

Sweeney from the Statehouse 7/12/10

USDA Awards Grants for Water Quality & Conservation Practices

On Thursday, June 17 Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has awarded \$14.1 million to IDALS as part of \$36 million awarded to Iowa through the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative. The funds awarded to IDALS will be used to support the restoration of 37 water quality wetlands in north central Iowa.

IDALS received the funding through the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP). The projects include:

Buena Vista County - 14 wetlands restored in the North Raccoon River Watershed

Mitchell County – 11 wetlands restored in the Upper Cedar River Watershed

Floyd County – 4 wetlands restored in the Upper Cedar River Watershed

Wright and Hamilton County – 8 wetlands restored in the Boone River Watershed

The wetlands to be restored will be modeled after nitrate removal wetlands that have been built through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Currently, 72 of these wetlands have been restored or are under development. Water quality testing by Iowa State University has shown that they remove 40-90% of the nitrates and 90+% of the herbicide in tile drainage water from upper-lying croplands. In addition to reducing nitrate loads to surface waters, the wetlands provide wildlife habitat and increased recreational opportunities. The effectiveness of these wetlands were recognized by the Gulf of Mexico Program, which is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is dedicated to protecting, restoring and maintaining the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem.

As part of the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative, USDA also announced \$22 million in funding to eight Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Iowa through the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) on June 16. IDALS is providing staffing assistance grants to the eight Districts receiving the funding.

USDA also announced Iowa will receive funding for 18 projects that will help landowners and producers within the Mississippi River Basin voluntarily implement conservation and management practices that prevent, control and trap nutrient runoff from agricultural land. During the next five years, these Iowa projects will receive a total of \$36 million, which includes \$14 million for Wetland Restoration and Enhancement Program funds for 10 projects coordinated by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation.

What a great learning experience I had when I attended the Mississippi to Iowa Farmer to Farmer Exchange! Friest Farms of Radcliffe, Iowa hosted a stop focused on intensive nutrient management. A very special opportunity was the helicopter flight that gave me a birds eye view of the Friest operation. Attendess also heard a presentation from the Story County Wind Energy Center. Thank you to Iowa Secretary Bill Northey for also attending this conference!

Reports Of Use Tax Audits Surface

As Iowa faces nearly a \$1 billion budget deficit, the state is searching for every tax dollar it can find. Reports from federal and state tax experts earlier this year confirmed that when times get tough, it's more likely that governments will look to raise revenue by increasing audits rather than looking for ways to reduce spending. "In times when more revenue is needed and the tax gap widens, absolutely the Internal Revenue Service is going to step up audits" proclaimed one tax analyst with H&R Block's Tax Institute. "You're not going to find a document that says this, but it's very clear that in a budget deficit, increased tax collection is another source of revenue" a tax expert and university professor stated.

Iowa's use tax provision complements the state sales tax. When a transaction is subject to sales tax but occurs outside of Iowa for use in Iowa and Iowa tax is not collected, it is subject to use tax. Taxpayers are responsible for registering with the Department of Revenue when they purchase taxable goods or services outside of Iowa and remit the use tax to Iowa. The problem is not many Iowans know this.

Nearly all Iowans understand they must pay their taxes and willingly do so. But many are expressing frustration about the lack of effort that goes into educating taxpayers about their obligations. The majority of Iowans are unaware they are required to remit use tax to the state when a retailer fails to collect it. Moreover, Iowans don't understand why it takes the Department of Revenue 10 years to issue notification of taxes owed. It is not unreasonable to require the state government to issue notice of unpaid tax liabilities in a more timely manner.

Because such little outreach occurs, most taxpayers rely on certified public accountants to handle their tax matters. Even so, it is rare for an accountant to ask an individual if they purchased anything across state lines and paid sales or use tax. For this reason, it is important for taxpayers to educate themselves on the requirements outlined in the federal and state tax code. Individuals can learn more about federal tax law at www.irs.gov and state tax law at www.iowa.gov/tax. Additionally, if an individual is being audited it's important they know their rights. The following website is also helpful: www.iowa.gov/tax/educate/78619.html

In Closing...

Activities are going strong this summer. I attended the Iowa Association of Agricultural Educators (IAAE) Professional Development Summer Conference and Ellsworth College was recognized for their outstanding Adult/Post Secondary Program. Heading the Department is Kevin Butt. He does a great job to encourage individuals to pursue Agriculture jobs. He was recognized as the outstanding instructor. Congratulations!

What a great job everyone did at the Hardin County Fair from livestock to exhibits. It is fantastic to see all the families involved in educating our youth.

A big thank you to Deputy Director Pat Boddy and Communication Kevin Baskins from the Iowa DNR for all their hard work in getting Pine Lake State Park some emergency funding to help with the devastation. Pat was there with me the Tuesday after the hail storm last summer and we viewed and toured for about 2 hours and then Pat went to work, volunteer and reported first-hand how bad the storm affected the Eldora area. Mr. Baskins is going to hold a meeting to explain the funding and for other concerns. It will be held at the Eldora Training School on Thursday, July 15 at 6:00 pm.