



News release

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Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance Announces Partnership to Expand Conservation Agronomist Network

Working in priority watersheds, conservation agronomists assist farmers and landowners with implementing proven water quality and conservation practices

ANKENY, Iowa (Mar. 8, 2023) – Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance (ACWA) announced a new partnership with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) to expand the network of conservation agronomists working with Iowa farmers and landowners across the state. Conservation agronomists are professionals who assist farmers with agronomic production decisions while also providing expertise about incorporating conservation and water quality improvement practices onto their land.

“Conservation agronomists serve as trusted advisers to Iowa farmers and landowners and help to identify, plan, and implement proven water quality and soil conservation practices,” said Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig. “As we scale up and accelerate our statewide water quality efforts, innovative public-private partnerships like this will get more practices in place and move us closer toward achieving our Nutrient Reduction Strategy goals.”

[ACWA launched the network of conservation agronomists in August of 2020.](#) Their existing funding model has thus far depended on support from a variety of sources, including Iowa ag retailers and cooperatives, which make up ACWA's membership.

“ACWA brings a collaborative group of co-ops, ag retailers, manufacturers and other supporting organizations together to advance a shared mission of helping Iowa farmers have a positive impact on soil and water resources. We want to thank IDALS for supporting expansion of the conservation agronomists' efforts,” said Dan Dix, ACWA president and NEW Cooperative general manager. “We appreciate the opportunity this funding presents, as it is a boost to the conservation agronomist programming approach that ACWA members started several years ago and is gaining traction across the Iowa countryside.”

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship will utilize more than \$2 million in public funding, received from the Environmental Protection Agency's new Gulf Hypoxia Program, to extend the duration of three conservation agronomist positions and deploy two additional positions. Other funding support for the network will continue from ACWA members.

“To date, we estimate the conservation agronomist network has helped to implement practices on Iowa land that have created substantial environmental benefits, including the removal of over 1.4 million pounds of nitrogen and 32,000 pounds of phosphorus between 2020 and 2022,” said Thomas Fawcett, ACWA treasurer and Heartland Cooperative director of environmental resources.

Enhancements of the conservation agronomist network will:

- Strengthen the coordination and project development between conservation agronomists, ag retailers, watershed coordinators and other conservation professionals to increase the adoption of practices.
- Connect farmers and landowners with technical and financial assistance to install priority in-field (cover crops, reduced tillage, etc.) practices and edge-of-field (saturated buffers, bioreactors, oxbows, water quality wetlands, etc.) practices.
- Continue to grow ag retail engagement in conservation and nutrient reduction practices to supplement agronomic and production expertise.
- Emphasize outreach efforts and highlight opportunities for individuals within priority watersheds to participate, especially with more dedicated water quality funding being made available.
- Support the implementation of practices that will lead to an estimated reduction of two million pounds of nitrogen and 57,000 pounds of phosphorus.

The eight priority watersheds include the North Raccoon River, Boone River, Floyd River, East and West Nishnabotna Rivers, Turkey River, Middle Cedar River, South Skunk River and Skunk River.

IDALS funding for this partnership is in place through September 30, 2026.

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Agriculture’s Clean Water Alliance (ACWA) is a non-profit association whose mission is identifying and advancing solutions that reduce nutrient loss, build healthier soils, and improve Iowa’s waters. ACWA is recognized for its ability to build upon its members’ extensive relationship with farmers across Iowa.

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ACWA regular members include: AgState, Central Valley Ag Cooperative, Gold Eagle Cooperative, Heartland Co-Op, Helena Agri-Enterprises, Landus Cooperative, NEW Cooperative Inc., Nutrien Ag Solutions, Pro Cooperative, Van Diest Supply

ACWA associate members include: Corteva agriscience, Iowa Corn Growers Association, Iowa Soybean Association, Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance, Koch Ag & Energy Services, Nationwide, TruTerra, LLC/Land O’Lakes, Verdesian Life Sciences