the top celebrations in Iowa with more than 30,000 people annually.

The group shared a float with Boy Scouts of America®.



Manure Mgmt: ILF Offers New DVD

A new how-to video from Iowa Learning Farms (ILF) and the Iowa Manure Management Action Group (IMMAG) offers suggestions, tips and reminders about manure application.

The 20-minute DVD, "Manure Management and Conservation," shows how to collect manure samples for nutrient analysis from different types of manure handling systems, reviews a manure analysis lab report, and provides the basics for determining application rates.

"Our goal with this video is to remind producers that proper manure application plays a significant role in meeting



conservation objectives and protecting our soil and water resources," says Jamie Benning, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach watershed specialist.

The DVD is available for free by request; e-mail ILF: ilf@iastate.edu. It can also be seen on YouTube at www.youtube.com/iowaLearningFarm.

Translation Team: Iowa Pubs Translated to Spanish

Three Iowa NRCS publications were translated to Spanish during the past year.

The Rain Garden Fact Sheet, Conservation Compliance and Your USDA Benefits, and Step by Step: Your Guide to Applying for USDA Conservation Programs have Spanish versions thanks to a Translation Team of employees from across the state.

"Compliance" and "Step by Step" have been professionally printed and are available through the State Office. "Rain Gardens" is available in PDF format only.

To request a publication be translated to Spanish, contact Jason Johnson at 515-323-2701.

Partner News: Iowa Learning Farm and Leopold Center

New Iowa Learning Farm Video: Out to the Lakes

Is there a water quality problem in Iowa?

This question is posed to Iowans in the latest video produced by Iowa Learning Farms. "Out to the Lakes" is a provocative and engaging film that encourages viewers to think about water quality and their personal relationship with their local lake or water body.

The film addresses water quality through the perspective of lakes and the water bodies that feed them.

Copies of "Out to the Lakes" are available at no charge by request; e-mail ILF at: ilf@iastate.edu or by mail: Iowa Learning Farms, 219A Davidson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011. Please include a mailing address in the request. The film can also be viewed in its entirety on Iowa Learning Farms' YouTube Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/IowaLearningFarm>. For more information about Iowa Learning Farms, visit the website: www.extension.iastate.edu/ilf.

Study Looks at Perceptions of Sustainable Farming Among Bankers, Crop Insurance Agents

The Center for Rural Affairs and the Iowa Farmers Union, with financial support from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, have released results of a survey of Iowa producers, agricultural lenders and crop insurance agents.

The purpose was to understand each sector's attitudes and knowledge toward "sustainable agriculture," and to determine the extent, if any, of discrimination against sustainable agriculture in lending and crop insurance practices.

Traci Bruckner, Assistant Policy Director at the Center for Rural Affairs says the analysis reveals real disparities between how conventional operations and sustainable farms and ranches are treated by lenders and insurance companies.

"First and foremost, to level the playing field, the 2012 Farm Bill should include direct language that would remove a 5 percent surcharge on insurance premiums for organic producers and provide insurance claim payments equal to the market premium for organic products," said Bruckner.

A full copy of the report entitled, "Credit, Crop Insurance and Sustainable Agriculture in Iowa," is available on the Leopold Center's website: www.leopold.iastate.edu.

New Water Quality Practice Offers First-Year Surprises

Researchers working with the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture report promising results from a new type of conservation practice that removes nitrate from water flowing in underground field drainage tiles before it reaches streams, rivers and other waterways.

An estimated 500 pounds of nitrate-nitrogen coming from crop fields along a 1,000-ft. stretch of Bear Creek in Story County never reached the waterway this past growing season. Instead, the subsurface drainage water was diverted to an existing riparian buffer along Bear Creek before it reached the stream.

The new practice is called a **saturated buffer**, in which a shallow lateral line intercepts tile lines before they release water into a stream. The lateral line has control structures that raise the water table and slow outflow, allowing the buffers to naturally remove nutrients such as nitrate and phosphorus.

"One weakness of riparian buffers in protecting water quality is that our extensively tiled farm fields rush the subsurface drainage water right past and through them," says Jeri Neal, who leads the Leopold Center's Ecology Initiative that is funding the study. "As a result, we are not able to take full advantage of the clean water work those buffers are capable of doing."

The saturated buffer was installed in 2010 as part of a multi-year competitive grant project supported by the Leopold Center's Ecology Initiative.

"This is a technology that many people definitely are interested in, and in having more information about how they work," said Dan Jaynes with USDA and lead for the project.

Iowa NRCS Golf Tournament: **Spring Valley**



*Submitted by Brian Tumey,
Resource Conservationist, Algona*

The 2011 Iowa NRCS Golf Tournament was held on Aug. 26 at Spring Valley Golf Course near the town of Livermore in Kossuth County. This year 42 people participated in the 2-person best shot event.

The overall winners of the tournament were the team of Jason Johnson and Lynn Betts with a final score of 3-under par 69, just edging out Dana Holland and Rick Trine who finished with a 70.

Via a tiebreaker, second flight winners were Rich and Jean Sims with a score of 80, followed by Deb Banwart and Deanna Banwart with an 80.

Winners of the third flight were Patrick Chase and Donnelle Banwart with an 84, followed by Larry Trauger and Doug Adams with an 86.

It turned out to be a great day weather-wise and everyone seemed to have a great time. Brian Tumey, Larry Trauger, Doug Adams, and Bob Moser helped organize the tournament.

Next year's event will be held on Aug. 24 at The Preserve on Rathbun Lake. Make plans to stay at the Honey Creek Resort State Park. More details about next year's tournament will be out early in 2012.

Roy Campbell: **Off to Afghanistan**



Roy Campbell, resource conservationist on the Operations Staff in the State Office, is heading to Afghanistan next week to serve as an Agricultural Advisor. He is assigned to a Czech Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Logar Province.

Campbell will help coordinate and implement projects, and assess agricultural needs. He will provide advice and support on ag reconstruction, as well as develop ag extension activities.

Photo Frenzy: **2011 Feds Feed Families Food Drive**



Atlantic Field Office



Thompson Field Office

Changes In: NRCS Personnel

In order of Effective Date

Name	Title	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Location
Klein, John	Wetlands Team Leader	7/17/11	Reassignment	Carroll
Ransom, Ryan	Wetland Specialist	8/14/11	New Hire - Temporary	Emmetsburg
Steele, Amber	Wetland Specialist	8/14/11	New Hire - Temporary	Garner
Vonnahme, Debra	Soil Conservation Tech.	8/26/11	Retirement	Carroll
Buitenwerf, Tamara	Soil Conservationist	8/28/11	Promotion	West Union
Frana, Matthew	Wetland Specialist	8/28/11	New Hire - Temporary	Boone
Henson, Tara	Wetland Specialist	8/28/11	Reassignment - Temporary	Fort Dodge
Klimesh, Derrick	Wetland Specialist	8/28/11	New Hire - Temporary	Pocahontas
Trauger, Larry	Engineering Tech.	8/31/11	Retirement	Algona
Farnsworth, Dustin	Soil Conservation Tech.	9/2/11	Resignation	Boone
Schmeiser, Dale	Soil Conservation Tech.	9/11/11	Converted to Career Conditional Appointment	Mt. Pleasant
Wilberding, Valerie	Soil Conservation Tech.	9/11/11	Converted to Career Conditional Appointment	Osage
Pokorny, Mark	Soil Conservation Tech.	9/11/11	Reassignment	Toledo
Stoeffler, Thomas	Soil Conservation Tech.	9/11/11	Reassignment	Iowa City
Townley, Gregory	District Conservationist	9/19/11	Return from Military Duty	Malcom
Frederiksen, Shirley	RC&D Coordinator	9/23/11	Retirement	Oakland
Paulin, John	Resource Conservationist (Wetlands)	9/25/11	Reassignment	Des Moines
Welsh, Matthew	Soil Conservation Tech.	9/25/11	Reassignment	Epworth
Parsons, Jerry	Soil Conservation Tech.	9/30/11	Retirement	Leon
Yunk, Alan	Soil Scientist	9/30/11	Retirement	Des Moines
Jahn, Gregory	Soil Conservation Tech.	10/2/11	Retirement	Orange City
Braun, Renee	District Conservationist	10/3/11	Retirement	Cherokee
Cox, Sheila	Asst. State Con. - F.O.	10/3/11	Retirement	Sioux City
Kestel, Jeff	RC&D Coordinator	10/3/11	Retirement	Spencer
Ehley, Ruth	Resource Conservationist	10/9/11	Promotion	Primghar
Mays, Dale	Easement Specialist	10/9/11	New Hire - Temporary	Des Moines

Changes In: IDALS-DSC Personnel

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Location
Bjerke, Brianne	State Secretary	New Hire	Winneshiek and Allamakee SWCDs
Dickinson SWCD		New Office Location	3302 18th Street, Suite 2 Spirit Lake, IA 51360 Phone: 712-336-3782, x3 (same) FAX: 712-336-1445 (new)