

Get attention of Iowa youth

By CAROL BROWN

WHEN we ask farmers why they began conservation farming, they answer: "I want this land to be here for my children and grandchildren."

Many Iowa farmers recognize the value of their land and hope the next generation continues the family business. A goal of the Iowa Learning Farm program is to encourage farmers to adopt conservation practices and structures to help them be successful.

Now, ILF has taken another step in building a culture of conservation by reaching out to a new audience in addition to producers — Iowa's youth. In several ways, ILF is teaching kids as young as fourth grade about the importance of good soil and clean water.

The video series called "A Culture of Conservation" was produced and distributed in the fall to Soil and Water Conservation District offices throughout Iowa, ISU Extension offices and Iowa County Conservation boards. Other copies have been sent to individuals across the Midwest upon request.

Supporting the teachers

The Iowa Learning Farm has developed age-specific publications to enhance the classroom learning experience. "Building a Culture of Conservation — It All Begins With You!" offers activities that coordinate with the video series. One publication is geared for sixth to ninth grade and the other for high school and junior college students.

These publications are being distributed to all Iowa high school and community college agricultural educators along with a DVD containing all six videos. The publications, written and compiled by Mary Swalla Holmes and Karla Stevens, contain issue-oriented classroom research activities or field-work exercises for each video.

"The activities link the social concepts of connection, reciprocity, responsibility, resilience and respect to the environmental systems that support all life on Earth," states the publications' introduction. Students may discover more about the water cycle, research soil erosion or reveal how their personal behaviors affect water quality. The activities work for all students whether they have an ag or urban background.

Talking to the kids

The Iowa Learning Farm is also talking directly with youth. The Iowa Agricultural Development Authority Youth Institute was held in Ames in June. Jacqueline Comito, ILF assistant program manager, spoke with all 81 high school delegates, who applied and were selected to attend. Discussions centered on the delegates' role in agriculture and how their individual choices affect soil and water quality now and in the future.

The ILF Rainfall Simulator is viewed by many children each spring and summer. This spring it was demonstrated at the Iowa Children's Water Festival in Ankeny, as about 3,000 fifth-graders from the state converged to

learn about water quality.

The rainfall simulator also visits SWCD outdoor classrooms and ISU Extension Agriculture and Environment Days. Staff from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and ISU Extension, and SWCD commissioners help ILF demonstrate the simulator to



elementary school students and teach them the value of preserving our natural resources.

In addition to providing educational resources for Iowa's youth, ILF has just published a series of information sheets with the producer in mind. The four handouts focus on

specific topics: Iowa watersheds, the transition to no-till, water quality and conservation practices, and the economics of residue.

The information sheets and booklets are at www.extension.iastate.edu/ilf. For printed copies, e-mail ilf@iastate.edu.

Brown is communications specialist for the Iowa Learning Farm.

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