



Allamakee County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Annual Newsletter

2016

Conservation Leader Award Presented to Jeff & Judy Huinker



Jeff and Judy Huinker have been farming on their farm northeast of Postville for 37 years. They began by milking cows on halves with Jeff's father, Bill. They started with a corn/hay rotation and over the years have installed terraces and gradually switched to more of a corn/bean rotation. Jeff says they realized that with less ground cover they needed more protection from heavy rains and that prompted them to switch to reduced tillage and then to no-till in addition to their terraces.

Today the Huinkers incorporate grassed waterways, grass buffer strips, strip cropping, terraces, grassed headlands, CRP buffers around the pond and along the creek and regular CRP in steep areas. They regularly plant cover crops and do no-till.

Jeff and Judy are striving to maintain their soil organic matter and top soil. They feel that by integrating many different conservation practices they can obtain their goals. Jeff states, "As a young farmer I would apply as many of these practices as possible. I learned that much of the conservation work can be done at a low cost with great benefits."

In the future they are considering going to all no-till and having more cover crops. Jeff and Judy are the proud parents of 3 daughters and enjoy spending time with their 8 grandchildren.

The Allamakee County Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioners would like to recognize Jeff and Judy Huinker as Outstanding Conservation Farmers and award them with the first Conservation Leader award for Allamakee County. "This farming operation is a shining example of integrating many conservation practices to achieve exemplary soil conservation and water quality impacts," says Lynn Stock, Chairman of the SWCD board.

Staff:

LuAnn Rolling-District Conservationist
Megan Waechter-Soil Conservationist
Barb Hanson-Soil Technician
Steve Scholtes-Soil Technician
Tom Duvel-Conservation Aid
Sara Berges-Project Coordinator
Brady Kruger- District Employee
Brienne Wild- Conservation Assistant

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Meet our New Soil Conservationist Megan Waechter



Megan Waechter (pronounced Wek-ter) started as the new Soil Conservationist at the Waukon NRCS office on October 19. She was offered the position after Jacob Groth moved to a new job with NRCS as a sub-area Resource Conservationist based out of New Hampton. Please introduce yourself to her if you stop by the office so that she can start to learn the names and faces of the Allamakee land-owners and producers.

Megan grew up in Earlham, Iowa which is about 25 miles west of Des Moines. Her family now resides in Texas, which prompted her to live there for a few years as well. Megan graduated from Iowa State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Wildlife Ecology. She

worked for three seasons as a Biological Technician for the Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring Program through ISU where she conducted various wildlife surveys. She has also been a Biology Intern at Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge outside of Prairie City, Iowa. More recently, she worked as a Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist in Plains, Texas.

Megan says she applied for the job in Allamakee County due to the diversity of conservation practices and programs that are available here. She is also looking forward to exploring the beautiful landscape and recreational opportunities. Her goals as the new soil con. are to gain as much knowledge as she can about the various conservation strategies used here and how they can best be applied to the land in order to assist producers with addressing resource concerns.

Thank you to our Conservation Donors! FY2015

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Commissioners establish new CRP policy

At the November 13, 2015 meeting of the Allamakee SWCD, the commissioners established the following policy for practices associated with the CP33-Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds, CP42- Pollinator Habitat, HELI (Highly Erodible Land Index), and SAFE Gaining Ground (State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement) Programs:

If more than 40% of the predominant soil type enrolled is A,B,C, or D slope the plan will not be approved unless the soil type has a weighted average CSR of 35 or less.

The rationale used is:

We, as elected officials, are charged with properly managing the resources, fulfilling the intent of legislation and wisely utilizing conservation dollars. We feel that by implementing the above policy we are meeting this goal. The continuous CRP program was established to enroll highly sensitive areas into a vegetative cover for soil protection, water quality, and wildlife habitat. Due to the limited amount of acres in these programs we want to make sure that the acres enrolled are best suited for these programs in an effort to help conserve our natural resources and conservation dollars. At the same time we want to keep productive land available and used wisely. Enrolling productive farmland into the CRP contradicts the original goal of the program, and could potentially deny other more sensitive acres from being enrolled when acreage limits are met. In addition, we feel that this program makes it difficult for young beginning farmers to get their start, or small farmers to acquire additional acres when they have to compete with CRP rental rates that exceed costs of production. We believe that keeping productive land in production and enrolling the most sensitive land in CRP is the best use of our resources within the county and of federal conservation dollars.

New Project Encourages Producers to Evaluate Economics of Farmland Use

A new project, funded by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, will focus on providing information to producers and landowners about the economics/environmental impact associated with different land uses. The district's project coordinator, Sara Berges, is available to discuss these options with interested producers. **The focus of this project is to encourage cropland conversion to pasture, adding a small grain to a rotation, utilizing cover crops on manure applied acres, and including conservation provisions in farm leases.**

Soils with lower yields (marginal soils) often do not yield enough to be profitable when factoring in commodity prices and input costs. Alternate land uses such as converting the land to pasture or including a small grain in the rotation may be more profitable in the long-term. Financial assistance may be available from NRCS through the EQIP program for either of these practices. If you are interested in converting crop ground to pasture, an NRCS grazing plan will need to be developed. A small-grain workshop will be set up this summer to help producers learn more about small grain production, harvest, and marketing.

Cover crops are rarely used on acres that have had manure application. By planting winter-hardy cover crops on these acres, erosion and nutrient runoff would be minimized. Cost-share may be available through EQIP or state cost-share for interested individuals. On-farm demonstration sites will be established using different methods for manure and cover crop application. A field day will be set up this fall to showcase the different methods of application and the many benefits of cover crops.

Landowners can play an important role in ensuring that their farm is managed for long-term productivity. One way to do this is to update the NRCS conservation plan to address areas of conservation concern and to attach it to the farm lease. If you, as a landowner or tenant, have questions about how to include conservation in your farm lease, please call or stop by.

If you have interest in any aspect of this project, please call the Allamakee SWCD office at 563-568-2246 ext. 3, stop by 635 9th St NW in Waukon, or email Sara at sara.berges@ia.nacdnet.net.

Protecting Our Resources

The Soil and Water

Iowans continue to make continual commitments to protecting the soil and water resources of our state. It is evident by the strong partnership between the landowners, farmers, the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, and many other partners locally working together to address soil health and water quantity and quality.

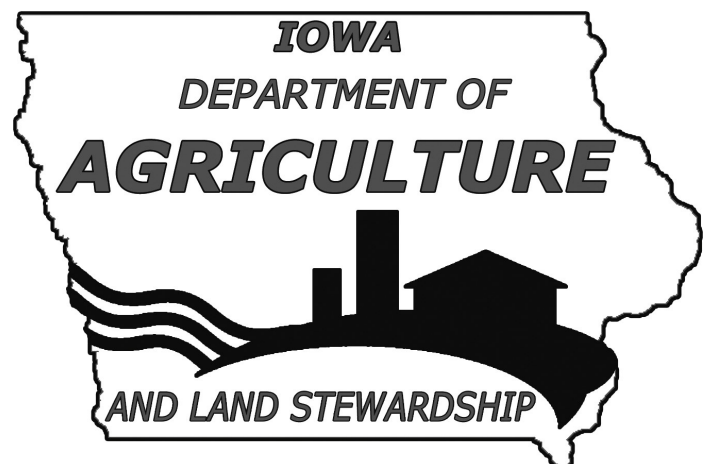
In State Fiscal Year 2015 Iowa set another record with the Iowa Financial Incentives Program (Cost Share) with a landowner/farmer contribution of \$12.8 million, a state investment of \$9.8 million with the total investment of \$22.6 million. To put in perspective what that meant in numbers for four conservation practices, it was 515 miles of terraces, 1,264 miles of waterways, 96 grade stabilization structures, and 471 water and sediment control basins. These conservation practices are effective, long term practices that trap sediment and phosphorus in the fields. This reflects a commitment of landowners and farmers making an investment with the state where they are contributing \$1.50 or more for each dollar invested by the state.

The impacts of the various cost share programs offered locally is that it continues to get more conservation practices installed. The numerous benefits of these conservation practices are that it reduces erosion, soil losses and nutrient runoff. It continues to improve soil health and water quantity and quality issues. They reduce storm water impacts on public and private property and protect infrastructure. These programs help in protecting watersheds above and water quality in Iowa's publicly owned lakes. They also help local economies benefiting local communities.

Your operations are businesses that depend on healthy soils, the water on your property is well managed and utilized, the nutrients are well managed for crop production, and your livestock operation is managed effectively. The challenges that go with these elements of your businesses are important to insure that you can operate effectively and profitably. When you evaluate these components of your business throughout the year and identify needs and opportunities to make improvements, please don't hesitate to stop in the field offices in your area to find out how we can help with your soil and water issues. These offices have great technical assistance and usually have financial assistance programs that can help put scientifically proven conservation practices on your land to help with improving your soil health, water quantity and water quality. Stop in any time and let us help you.



Jim Gillespie-IDALS-DSCWQ Division Director





Matt Lechtenberg– Water Quality Coordinator-IDALS-DSCWQ



Will Myer-Water Quality Coordinator-IDALS-DSCWQ

2015 Update on the Water Quality Initiative

The Water Quality Initiative was established during the 2013 legislative session to assist the implementation of the Nutrient Reduction Strategy which provides a road map to achieve a 45% reduction in nitrogen and phosphorus losses to our waters using an integrated approach of point (cities and industries) and non-point sources (farms and residential areas). The initiative seeks to harness the collective ability of both private and public resources and organizations to deliver a clear and consistent message to stakeholders to reduce nutrient loss and improve water quality.

In 2015, 1,800 farmers committed \$3.5 million in cost share funds to install nutrient reduction practices in each of Iowa's 99 counties. The practices that were eligible for this funding are cover crops, no-till or strip till, or using a nitrification inhibitor when applying fall fertilizer. Participants include 980 farmers using a practice for the first time and more than 830 past users that are trying cover crops again and are receiving a reduced-rate of cost share.

In addition to statewide cost share, 16 targeted Water Quality Initiative demonstration watershed projects have been funded to help implement and demonstrate water quality practices. The state has provided \$7.4 million in funding to support these projects and has leveraged an additional \$11.7 million in additional funding from partners and landowners. More than 95 organizations are participating in these projects.

In 2015, Four additional demonstration projects focused on expanding the use and innovative delivery of water quality practices beyond an individual watershed have also received funding. These projects will receive \$3.06 million in funding through the Iowa water quality initiative over the next three years and be matched by \$2.59 million in funding from other sources. These projects include projects that will focus on expanding the use of cover crops, edge of field practices such as bioreactors and saturated buffers, and usage of water quality wetlands. A second round of funding for these projects will be awarded in early 2016.

Nine Urban Conservation Water Quality Initiative Demonstration Projects have also been funded. The state has awarded \$655,194 in funding and partners and landowners participating in the projects will provide \$2.43 million to support urban conservation efforts. A second round of funding for Urban Conservation Projects will also be awarded in early 2016.

For FY2016, \$9.6 million was appropriated by the legislature to support the Water Quality Initiative. This appropriation will allow the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship to continue to provide cost share, expand programs and work in targeted watersheds to achieve measurable water quality improvements.

More information about the Water Quality Initiative can be found at www.CleanWaterIowa.org.



**Allamakee Soil & Water
Conservation District**
635 9th St. NW
Waukon, IA 52172
(563)568-2246 ext. 3

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JOIN THE CONSERVATION CLUB—YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED

Landowners/operators and area businesses:

We hope that the Allamakee County Soil and Water Conservation District can count on your support again in fiscal year 2015-2016. We thank you for your generosity in the past. For 73 years, the District has been helping you and your neighbors conserve our most valuable resources, our soil and water.

We invite you to join in the local conservation effort by becoming a Conservation Club member.

The District has no taxing authority and the commissioners volunteer their services, which become more demanding every year. Funds for promoting soil and water conservation in our county must be raised locally through donations.

Donated dollars are used for a variety of projects including the district newsletter, scholarships, materials for the local conservation education day, CDI and NACD dues, and awards for conservation leaders.

We believe promoting soil and water conservation is everyone's job and we invite you to help. Please consider donating.

Categories are as follows:

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THANK YOU!

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635 9th Street NW
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