

---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.



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From: CDI President Ramona Nitz

What a time we had in DC this past week! We were so happy to have had the responses we did from our legislators as we spoke to them about our need for continued conservation funding in the new Farm Bill.

We met with Senators Grassley and Ernst and Representative Feenstra in person and with the staffs of Representative Hinson and Representative Miller-Meeks. Each listened very attentively to our thoughts and offered theirs along with questions.

The Senate is much further along with their Farm Bill hearings. The House is moving along with setting up hearings. As I mentioned to you at the regional meetings, I am serving on Representative Feenstra's Ag Leadership Farm Bill team representing conservation. I did have to miss the first Zoom meeting for this board as I was doing Hill visits that day. However, I didn't feel too bad about that as I had just spoken with him and his ag staff in his office an hour before. Conservation got individual attention that day!

I'll keep you all informed as I hear more about how the hearings go. Our main concern is that the legislators know that we do appreciate the IRA funds and hope to get them used but that we need those funds in addition to the Farm Bill monies. We must keep (or increase) the Farm Bill base for Title II. Our Iowa legislators get that and we've asked them to make sure their colleagues do, too.

Please stay safe as it's soon time for some of us to get in the field. Keep in touch! It's always great to hear from you.

Ramona

Executive Director Report – John Whitaker

March can be a busy month with spring regionals and NACD Fly-In, but that is good in that we are out talking to each other and our elected officials about our needs in conservation and water quality improvement. Thank you to those who could attend their spring regional meeting. Our elected leaders were very receptive to CDI leadership during the Fly-In and let us know they will work for our needs to be met.

The virtual Envirothon went well with good numbers of teams participating. We did not surpass our previous record number of teams but were close to our long-term average. With new teams and schools who have not participated in the past, we should see an increase in teams next year. The state competition will be held April 24 at Jester Park near Granger Iowa.

The number of scholarships sent from districts to the regional directors has been very good this year. This is a great program which enables us to make a positive impact on young people studying conservation. I recently talked with the father of last year's state winner and he is so thankful for the support we have provided. The thanks for that goes to all of you for your contributions!

Please get the word out to your local youth groups and interested schools

Poster Contest entries due to local SWCD office April 28!

Important deadlines approach for local youth to participate in the 2023 Poster Contest!

Youth leaders, teachers, and parents who wish to encourage future participation by their young artists are encouraged to contact local youth organizations and schools to be sure they may participate. For 2023, the contest theme is **"One Water"**. Applicants must submit their poster art – accompanied by the Poster Contest Entry Form – to the SWCD office in the county which their school or group is located by Friday, April 28th! Entry forms must be legible and complete, including a guardian/parental signature and their SWCDs information or the poster cannot be considered. Make sure a copy is securely attached to the back of the submitted poster. For much more information, please consult [Poster Contest critical dates and rules](#). Or visit [CDI Poster Contest](#).



The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) provides students from kindergarten through 12th grade the chance to have their art displayed as part of a national conservation outreach initiative. The Stewardship and Education Committee developed a five-year rotation for stewardship topics – **water, soil, habitat, forestry, and a topic of interest** – and determines the theme each year. The poster contest is open to public, private and home-schooled students. The top three posters in each category of the national contest receive monetary prizes. First-place winners receive \$200; second place winners receive \$150, and third place winners receive \$100. If you have any questions, please contact CDI Communications Coordinator Joe Hayes at joe@cdiowa.org.

Districts encouraged to join the Soil & Water Conservation Society

By Anna Golightly, CA, Madison SWCD, and
Jaspar SWCD Commissioner Joe Otto

Commissioners and staff who attended the Spring Regional Meetings this year may remember watching the film about Hugh Hammond Bennett, the “father of soil conservation.” In addition to his role in creating the Soil Erosion Service (later the Soil Conservation Service and now the Natural Resources Conservation Service), he was also instrumental in the formation of the Soil and Water Conservation Society in the 1940s.

The Soil Conservation Society is now the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS), and its mission is to foster the science and art of natural resource conservation. SWCS is a community of more than 2,000 conservation leaders that represent nearly every academic discipline and many different public, private, and nonprofit institutions around the world.

SWCS is an international organization, but it is headquartered right here in Ankeny, Iowa. Built in 1963 and funded entirely through member donations, SWCS headquarters houses staff offices, meeting space, and the SWCS archives. It is the oldest nonprofit organization in Ankeny and one of the city's oldest businesses.

SWCS is a close cousin to CDI (Conservation Districts of Iowa) and its national organization NACD (National Association of Conservation Districts), which was founded just one year after SWCS by many of the same people. Hugh Hammond Bennett was involved in the formation of both SWCS and NACD.

For most of its existence, SWCS members have been individuals, but in 2019, the Society created a new membership level that provides an opportunity for Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) to have office-wide memberships! With this new option, the entire SWCD can take advantage of membership perks such as: access to the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation, delivery of the monthly membership newsletter, delivery of the weekly Conservation News Briefs, 20% discount to SWCS online store for all office employees, access to career center and 30% off job posting, access to the private member directory, and here’s the big one: Member pricing on Annual Conference registration for all office employees and commissioners!



78th SWCS INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

DES MOINES, IOWA

AUGUST 6-9, 2023

SAVE^{the} DATE

www.swcs.org/23AC

#SWCS23

Continued next page

Now is a great time for SWCDs to join the Society because this year, SWCS is hosting its 78th International Annual Conference in Des Moines, August 6-9, 2023!

This year's annual conference includes an option to visit SWCS Headquarters and learn about conservation history. SWCS Headquarters is dedicated to the memory of Hugh Hammond Bennett and is the home of his collection of conservation documents and mementoes. Join us for an open house and tour the SWCS headquarters building and its uniquely Midcentury Modern architecture. Guests will also see artifacts from the Hugh Hammond Bennett Collection that have never been exhibited to the public. When you register for conference, you have the option of signing up for this tour and other workshops as well.

In addition to all of those benefits, joining SWCS will give you a connection to the local Iowa Chapter. The Iowa Chapter supports its members by offering workshops, trainings, career development grants, leadership opportunities, online updates and networking events. SWCS also supports local communities through service projects and awareness-raising events.

Conservation Community Member dues are \$230 annually, and the great news is that the cost membership to SWCS is eligible for the Commissioner Expense fund (sometimes called "1M"). It counts as "association dues affiliated with the SWCD mission", just like CDI and NACD dues.

Districts are encouraged to add "SWCS Membership" to the agenda for their next commissioners meeting. If commissioners approve a motion to join SWCS, Conservation Assistants can download and print the membership form from the SWCS website to mail in with a check: <https://www.swcs.org/get-involved/join/>



Iowa Learning Farms Webinars

Staff and commissioners are encouraged to join these valuable weekly webinars, offering insights and updates on issues, updates, and how-to techniques of importance to committed conservation-minded Iowans. Participate in the live events, check out archived webinars from weeks past, and read a blog synopsis of up-coming sessions.

April ILF Webinar Schedule

4/5: Minerva J. Dorantes and Shannon Moeller, Soil Health Institute

4/12: Sotirios Archontoulis, Iowa State University

4/19: Matt Helmers, Iowa State University and Iowa Nutrient Research Center

4/26: Antonio Arenas Amado, Iowa State University

Join live: [LINK](#) Read future session blog: [LINK](#)

Washington DC 'Fly-In'

Healthy exchange of ideas, funding concerns



(L-R) Angela Rosol, Jeri Thornsberry, Senator Grassley, Ramona Nitz, John Whitaker, Clare Lindahl, Jaia Fischer



(L-R) Jeri Thornsberry, Ramona Nitz, Angela Rosol, Senator Ernst, John Whitaker, Clare Lindahl, Jaia Fischer



(L-R) Jon Hubbert, Clare Lindahl, Angela Rosol, Jeri Thornsberry, Ramona Nitz, Representative Feenstra, John Whitaker

A leadership group representing CDI and state partners returned from the annual "D.C. Fly-In" believing a healthy exchange with Iowa congressional delegation members was secured, with some caution about approaching conservation funding priorities. "The NACD Fly-In went very well for us", reports CDI Executive Director John Whitaker. "We were able to meet with Senators Grassley and Ernst as well as Representative Feenstra. We met with congressional aides for Representatives Hinson and Miller-Meeks. Many other states were envious that we were able to speak directly with half of our elected officials since most only spoke with aides."

Whitaker described talks as good, open frank discussions. "I think our representatives know how important conservation is, and we're keying in on that. Some of the things we've got to watch for is making sure that they don't just replace conservation funding with Inflation Reduction Act and say, 'Well, we've done our job'. House members are saying 'No, we're not going to let that happen.' Senate is saying, 'We don't know yet'. I think that's something we've got to keep in front of our elected officials."

Whitaker believes how conservation groups respond to current opportunities may help determine outcomes when funding decisions are included in pending legislation. "It's imperative on all of us to prove we can implement the IRA and can implement all the conservation funding we've previously been having. CBO is saying, 'We're not sure there's capacity out here to get it done.' And I'm saying don't doubt the conservation partners for getting it done. That's what I said to Senator Grassley: 'Don't doubt that we can get this done.'"

The Iowa group included State Conservationist Jon Hubbert, Acting State Conservationist Jaia Fischer, Claire Lindahl with the Soil and Water Conservation Society, Angela Rosol, Whitaker, CDI President Ramona Nitz and CDI V.P. Jeri Thornsberry.

Spring Regionals bring district ideas into yearlong planning goals

Districts speak up – and leadership assure they are heard!

A revamped approach to Spring Regionals allowed for a unique leveraging of statewide district input into CDI projects and plans for the remainder of 2023. “From commissioner training, CDI annual conference planning, lobbying efforts, legislative updates – these meetings bring districts into everything we’re going to be doing this year,” said CDI Executive Director John Whitaker.



CDI Exec Director John Whitaker (standing) listens as Region 5 commissioners share questions and ideas in Guthrie Center.

The Spring Regionals were held through March in all nine regions, and for the first time, promoted local concerns and locally focused agendas, in addition to presentations by CDI, state and federal partners. According to IDALS Division Director Susan Kozak, the new approach added great value to the meetings, with each filling out scheduled times with full robust discussion. “I think the new format with open discussion has been very valuable,” Kozak said. “Commissioners appreciated being able to think of the questions ahead of time and then come prepared for that discussion. I think they appreciated just having that time to talk with each other or hear from leadership on some of the questions that they have and haven’t been able to get answers to.”

Leadership heard from hundreds of commissioners in all nine regions during Spring Regionals. Here are just a very few input ideas mentioned by multiple districts:

- Communication has been mentioned several times and from many different perspectives. One suggestion is weekly or monthly draft articles from CDI that districts can use with local media. Can *Connections* be an avenue for partners to communicate monthly with commissioners on any updates?
- Email weekly legislative update to all commissioners/assistant commissioners on our email list. (Please note: this cannot be emailed to the CAs for distribution.)
- Districts need an ‘off-ramp’ on older 566 and other structures with easements they have to maintain after the life of the structure.
- Can soil health education be a required part of pesticide applicator training?
- More needs to be done to ensure that farmers are in compliance before receiving any taxpayer assistance (including crop insurance).
- Wages rates, staffing levels, number of applicants and staff stress due to workload has been brought up in most meetings.
- Cultural Resource requirements is a concern when it comes to getting work done (federal law).
- Seems to be too long of time frame from application for a practice until actually being able to construct or implement the practice.

Hora Farms, Inc. installs Denitrifying Bioreactor

Special to Connections

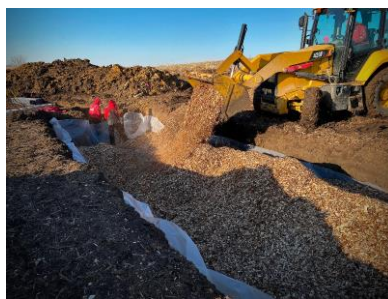
For In early February Keith Hora, of Hora Farms, Inc., had a Denitrifying Bioreactor installed on one of his fields five miles north of Washington. The project took approximately a week to complete and was funded through IDALS's WQI cost share program. NRCS provided technical assistance and Gingerich Tiling & Earthmoving did the construction. Keith claims he became interested in bioreactors after seeing Rob Stout's, the first installed in the county, and has always respected Rob's dedication to conservation practices. After learning more about the environmental benefits of bioreactors by visiting the Research and Demonstration Farm in Crawfordsville, Keith decided to move forward with the project. "We are trying to voluntarily do something to improve water quality," says Hora. "We have plenty of places to put those things."

The bioreactor was installed along a waterway near a drainage ditch. The structure's chamber measures 48' long by 12' wide, with a depth of 3.6'. A plastic protectant liner was applied to the bottom and walls of the pit and then filled with the woodchip media. A layer of geotextile material was laid on top of the chips followed by capping off the chamber with 2' of soil. Two inline water control structures, inflow and outflow, were installed near the chamber to adjust water flow using stop logs. Tile water from the field is routed into the structure's inflow control, enters the woodchip chamber, and exits through the outflow control before draining into a nearby creek.

Woodchips serve as the carbon source necessary for the denitrification process. Bacteria in the chamber use carbon from the woodchips to break down the nitrates in the water into harmless nitrogen gas that releases into the environment. Considering the subsurface nature and small footprint of bioreactors, this edge-of-field practice doesn't take land out of crop production and is a great way to make an impact on Iowa's water quality.



from Washington SWCD



Enter your local land steward hero!

“Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award” (IFELA)

Casey J. Judge, Ph.D.

Environmental Specialist Senior/IDALS

The deadline for submitting [Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award \(IFELA\)](#) nominations is just over 5 weeks away and approaching quickly. This award recognizes Iowa farmers who have taken steps in their farming operations to improve or protect the environment and natural resources of our state while serving as leaders in the agricultural community to encourage others to follow in their footsteps. If you have been thinking about nominating someone, don't wait – start the nomination today! (Incomplete nominations can be saved and you will be sent a link to finish completing the form if needed.)



The [on-line nomination form](#) is open year-round, and those submitted by Monday, May 1 will be considered for the 2023 award year. We do recommend opening the form in a modern browser (i.e., Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge, or Firefox) for it to work properly. If you have any issues or questions, please let me know so I can help.

We look forward to recognizing another deserving group of Iowa Farm Environmental Leaders for 2023, but we can't do it without everyone who takes the opportunity to submit a nomination.