

# ---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 2024**  
**Volume 5, Number 7**

### **CDI EXECUTIVE BOARD:**

President: Jeri Thornsberry  
Vice-President: Don Elsbernd  
Treasurer: Jack Boyer  
Secretary: Paul Ackley  
Past President: Ramona Nitz

### **CDI OFFICE STAFF:**

Executive Director: Dien Judge  
Program Manager: Carlee Sabus  
Communications: Joe Hayes

Office Phone: 515-289-8300

Office Address:

Conservation Districts of Iowa  
2015 Grand Ave. (Box #15)  
Des Moines, IA. 50312  
Website: <https://cdiowa.org>

### **From: President Jeri Thornsberry**

Our annual state-level Envirothon is happening Monday, April 29 at Jester Park near Des Moines. This year 55 teams competed in regional competitions using the virtual online testing platform called Quia. At Jester Park, the top 15 qualifying high-school teams will be tested for their knowledge and understanding of Iowa's natural resources during this hands-on environmental education competition. Teams can expect applying knowledge of environmental science as well as conservation equipment. Four areas (soil, water, wildlife, and forestry) are covered plus a current environmental issue and an oral presentation. The 2024 current environmental issue is "*Renewable Energy for A Sustainable Future.*" It will be interesting to see how these young people approach this topic!

The winning team at this state-level Envirothon will represent Iowa at the international competition being held July 28 to August 3 at Hobart & William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. Come join us if you can. We would love to see more commissioners and assistant commissioners helping out. This is such a fun-filled energetic day for students as well as volunteers.

On another subject, the 2024 CDI Scholarship winners have been announced (*See page 7 for details.*) Reading the student's applications gives me great hope that we are leaving Iowa's land and water in good hands with this upcoming generation of young minds. Donations from districts fund our scholarship awards. Deepest thanks to all the participating districts. Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners through programs that CDI sponsors—scholarships, the poster contest and the State Envirothon—are very supportive of educating our young people about not only the agriculture sector but also the environment as well. All of these CDI-sponsored activities take place during spring time. Yes indeed, spring is a busy time for us all.

Hope to see you at Annual Conference in Ames, August 19-20. Conference planning has already begun!

Be safe out there.

## Executive Director Report – Dien Judge

The Iowa Legislature adjourned its 2024 legislative session in the wee hours of the morning on Saturday, April 20. We want to thank everyone involved in soil & water conservation for making your voices heard. CDI works to make a positive impact on government policy at the local, state and federal level, to keep our vital conservation programs working to preserve and improve our precious soil and water quality. I hope you have followed our Legislative Updates throughout the last few months as we've kept track of the legislation that will affect our efforts in conservation. We want to thank all of you who reached out to legislators and the Governor to voice your concerns with each piece of legislation, and we especially want to thank all of you who came to Des Moines in early February for our Conservation Partnership Day at the Iowa Capitol. It's very important that legislators hear from you directly, and CDI will continue to try to create more opportunities for you to advocate for soil and water conservation.

Earlier in April, each Soil & Water Conservation District was sent a packet with all of the necessary documents for the CDI 2024 Resolutions process. This process is how you as commissioners make your official position known on important issues. This year, there are nine resolutions that were submitted by active districts. These resolutions cover a wide variety of topics. We hope you take some time to review each resolution before voting. Once your district has voted, ballots must be returned by July 1.

Also happening last week was our CDI Scholarship Committee meeting when the top scholarship applicants were chosen. Congratulations to all our scholarship winners, and best of luck to you in your future academic pursuits.

***Share your photos!***

## Soil and Water Conservation Week

**April 28 - May 5, 2024**

Iowa's Soil and Water Conservation Districts are set to engage local communities as we honor the 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual Soil and Water Conservation Week. 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 IDALS, NRCS and others who provide leadership in soil health, soil conservation, water quality and the protection and enhancement of Iowa's natural resources. Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Week this year is being coordinated with national [Stewardship Week](#), which is sponsored by the National Association of Conservation Districts. Thank you to all SWCDs for what you do all year long for Iowa conservation and sustainability!

***Share your SWCW activity photos with CDI, and we will publish your contribution in the May edition of "Connections" to share with peers statewide! Forward your pictures and captions to [joe@cdiowa.org](mailto:joe@cdiowa.org). Check out [2023 district activity photos!](#)***

***Pre-conference resolution voting now underway***

# The combined voices of Iowa commissioners, heard in the halls of Washington D.C.

As vital as the responsibility SWCD commissioners assume to advance the goals of conservation and sustainability at the local level, often that means working to effect change at the state and even federal levels for the benefit of their constituents. By law, SWCD commissioners have the power to influence changes in policies and rules. If change is needed, the CDI resolution process is where the path begins. Where it concludes can mean significant advancement and improvement is how things get done.

This month, CDI forwarded nine proposed resolutions to all 100 districts to consider for “pre-conference” voting – the first step to decide which proposed resolutions will be debated at the CDI Annual Conference business meeting, August 19<sup>th</sup>, in Ames. District pre-conference voting officially began April 12<sup>th</sup> with distribution of the nine proposed resolutions to each district; those final votes are scheduled to be submitted to CDI by July 1<sup>st</sup>.

President Jeri Thornsberry said the package forwarded to districts spells out the importance of districts participating in that vote. “In the document we send to districts, we point out ‘resolutions can address the problems in your district that CDI should act upon, challenge or make

proposed changes to IDALS administrative rules, or a suggestion to improve the Farm Bill or federal program”, Thornsberry said. “The resolutions are a ground-up process. People working in the field, people who are working with the different programs will identify a question and ask, ‘Why in the world do we do it *this* way, why don’t we do it *that* way, it makes more sense!’ So they offer suggestions for improvement, suggestions for changes, changes for elimination, and give the rationale behind it.”

Typically, issues that begin as concerns in the field or staff office become resolutions debated in the local monthly district meetings. Thornsberry says commissioners may develop the concern into a formal resolution, which must be voted and approved by three of five commissioners, who sign and submit the resolutions directly to CDI. The nine resolutions distributed in early April are now before each district for a pre-conference vote.



*SWCD representatives voting by district on Resolutions debated during the 2023 CDI Annual Conference. Resolutions that receive more than 50%, but less than 60%, are brought to the conference business meeting by sponsor districts for consideration.*

***Continued next page***

Before distribution, the nine resolutions were vetted by the CDI Resolutions Committee, which reviews all proposed resolutions to determine if those proposed by districts may have already been resolved. If the committee determines a proposed resolution can move ahead for voting, they are edited for clarity, and may include comments in “IDALS Notes” if needed. The pre-conference ballot is then forwarded to all 100 districts.

“The package is sent out to the districts and gives them two monthly meetings to decide – ‘yes, no, or want to discuss,’” Thornsberry said. “What pre-conference voting does is save us time during the annual meeting to get

“It’s so critically important that your voice matters. We can make a difference.”

-CDI President Jeri Thornsberry

our business done, when time is so short anyway. If 60% of all commissioners voting vote ‘Yes’, then it automatically passes; it will be in the program guide, and we don’t have to bring it up again. Conversely if it fails, it goes no further.” If a proposed resolution receives more than 50%, but less than 60%, that resolution will be discussed and voted on during the conference meeting. “The originating district brings it to the floor and then share the rationale behind it, and after debate is closed, the Chair will call for a vote.”

The weight Iowa districts bring to policy is evidenced by success at a recent series of regional and national NACD policy meetings, where a resolution passed by the 2023 CDI Annual Conference was debated. “This year, the 500 commissioners in Iowa spoke and said that we should change the rules of CRP, one of the major programs, and it went all the way to national – went through the state of Iowa, went through the NACD North Central Region, and they approved adding wetlands as a covered practice on CRP ground,” said Thornsberry. “Then I got to present it to the NACD National Conference in San Diego and it passed there.” Currently, the resolution is with the federal USDA in Washington, D.C., with status pending. “This would become part of the administrative rules for the Farm Bill – when we get a Farm Bill.”

Thornsberry said the CDI resolution process – and the importance of the current pre-conference voting – is a vital source of district empowerment. “It’s so critically important that your voice matters,” she said. “We can make a difference. Iowa is so well-respected at the national level. Commissioners should be so proud of the role that they play as a local conservation leader in their county, but also that their voices are being heard in the halls of the USDA building in Washington D.C.”

### ***Nominations due May 6<sup>th</sup> for Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award***



Iowa farmers and landowners who implement proven practices to improve water quality and incorporate farming practices that conserve and protect our natural resources are eligible for the award. Awardees should also actively serve as leaders within the Iowa agriculture community. Since the creation of the award in 2012, 777 farm families have been recognized. To be considered for recognition in 2024, nominations will be accepted through May 6, 2024. For more information:

[Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award](#)



## DNR accepting applications for ‘Underserved Farmer to Farmer’ grant

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is now accepting a second round of applications as part of the \$3 million, 5-year “Underserved Farmer to Farmer” grant from the Environmental Protection Agency’s Gulf of Mexico division.

Eligible subawardees to apply for grants include conservation districts, local or state government entities, nonprofits, tribal nations and institutions of higher learning. Those groups will then work with the DNR to develop projects with a focus on water quality, such as flood reduction, source water protection and nutrient reduction.

According to Steve Konrady, DNR’s Western Iowa Basin Coordinator, those Iowa districts considering applying should ask their Conservation Assistants to reach out to [Will Myers at IDALS](#) for assistance with assessing resource availability and financial management capacity. “It’s important that each district applicant has the capacity to manage a grant project of this nature without impacting other projects negatively,” Konrady said.

The DNR will continue to distribute the remaining funds from the \$3 million EPA grant to eligible applicants across the state over the remaining three years of the grant. Through the grant, the DNR looks to increase the ability of historically underserved farm communities to address nutrient pollution, frequent flooding, and drinking water challenges.

“We have had good success awarding funding with this grant so far, and the first round found nine eligible subawardees with projects ongoing throughout the state to address unique water issues head on,” said Konrady. “The remaining funding will allow us to engage with three to four more partners in the second round, and we hope to see some unique projects and partnerships come forward to help us expand the reach and impact of this fantastic opportunity from EPA.”

A second round of subawards will be issued to eligible entities who will work with farmers and farm communities who fall under at least one of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s four underserved groups, which includes those who are beginning, socially disadvantaged, veterans and with limited resources. Projects may be awarded up to \$250,000 with no match requirement. Applications will be accepted now through May 31, though multiple rounds are possible.

BECOME A  
SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
COMMISSIONER

SWCD Commissioners make a positive  
impact on Iowa’s land and people.



An updated graphically enhanced brochure outlining the roles and responsibilities of SWCD commissioners, developed by IDALS, is now available online to help promote local interest in seeking office. The webpage links include contact information for local county election office, the Affidavit of Candidacy, Nomination Petition for Non-Partisan Offices, and Iowa Code 161A. Click here for review or to share:

[Become a Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner](#)

## Fayette SWCD “Conservation Education Field Day”

# Three decades helping kids be future conservation heroes



*(Above)* Alisha Sedlmayr, NRCS Soil Health Specialist, demonstrates how plants influence erosion to third graders during the Fayette SWCD “Conservation Field Day”. *(Below)* Blake Gamm, Fayette County Conservation Board Roadside Manager, explains the importance of maintaining woodlands for animal habitat and the environment. *(Photos courtesy Fayette SWCD)*

For three days in September, in the fields of Dick Jensen’s farm, a flurry of third graders enjoys the day outside to hear how caring for the land today impacts their own future – planting the seeds for a new generation of conservation-minded adults, in a program started a generation ago. The Fayette SWCD “Conservation Education Field Day” makes it fun for kids to discover the importance of soil, water and wildlife in Iowa.

Fayette SWCD commissioner Mark Howard says what started in 1993 has evolved and grown, but the basics remain the same. “When I first got on the board, the field day was one of my first things. I helped with logistics, and I was so impressed with this program,” says Howard. “We’re spread way out to the back of Dick Jensen’s field and the kids and teachers keep rotating around, walking from one station to the next, learning about different areas of conservation. It really is a great day, kids get a lot out of it.”

The six learning stations include: Honeybees, Soils, Agriculture, Woodlands, Ponds and Wildlife. Staff members at each station offer educational insights, including active bee hives and a tub of live fish. “In soils, we have a pit dug that shows the layers of the soil, if there’s a hard pan there and so forth, and talk about soil structure,” says



Howard. “Agriculture can be a lot of things – talk about corn and soybeans and how soil and water affect their growth and their potentials – the basics. Hopefully when it comes to water quality and soil health they will take away something from that experience and they’ll have a passion for it that they can carry on through their life.”

*Continued next page*



Explains SWCD CA Lori Kohlmeyer – whom Howard credits for doing “...a tremendous job for our district, she puts a lot of this together, she puts a lot of work into it” – the annual event, now heading into its fourth decade, was the idea of Dick Jensen and Bill Bennett, former long time district commissioners. Jensen volunteered his farm for that event.



**Mark Howard, Fayette SWCD Commissioner, identifies the various parts of a corn plant (seed, roots, stems, leaves, and tassels)**

“They were really wanting to dig deep into ‘How do we educate our younger students?’” says Kohlmeyer. “So we got Deb Dessel – third grade teacher at the time – very interested in it. We ended up having the North Fayette school kids in West Union on a trial basis that first year, just to see what Deb thought of it, what we thought of it – and the rest of it is history! I mean it just clicked.” The late Deb Dessel was honored the following year in 1994 as “Conservation Educator of the Year” for her support and efforts helping grow the Conservation Education Field Day. In its 30<sup>th</sup> year, Fayette SWCD has offered 11,055 third grade students the chance to learn from presenters, ask questions, and gain an experience of the farm and a conservation ethic.

“I think it’s very important to educate our younger students at an early age to conserve the soil for future generations,” Kohlmeyer says. And it’s an education they don’t forget. “When their mom or dad will walk into the office here and say ‘My kids still remember that day that we were out there at the Education Field Day’ – it means a lot to hear the impact with those kids at that age. It’s rewarding to see how much fun the kids are having – and even the adults!”

## Announcing the 2024 “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 thank you to Iowa SWCDs for making these well-deserved scholarships possible. Personal letters of congratulations will be sent directly to winners, and special award certificates will also be available soon.*

### State level winners:\*

- 1<sup>st</sup> – Lillian Howe, Fremont SWCD, Region 8
- 2<sup>nd</sup> – Olivia Marti, Allamakee SWCD, Region 4
- 3<sup>rd</sup> – Isaac Wilhelm, Clinton SWCD, Region 7

\*(1<sup>st</sup> \$3,000; 2<sup>nd</sup> \$2,000; 3<sup>rd</sup> \$1000)

### Regional winners (\$500)

- Jordan Shull, Monona SWCD, Region 1
- Reid Louwagie, Kossuth SWCD, Region 2
- Kaleb Adams, Howard SWCD, Region 3
- Braden Spurr, Cass SWCD, Region 5
- Arianna Chappell, Story SWCD, Region 6
- Briana Steele, Jefferson SWCD, Region 9

# Five Conservation Myths Debunked

by Kriss Nelson



Myths are often cited as a rationale behind a farmer's choice not to adopt conservation agriculture practices. Backed by data and experience, Iowa Soybean Association (ISA) experts and farmers are dispelling those myths.

Myth 1: Alfalfa has a negative effect on water quality.

Myth 2: Golf courses are a significant source of nitrate runoff, not farms.

Myth 3: Using cover crops contributes to phosphorus loss.

Myth 4: Rye before corn does not work.

Myth 5: I live too far north to make cover crops work.

**DEBUNKED**

Find out how each of these myths are debunked by what our data and results are showing by reading the full article [Here](#). For more information, contact Tony Seeman at [aseeman@iasoybeans.com](mailto:aseeman@iasoybeans.com).

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.