

# Iowa Chapter Newsletter

Soil & Water Conservation Society  
November 2024



## Jerry Neppel President's Report

The recent rains started replenishing the soil with water to increase the soil profile moisture content. It has provided water to planted cover crops to germinate and flourish and has moistened the soil to aid in adequate compaction for soil and water conservation practices being constructed. These rains have also allowed for recharge of groundwater and to increase stream flows.

Water is essential for life. We know this as conservation professionals. However, this year demonstrated how Mother Nature can provide water extremes. Average annual precipitation doesn't convey the whole story. No rain for 6-8 weeks followed by a 12-inch rainfall over 1-2 days results in a different hydrograph than 1.5 inches of rainfall per week produces.

We as conservation professionals need to work on a systems approach that builds resiliency in the soils, the cropping systems, and the water-



*Jerry Neppel, Iowa SWCS Chapter President*

sheds we work in and with the land managers we help implement these concepts.

It may not be easy. But as members of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, we can be better prepared to address this need for resiliency in our natural resources in our area.

Yours in conservation!

Jerry Neppel

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## Professional Development Grant Recipients Report on Trips to SWCS International Conference in Myrtle Beach

### ***Olivia LaGrange, Easement Specialist, NRCS***

"Wow!" was the most common exclamation that came out of the mouths of attendees who first peered into the meeting room. It was overflowing with attendees seated for the Pritchard Speaker's message on the first day of the conference. The 79th Soil and Water Conservation Society International Conference in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina was the place to be this summer for all things focused on sustaining and advancing the technology of our natural resources. I enjoyed the diversity of topics and attendee backgrounds that were present at the conference this year. The Pritchard Speaker, Farmer Cee was one of my favorites.

Farmer Cee is a single black woman producer from North Carolina. She grabbed the audience's attention not only at the conference, but with her national social media following of nearly 400K followers due to her authentic nature and her truth in her words. She coined the term "agripreneur" as a strong black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) advocate and Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) advocate. She produces hemp/herbs on her farm and was initially considered quite controversial. However, her journey revolves around changing perspectives to "expand well-being in natural ways". She demonstrated through her 10 years of farming that regenerative, organic agriculture has changed its face. As she shows that small-scale farming can in fact have the highest influence. She cautions that programs going after the largest acreages may be missing opportunities to influence a population not normally worked with. She stated that "the lack in acreage may make up in influence, and that changing perspective is not a pick it up, put it down kind of conversation." It is conversation that must continue to develop and as you become more educated, so does the potential to change behavior.

Another presentation I otherwise might not have the pleasure of listening to, was presented by a student David Yawson at the University of the West Indies. His talk "Land Cover Dynamics in Barbados" was a sort of request for expertise on an otherwise uncommon problem in the states. He discussed natural resource issues in the Scotland district of Barbados that has heavy farming and grazing pressure. In addition, this land is unfortunately prone to high erosion due to unstable, thin soils. Due to the pressure, this area has also experienced a strong decline in woody vegetative cover. David hypothesized that planting more trees and limiting grazing would reduce the erosion and hold soil in place so that farming could continue for years to come. There is however

a societal/political issue in Barbados. Trees provide habitat that brings monkeys and monkeys cause crop damage. The flip coin is that monkeys also bring tourism. This talk left the audience thoroughly understanding the predicament and that multiple factors come to play when trying to protect and sustain our natural resources across the globe.

Overall, it was a great conference. I enjoyed the variety of topics, getting to see former coworkers, friends and meet new faces too. I highly encourage you to do your best to make it to the next one, as it is an investment in yourself.

### ***Erin Ogle, Project Coordinator, Taylor County***

Thank you, Iowa SWCS Chapter! With the help of the Iowa SWCS Career Development Grant, experiencing my first Soil and Water Conservation Society annual conference was made possible. Not only was it an opportunity to network and meet other conservation professionals, nationwide, but it was a chance to showcase how a grass roots water quality demonstration project in southwest Iowa has been able to thrive and now begin to expand, statewide.

As a Project Coordinator in southwest Iowa, I manage the Taylor County Water Quality Initiative (WQI) Project. Over the last 9 years, the Taylor SWCD has seen success and growth with their pilot project, focusing on marginal acres and incorporating livestock back on the landscape. So much so, that they have been able to expand the project to additional counties in Iowa. With this momentum, showcasing their success has been something the SWCD has been wanting to do, yet funds are limited to do so. With the SWCS Grant, that opportunity was made possible.

Having the opportunity to speak at an international conference was incredible. Not only did it allow me to showcase what southwest Iowa has been working on over the last 9 years, but it allowed for professional growth to help with my fear of public speaking. It also allowed for networking which resulted in additional opportunities after the conference, including webinars and magazine interviews, focusing on the Taylor County WQI Project. It was an inspiring opportunity to hear from many conservation professionals and meet some wonderful people in such a positive environment. I left with new ideas and energy that has motivated me to want to try new things for the project. Attending the 79th SWCD annual conference in Myrtle Beach was truly unforgettable.

## Event Wrap-ups

### Iowa Women in Agriculture

The Iowa Women in Agriculture conference was held on Thursday, August 1, at the Iowa FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny. The Iowa Chapter was invited to sponsor a booth and visit with the conference attendees. There were more than 120 conference attendees. This event provided a unique audience to increase awareness of the Chapter.

### RAGBRAI

The Iowa Chapter and the Conservation Team partners again sponsored free water, bananas and postcards to bicyclists along the RAGBRAI route. Over the five days that the Conservation Team set up their wayside tent and wares, the Team mailed 2,674 post cards from riders and handed out 4,000 bananas! After a tornado ravaged Greenfield earlier in the spring, the Executive Board decided to donate back to the Greenfield community any contributions made by the bicyclists on Tuesday, the day the route passed through Greenfield. Donations on Tuesday totaled \$508.68 which were donated to Greenfield Fire Department for tornado relief.

Alan Lauver again served as van master for this event--transporting equipment and supplies, setting up the tents, coordinating and coaching the volunteers and managing the many details for a successful week. Thank you, Alan!



### Iowa Water Conference

On September 10-11, more than 300 water resources professionals gathered at the Hyatt Regency Hotel and Conference Center in Coralville, Iowa, to collaborate and exchange information at the 2024 Iowa Water Conference.



*Past President Mary Beth Stevenson (left) visits with a conference attendee about the benefits of Chapter membership.*

The Iowa Chapter sponsored a booth to meet conference attendees, promote the Society and membership into the Chapter. Several Chapter members helped staff the booth over the two-day conference. Several people stopped by to learn about the Chapter and the Society. It was an opportunity to help attendees become aware of the unique role the Society has of bringing together a diverse group of individuals for a common cause of soil and water conservation.

### Upper Mississippi River Conference

The Upper Mississippi River Conference (UMRC) took place on October 16-17 at Western Illinois University (WIU) Quad Cities Campus in Moline, IL, with the theme "Learning from Each Other."

The conference was a success, bringing together 78 attendees from various states. The second day was dedicated to the Next Gen Summit, which welcomed an additional 65 students from local universities and high schools. The day featured a panel of river and water resource professionals sharing insights, followed by a water testing activity along the Mississippi River. SWCS promotional materials, membership forms, and the Conservogram were displayed in the exhibit area.



## Newsworthy

### Christine A Curry Art

Christine A Curry's art is more than just impactful—it's a powerful call to action. With a life-long passion for advocating for animals, nature, people, and the environment, Christine uses her work to raise awareness about crucial issues like water pollution.



*Ann Wolf, SWCS Secretary, is featured representing the Mississippi River in Pure Iowa Water - A Pop Art Project*

Her latest project, inspired by Andy Warhol, highlights the stark realities of water quality in the Upper Mississippi River watershed, aiming to engage those who may not be moved by data alone. Through her art, Christine aspires to spark a larger movement for cleaner water and

showcase the essential role of conservation farmers in providing real solutions. The artist uses oversized advertising graphics and addresses the poor water quality problems that plague the Upper Mississippi watershed by promoting a fictitious PURE IOWA sparkling stream water company that bottles water directly from Iowa streams. #ChristineACurry #EnvironmentalArt #WaterQuality #Art-ForChange #PopArt #PUREIOWA #CleanWater #Conservation #Awareness #Advocacy

### Chair Leadership Award

The Iowa Chapter was awarded the 2024 Board Chair's Leadership Award as well as the 2024 Outstanding Chapter Award. These were presented at the 79th SWCS International Annual Conference held in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Shown below is the Board Chair's Leadership. Congratulations to everyone who helped the Chapter earn these national awards!



## Scholarships

Apply for the Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Society Memorial Scholarship.

Two \$1,000 scholarships are available. Application Deadline: December 1, 2024. Download an application online at <http://iaswcs.org/student-scholarships>.

**ELIGIBILITY.** Applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Be a resident of Iowa OR be a student registered at a college in Iowa;
- Be employed in a natural resources related field in Iowa for a minimum of one year OR have completed a full year of college coursework in a natural resources related field;
- Have demonstrated integrity, ability, and competence in their work;
- Possess skills gained through training or experiences;
- Be enrolled in the upcoming spring term.

Any Questions? Contact Heidi: [heidia@iastate.edu](mailto:heidia@iastate.edu) or 515-294-6636

## Iowa Chapter Book Club

The Iowa Chapter is considering hosting a virtual book club to discuss the book, *Tending Iowa's Land: Pathways to a Sustainable Future*, by Cornelia F. Mutel. However, before we go too far in planning this, we want to get some feedback from other Iowa Chapter members to gauge interest and get input on best times to meet virtually.

Please take a moment to fill out this short survey to help guide our efforts: <https://form.jotform.com/241905211273145>

## 2024-25 Iowa Chapter SWCS Nominations

The Iowa Chapter is seeking to fill the positions of President-Elect, Treasurer, Central Area Chairperson, Northeast Area Chairperson, and Southwest Area Chairperson for 2024-25. Please vote at the link below:

<https://form.jotform.com/243163999153163>

## Iowa SWCS Events Calendar

- » 2024 Iowa Chapter Annual Meeting, Friday, November 22, 2024
- » 2024 Women In Ag Leadership annual conference, Gateway Hotel & Conference Center, Ames, IA. Breaking Ground, Seeding Success. December 4-5, 2024 <https://www.regcytes.extension.iastate.edu/womeninag/>

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