

Group picks 10 to be stewards

Commentary

By CAROL BROWN

Key Points

- Decisions involving natural resources concern everyone, not just farm industry.
- Iowa Learning Farm has introduced 10 people across Iowa to serve as speakers.
- They'll help drive the message about the need for more resource conservation.

IOWA'S farms are a gift. "We need to be aware of that and maintain them and build them back to where they were," says Dave Ruden, an Iowa Learning Farm conservationist.

Ruden, farm manager for the Melleray Abbey south of Dubuque, is one of 10 people across Iowa who are helping with the ILF project by serving as an ILF conservationist. These spokespeople are champions of the conservation cause. They are role models who practice, understand and are willing to speak out about the need for a renewed commitment to a culture of conservation.

The ILF project is working to build a culture of conservation — strengthening our commitment to the belief that natural-resource conservation is important to our quality of life. A culture of conservation encourages us to more fully appreciate our environment and not take our natural resources for granted. The goal of ILF is to increase the understanding between individual decisions and the aggregate impact.

Until now, the ILF project has consisted of farmer cooperators, agency partners and ILF team members. The farmers are demonstrating various conservation practices on their land. ILF team members are conducting scientific and economic research, testing water quality, offering guidance, and finding what motivates us. The project is supported by agency partners.

Adding a new dimension

With the addition of the conservationists, a new dimension has been created. Initial ILF conservationists include:

- Steve Berger, Wellman
- Jon Gisleson, Floyd
- Bill Hammitt, Portsmouth
- Mark Ingwersen, Spirit Lake
- Jody Kerns, Edgewood
- Laura Krouse, Mt. Vernon
- Barry Kusel, Manning

- Norm Lust, New Virginia
 - Dave Ruden, Dubuque
 - Dave VanWaus, Colo
- More spokespeople may be added as the project moves forward.

The ILF conservationists will be involved in various ways. They might present a program at a local service organization meeting, write editorials for local or regional newspapers, host a field day on their farm, or speak to students at an FFA or 4-H meeting.

Bill Hammitt, Portsmouth, knows local impact is important. "It means a lot more to people when they read an editorial from a local person. Seeing somebody's name they know brings the message back to the local community." Hammitt is a full-time farmer who previously worked for the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

These spokespeople will share their own experiences, incorporating science-based information provided by the ILF project, Iowa State University and other research institutions.

Most ILF conservationists are farmers, but urban and rural nonfarm Iowans are also involved, as building a culture of conservation includes everyone. Raising awareness about the fate of chemicals and fertilizers applied to lawns and golf courses is just as important as those applied to fields.

You can help by asking one of these people to speak to your club or organization. To find out more about the ILF Conservationist program, call ILF at 515-294-5429, e-mail ilf@iastate.edu or visit www.extension.iastate.edu/ilf. We can put you in touch with a conservationist nearest you.

Brown is a communications specialist for the Iowa Learning Farm.



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