

2000 Iowa Report Natural Resources Conservation Activities

This buffer of native and cool season grasses, shrubs and trees on the Tesdall farm was planted in 1997. It's one of 14 buffers recently planted or committed for planting along the 14 mile length of Bear Creek in Story and Hamilton Counties. Nearly half the farmers along Bear Creek are or will be using streamside buffers. Most are participating in USDA's Conservation Reserve Program to plant the buffers.

Iowa leads the nation in the installation of conservation buffers as part of planned treatment systems, with nearly a quarter of a million acres.



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

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Dear Iowa Citizens,

We are increasingly becoming an urban society, even in Iowa, but our natural resource base and our environment is critically linked to the health of our private, rural land. Every time we buy a loaf of bread, take a drink of water, and watch a flock of geese head south, we are reminded that private land is interwoven into our daily lives.

While the movement to take better care of natural resources never seems to occur fast enough, it's clear that Iowa farmers and the conservation community are already national leaders in establishing conservation buffers, restoring wetlands, using conservation tillage methods, and overall care of working agricultural land. This work has been aided through strong local and state leadership, including involvement from Iowa's 100 soil and water conservation districts and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Division of Soil Conservation. The many partnerships and strong conservation ethic that have propelled Iowa into national leadership in resource conservation will gain more support, as public and private conservation efforts continue to expand.

As the nation's lead technical agency on natural resource care of private lands for more than 60 years, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is eager to help Iowans take more steps forward.

Please feel free to review the recent accomplishments on natural resource care in Iowa listed in this brief report, and share in the satisfaction of the important work that continues on private land for all of society.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Leroy Brown'.

Leroy Brown, State Conservationist

NRCS Mission

To provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve and sustain our natural resources and environment.

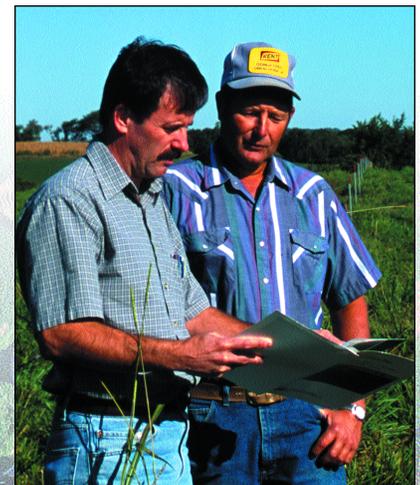
NRCS Vision

A Productive Nation in Harmony with a Quality Environment.

A Partnership for Good Stewardship

Harold and Ruth DeBruin of Fremont are working with NRCS to reduce erosion, get cleaner water, improve forage production, and make better use of nutrients on their Mahaska County farm. Together they developed a prescribed grazing system that included pasture, hayland, and critical area plantings, a livestock water tank, a brush management plan, and a nutrient management plan. Since enrolling 88 acres of pasture in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in 1999, they established 12 paddocks to rotate about 40 head of cattle. Several pastures were converted from cropland, and were seeded to eastern gamma grass, a warm season, native plant that provides good forage for summer grazing.

Harold DeBruin (right) has worked with Kevin Funnii of NRCS through EQIP to take care of his grass as well as his cows.



Program Summary

This report highlights accomplishments in Iowa for fiscal year 2000, but is also an update on the current status of conservation programs.

Conservation Operations

Conservation operations is the NRCS day-to-day technical assistance program. Assistance includes special outreach efforts by NRCS employees to minority and non-traditional audiences that could benefit from NRCS services. This base program also often supports the initial phase of work done through other programs mentioned in this report. In FY 2000, accomplishments from this base program include:

- Acres Planned for conservation 1,174,262
- Practices applied (acres) 875,363
- Highly erodible land treated (acres) 590,601
- Estimated soil saved (tons) 1,789,143
- Customer assistance (number) 300,058
- Nutrient management used (acres) 157,882
- Prescribed grazing (acres) 43,099
- Trees and shrubs planted (acres) 9,238
- Residue management (acres) 481,062
- Wetlands created/restored (acres) 18,264

Plant Materials

The Elsberry Plant Materials Center serving Iowa released 27 trees, shrubs and native grass and forb seed species to Iowa seed growers who produce seed and bare root stock for conservation purposes.

Earth Team Volunteers

In FY2000, more than 50,000 hours were served by NRCS Earth Team volunteers to survey and stake terraces and waterways, work with landowners to enroll them in the buffer and wetlands programs, hold conservation education sessions, and encourage people to include conservation measures in their back yards.

Grazing Land Conservation Initiative

Since there has been an almost 20% reduction in pastureland acreage in the last 20 years in Iowa, special effort has been given to the grassland resource. The GLCI has funded four grassland conservationists to work directly with more than 400 landowners, private groups, and NRCS staff to demonstrate and assist landowners on 42,500 acres to implement prescribed grazing plans.

Soil Survey

Modern soil surveys are available in all 99 Iowa Counties. All soil surveys are available in an electronic format. (Thirteen) soil surveys are SSURGO certified (most detailed mapping level with a geographic database) with an additional 18 counties in various stages of SSURGO development. Digital orthophotography is available for the entire state.

Soil surveys have been updated and published in four counties, field work has been completed for update in four others, and field work is ongoing in four more counties.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Wetlands were restored, enhanced or created on 8,647 acres in 29 counties in Iowa during FY2000 with assistance from the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). An additional 3,237 acres were restored with assistance from the Emergency Watershed Protection Floodplain Easements Program (EWP-FPE).

These restored wetlands provide important flood reduction as well as wildlife habitat and other environmental benefits. Over 97,000 acres of wetlands have been restored or are in the process of being restored under these programs in Iowa since 1992.



NRCS employees serve all 99 counties through 100 soil and water conservation districts in Iowa. Local offices are located in USDA Service Centers. Professional soil conservation staffs in each office are supported by agronomists, biologists, soil scientists, engineers, and other conservation specialists. NRCS conservationists help interested landowners to plan and apply practices that improve water quality, sustain soil resources, enhance habitat for wildlife, and improve the conditions of natural resources on privately owned land in general.

Conservation Buffers

Iowa continues to lead the nation in the CRP continuous sign up with 241,836 acres. A total of 1,772,641 acres have been enrolled all continuous and general CRP. The continuous CRP acres include 23,824 acres from the 21st CRP that ended in April with the advent of the 22nd CRP including incentives for entering into a contract and for installing certain practices. An addition 34,200 acres have been enrolled in the 22nd CRP.

The Iowa buffer partnership continues to be active in promoting buffers and continuous CRP. NRCS continues to work with the AgroEcology Issue team at Iowa State University in developing new standards for buffer practices.

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Division of Soil Conservation has introduce a program to match the signing incentive payment (SIP) for those practices that do not receive a SIP under the CRP program. In addition the Division has funds to promote buffers through grants to Soil Conservation Districts.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

WHIP is a voluntary program that helps landowners develop wildlife habitat on private lands. The 11 contracts initiated on 468 acres for \$80,000 helped restore native prairie sites, establish prairie vegetation, stabilize streambanks and install fish habitat structures.

Resource, Conservation & Development

Thirteen RC&D councils worked in communities across Iowa to leverage more than \$9.8 million in completing a wide variety of natural resource and community development projects that included:

- Demonstration of the use of biomass from switchgrass to replace coal in large-scale electricity generation;
- Re-establishing the wine grape industry in Iowa;
- Development of locally-driven watershed organizations; and
- Outreach projects to economically disadvantaged and other under-served communities.

Manure Management

Working with the Iowa Manure Management Action Group (IMMAG), NRCS has developed a working partnership with farm organizations, Iowa livestock and poultry industry, and environmental groups. The group's website averaged over 200,000 hits per quarter during the year by producers, agriculture service providers, and others.

Farmland Protection Program

Local groups are showing interest in this program intended to slow the rate of conversion of prime and unique agricultural land to urban development.

Small Watershed Program

Planning for watershed project rehabilitation began in Iowa during FY2000, with plans for two pilot projects in western Iowa completed. Watershed planning assistance was also provided in southern and northeastern Iowa.

Watershed project measure construction was completed on 19 sites in five watersheds during FY2000. Operations and maintenance technical assistance was also provided to more than 50 projects.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Since the beginning of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the land users of Iowa have shown a great interest in using the program to help them protect natural resources. In 4 years, 4,100 applications requesting a total of nearly \$41 million of EQIP funds have been received. A total of \$15.5 million of EQIP funds received in Iowa has allowed funding of 2,240 applications. The funds were used primarily to treat resource concerns related to livestock production, reduce soil erosion, and improve water quality.

In fiscal year 2000, \$3.3 million in conservation cost-share funds were available to Iowa farmers through EQIP. Of these funds, \$2.3 million were designated for 46 priority areas across Iowa. These funds resulted in the development of 313 EQIP contracts. About \$1 million in remaining EQIP funds were awarded to Iowa farmers with statewide priority resource concerns, including livestock manure and pasture management, soil erosion, and water quality. These EQIP monies funded a total of 125 contracts covering approximately 21,000 acres. NRCS received many more applications for the statewide priority resource concerns that could be funded.

Forestry Incentives Program (FIP)

9 contracts were issued to improve timber stands on 300 acres in FY 2000. Potential is great for more improvement; more than 90% of Iowa's 2 million acres of forest are owned by 50,000 individual landowners.

