

# ---CONSERVATION DISTRICTS OF IOWA (CDI)---

## CONNECTIONS

The Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) informs, educates, and leads Iowans through our local soil and water conservation districts to promote conservation of natural resources.



**April 2023**  
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Office Phone: 515-289-8300  
Office Address:  
2015 Grand Ave. (Box #15)  
Des Moines, IA. 50312  
Website: <http://cdiowa.org>

**From: CDI President Ramona Nitz**

Earlier this week, I traveled down to Jester Park near Des Moines for the annual state Envirothon competition. I've been going down for years now because I cannot pass up the chance to meet some of the best and brightest teens in our state. This year certainly didn't disappoint. The teams did great and I got to present the top award to a team that won by the highest margin ever. And, because this team was made up of all juniors in high school, they said that they'd be back again next year!

As I looked at all the smiling faces in the crowd as I presented the awards, I couldn't help but wonder if any of them would be submitting a scholarship application their senior year to their local SWCD. I decided it was pretty likely that that would happen. One or more of them may even win a regional or state scholarship (*see page 5 for 2023 Scholarship winners!*).

Along with the poster contest and the Envirothon, giving out these scholarships each year is a big part of what CDI does to educate our Iowa students. Money for these scholarships is raised mostly through the auction held each year at annual conference. Since becoming president of CDI, I've found that many districts choose to send in a check to the office rather than donate an auction item. Either way, we do need full participation to make this happen.

Please be aware that the time for conference is fast approaching. How will your SWCD decide to participate this year? Donating something special for the live auction? Something for the silent auction? A monetary donation?

Next month, I will once again have the pleasure of seeing the proud and excited look on the faces of scholarship recipients. It's thanks to you commissioners that I get to see these smiles! I can't wait!

Ramona

## Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

This is difficult to write but in case you have not heard, I will be retiring on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023. Yes, it was a tough decision because I feel so at ‘home’ working with conservation-minded people. My dad served as a Soil Commissioner in the 1970s before the water quality was added to your duties. He didn’t just talk conservation, he practiced it. I remember neighbors calling him a ‘trash farmer’ and knowing that was not a compliment. I also know that he didn’t care! My uncle that farmed with my dad was killed in an accident in 1963 so dad’s workload doubled instantly. Dad hired a retired farmer named Rex to help him. I was with Rex one day at the local feed mill when someone said something about how rough the tillage looked on the bean ground which had been in corn the year before. Rex just said, ‘Maybe, but I don’t hit washout ditches that throw you off the tractor’. That ended that conversation! I remember local newspaper articles about innovative conservation practices that he and Grandpa implemented when I was in high school, and yes, I remember what classmates said to me about those practices. Again, not compliments.

I sincerely hope that we can all keep moving CDI forward. If you know someone who might be a good candidate for the Executive Director position, please direct them to our website to apply for the position. [Job Openings - Conservation Districts of Iowa \(cdiowa.org\)](https://www.cdiowa.org)

*Nominations now due May 15*

## Deadline Extended for 2023 Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award Nominations

The deadline to nominate individuals or families for the [2023 Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award](#) has been extended to May 15, 2023.

Farmers and landowners who invest in conservation practices, such as cover crops, wetlands and edge-of-field practices and incorporate best management practices into their operations to improve and protect the state’s natural resources are eligible for the award. Successful nominees must also actively serve as leaders in the agriculture community.

An appointed committee representing conservation and agricultural groups will review the nominations and select the winners. The recipients will be recognized by Gov. Kim Reynolds, Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig and Department of Natural Resources Director Kayla Lyon at a ceremony at the Iowa State Fair on Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2023.

Seven hundred thirty-eight farm families have been recognized since the creation of the award in 2012. The [nomination form](#) and a list of previous awardees can be found on the [Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship’s website](#).

Nominations for the 2023 awards will now be accepted through Monday, May 15, 2023.

*Federal funding increases “once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for conservation”*

## Hello from the Director!

By Susan Kozak  
IDALS Division Director



The Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality, a part of the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, has been a flurry of activity over the last year. We have staff across Iowa, located in all 100 counties, to assist with natural resource conservation efforts. Our work focuses on traditional

soil conservation work (which dates back to the Dust Bowl era) and newer efforts related to reducing nutrient loss to our surface waters in the state. This work can take many forms depending on the land use of the field, the geology of the area, and what the landowner is trying to accomplish. Currently, we are very focused in finding areas along field edges where a nutrient reducing wetland or saturated buffer might fit into the landscape. These practices will remain in place for many years and continue to do their job for better water quality. The Division is also encouraging more cover crop acres across the state. Cover crops are important not only to keep soil in place in between cash crops, but also to increase the soil health and organic matter for future generations.

Sometimes, we can get so focused on our day-to-day challenges, we might lose sight of the big picture. But I have been lucky this year to resume some travel and get to chat with conservation professionals from other parts of the country. The landscapes in Tennessee, Washington, or Colorado might look very different to what we see in Iowa, but it is refreshing to hear that they are taking on similar challenges and looking for nature-based solutions. At a recent meeting, I heard it mentioned several times that the federal funding increases for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for conservation. That funding, combined with our dedicated state funding for water quality efforts, positions Iowa to continue to be a leader in nutrient reduction work and to construct wetlands and other edge of field practices at a pace that wasn't possible in the past. There are many opportunities, big and small, to get involved with conservation in Iowa. Reach out to your local USDA service center to find out how you can help us build upon this momentum and accelerate our progress.

### Iowa districts make plans to join nationwide focus on conservation

Iowa's Soil and Water Conservation Districts are set to engage local communities as we honor the 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual Soil and Water Conservation Week, April 30 - May 7, 2023! The 2023 Soil and Water Conservation Week theme is "One Water", to raise awareness of how important it is to protect our water resources in Iowa and nationwide.



The week is an opportunity to recognize conservation and sustainability practices underway on Iowa's landscape and bring attention to the ongoing work by farmers, landowners and urban residents to protect the state's soil and water resources. Iowa's 100 Soil and Water Conservation Districts join the IDALS, NRCS and others who provide leadership in soil health, soil conservation, water quality and the protection and enhancement of Iowa's natural resources. Thank you to all SWCDs for what you do all year long for Iowa conservation and sustainability!



CDI President Ramona Nitz introducing winners

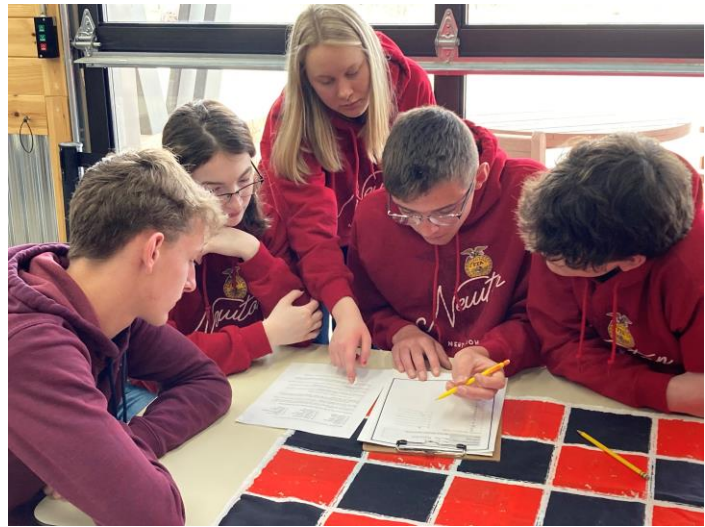
### CDI Envirothon 2023

Looking for a good reason to be optimistic about the future? Spend a day with Iowa high school conservation-savvy students during a statewide CDI Envirothon competition. The intensity of their passion for natural resource science and dedication to conservation knowledge is an inspiration. On April 24<sup>th</sup>, 15 teams of five members each gathered at Jester Park in Polk County to see which would advance to the NCF International Envirothon Competition in Vancouver. Moving from one test-station to the next, teams huddled together to answer a series of questions – written and developed specifically for the Iowa competition, overseen by Program Director Carlee Sabus – that challenged their knowledge of aquatic ecology, forestry, soils, and wildlife; oral presentations were made before a three-judge panel. At day's end, CDI President Ramona Nitz announced the winners: 1<sup>st</sup> Place Overall (by a 52-point margin!) Decorah Nerd Republic; 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Overall Muscatine Gold FFA; 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Menacing Monarchs Marshalltown; 4<sup>th</sup> Place Skabush Decorah. In the FFA division: 1<sup>st</sup> Place FFA: Muscatine Gold; 2<sup>nd</sup> Place FFA: Louisa-Muscatine Black. For more pictures:

[CDI Envirothon video moments.](#)



3<sup>rd</sup> Place overall: Menacing Monarchs Marshalltown; \$500 cash prize for 3<sup>rd</sup> place (4<sup>th</sup> place winners – Skabush Decorah, earn \$250 cash prize).



Newton FFA bring teamwork to an Envirothon test



1<sup>st</sup> Place overall: Decorah Nerd Republic; win all-expenses paid trip to international competition in Vancouver!



FFA 1<sup>st</sup> Place and 2<sup>nd</sup> Place overall: Muscatine Gold FFA; \$1,000 cash prize for 2<sup>nd</sup> place.

## Cohort NGLI members gain insights into government affairs during D.C. visit

*Special from NACD eResource April 25 newsletter*

The 2023 Cohort of the Next Generation Leadership Institute (NGLI) is celebrating Earth Day and Stewardship week by becoming better conservation leaders! The cohort began their spring session yesterday in Washington, D.C..

So far, they have learned about legislative relations, government affairs, and natural resource policy from experts from NRCS, EPA, NACD Government Affairs, and the 9b Group.

After a jam-packed training day, and geared with this valuable knowledge, they have put it to the test with visits to their own legislators throughout the day today. Next, the group is headed to the US Fish & Wildlife Service’s National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, W.V. Here they will continue classroom training on all things communications, and how to tailor messages to specific conservation and natural resource audiences from industry experts.



*Bremer Assistant Commissioner Angela Rosol, picture bottom left, with Cohort NGLI members during D.C. visit.*

## Announcing the 2023 “CDI Scholarship” winners!

A special group of young Iowa high school graduates earn a well-deserved “thank you” for making natural resources and/or agriculture their higher education goals. CDI and local Iowa SWCDs awarded scholarships to seniors in each of the nine Iowa regions who demonstrated leadership and scholastic achievement and who aim for careers in conservation-related fields. The scholarships are funded by Iowa SWCDs, with finalists selected by a committee of CDI leadership and regional directors. Congratulations to all those Iowa students who applied for making conservation a priority in their future career plans, and special recognition to our 2023 CDI Scholastic Scholarship winners! And thank you to Iowa SWCDs for making these well-deserved scholarships possible.

### State level winners:

- 1<sup>st</sup> place Alaina Gebel, Region 4 ... \$3,000**
- 2<sup>nd</sup> place Amelia Hesse, Region 8 ... \$2,000**
- 3<sup>rd</sup> place Seth Breeding, Region 6 ... \$1,000**

### Regional winners (\$500):

- Derek Goth Region 1**
- Sydney Hurd, Region 2**
- Jadyn Beland, Region 3**
- Keira Simmons, Region 5**
- Molly Matthiesen, Region 7**
- Elle Chickering, Region 9**

**Monitoring for Success****Testing tile water can help improve water quality and give a better understanding of what is happening in your fields.****By Kriss Nelson****Iowa Soybean Association**

Water monitoring enables farmers to better understand the impact of their management on the water leaving their farms via tile or surface water. They use the results to make sound economic and environmental decisions for their farms. Water quality monitoring is a key program through Iowa Soybean Association's (ISA) Research Center for Farming Innovation (RCFI). The center works with sponsors supporting monitoring across Iowa, including Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Watershed Management Authorities, and several cities.

Monitoring connects and complements conservation implementation projects and programs where sponsors are providing financial and technical assistance to farmers as they work to protect and improve their soil and water. The ISA accredited water lab supplied individual water monitoring reports for 158 participants in 2022, including samples on 247 tiles and 63 edge-of-field nutrient reduction practice sites, which include saturated buffers, bioreactors, ponds and wetlands. Results showed a statewide average tile nitrate-N concentration of 14.5 mg/L, the highest since 2016 and above the seven-year average of 12.6 mg/L.

Tony Seeman, ISA senior field services lab and data manager, noted that when drier growing seasons occur, plants might not access nitrogen in the soil, allowing it to accumulate and be lost the following spring. When early season rain arrives, higher levels of nitrates can be leached below the root zone and lost out of tiles, causing increased levels in streams and rivers. Other results showed no significant difference between corn or soybeans in the rotation, and cover crop fields averaged 26% less nitrate loss than those without cover crops. "When the soils thaw and we get those spring rains, cover crops use those nitrates instead of letting it leach deeper into the soil and eventually lost downstream," Seeman says.

**A greater level of understanding**

Water monitoring can help gain an in-field management evaluation. "If there are exceptionally high levels of nitrates coming off your field, there is an opportunity to change your fertilizer regime," says Seeman. Following the 4Rs of nutrient stewardship, the right source, right rate, right time and right place should be a priority. "That is where your dollars are. Over 75% of the sites we have sampled fall into expected ranges, so then you can think about adding an edge-of-field practice or cover crops to make further reductions," says Seeman.

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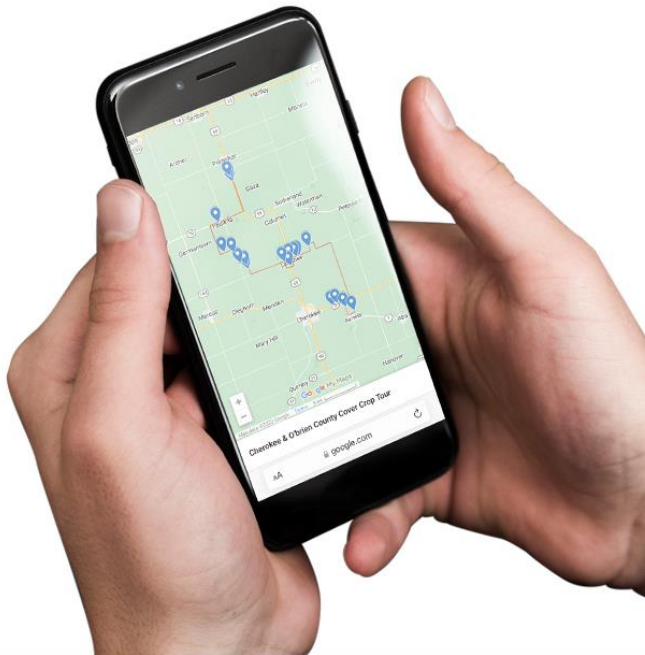
Edited for space; to read the complete version, [click here](#). This article was provided by the Iowa Soybean Association's Research Center for Farming Innovation (RCFI). Our mission is to engage Iowa farmers through research and innovation to increase their productivity, profitability, and sustainability. For more information on the Iowa Soybean Association's Research for Farming Innovation, visit our website [www.iasoybeans.com/Research](http://www.iasoybeans.com/Research) or contact Kristen Dearden, [kdearden@iasoybeans.com](mailto:kdearden@iasoybeans.com). Iowa Soybean Association is a valued sponsor of CDI.



Research Center for Farming Innovation

# COVER CROPS IN ACTION

Check out everything cover crops have to offer on a self-guided tour. Scan the QR code to get started.



## COUNTIES

- Benton
- Buena Vista
- Calhoun
- Cherokee
- Linn
- O'Brien
- Pocahontas
- Sac



[iasoybeans.com/CoverCropTour](https://iasoybeans.com/CoverCropTour)



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