Annual Conference News

The 2015 SWCS International Annual Conference will be held July 26-29, 2014, at the Sheraton Hotel in Greensboro, North Carolina. To keep up to date on all annual conference news, visit our website at www.swcs.org/15AC.

Annual Conference Theme Announced

The 70th Annual Conference theme will be “Coming Home to Conservation: Putting Science into Practice.” The 2015 conference will provide a forum to celebrate past conservation accomplishments as well as share and promote science-based knowledge on critical, current issues facing soil, water, and environmental sustainability.

We will meet this year in North Carolina, the home state of Hugh Hammond Bennett, which provides a unique combination of conservation history and southern hospitality. Already an active soil scientist in the years prior to the Dust Bowl, Bennett witnessed first-hand the social and environmental devastation of significant erosion. His nation called on him to help stem the tide of its worst environmental disaster by implementing soil saving practices in the Great Plains and beyond. Hugh Hammond Bennett later helped found the SWCS and led the charge of identifying and applying sound science in pursuit of conserving soil and water resources. With the same mission today, we face even greater natural resource challenges in the midst of climate change and increasing populations. The path paved by Bennett’s efforts and example gives us a solid foundation, and we must strive to continually improve the use and preservation of resources as we build a sustainable future.

Additionally, this year we will be incorporating the former National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) National Water Conference into the SWCS Annual Conference, which will increase collaborative opportunities for land-grant based scientists and educators engaged in water issues.

The conference Call for Presentations will launch in the next couple of weeks. Please watch your email for the announcement or visit www.swcs.org/15Aac for updates as they become available.
Iowa Cover Crops Conference
Save the Date

Save the date for the Iowa Cover Crops Conference! This year the conference will be held on February 17-18, 2015, at the Sheraton in West Des Moines, Iowa. The Iowa Cover Crops Conference will provide a forum to learn about successful cover crop practices, discuss opportunities for collaboration, and troubleshoot challenges that could be encountered along the way. Speakers will include farmers, crop consultants, and university researchers who have extensive experience in cover crop management. Registration coming soon! Visit [www.swcs.org/15IACC](http://www.swcs.org/15IACC) for updates as they become available.

SWCS Annual Giving Campaign
Is Underway!

The past year has been challenging for natural resources conservation, but through your contributions, SWCS is working to make a difference. The 2014 Annual Giving Campaign is underway, and SWCS needs your help reaching our $25,000 goal by the end of the year. Contributions from dedicated members like you allow SWCS to continue our conservation efforts. We need your support! Please donate $5, $10, $25, $50, or more to the Society today.

[Click here to donate today](#): send donation by mail to SWCS, 945 SW Ankeny Road Ankeny, IA 50023; or call 515-289-2331 ext. 118 to contribute over the phone. Thank you for your continued support.

Holiday Gift Idea from SWCS

Introduce a friend to the benefits of an SWCS Membership with a discounted rate of $45 for a first time member. Your gift will not only support local, national, and international soil and water conservation, but will allow the recipient to receive professional education, networking opportunities, and all the other great member benefits you enjoy! Plus, they’ll receive an introductory welcome packet, too! Contact [memberservices@swcs.org](mailto:memberservices@swcs.org) for more information.

Kentucky No-Till and Cover Crop Soil Health Forum

The Bluegrass Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will host a no-till and cover crop soil health forum from 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (CT) on December 17, 2014, at the UK Research and Education Center in Princeton, Kentucky. Leaders in no-till and cover crop farming will discuss the benefits, opportunities, and challenges associated with improving the health and function of their soils through the adoption of soil health management systems. The forum will provide a unique opportunity for farmers interested in using cover crops in no-till farming operations to ask the panel about their experiences.

Please RSVP by November 30 to Steve Blanford at 859-224-7607.

Michigan Chapter Workshop Field Trip

Join the SWCS Michigan Chapter on October 27, 1:30 to 4:45 p.m., at Shanty Creek Resort in Bellaire, Michigan, as they head outdoors to explore area farms in Northern Michigan. Enjoy discussions about Michigan agriculture and hear first-hand from producers who are working to protect the environment and the state’s natural resources. There will be an opportunity to ask questions of producers that you might not ask in your own coverage area. Stops will highlight farms that produce a variety of Michigan commodities, from cattle to cherries.

Producers will highlight their participation in programs like the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program, Farm Bill programs, and innovations implemented on their operations. Hear tips about how to market your programs and communicate with producers.

To register, go to the [Michigan Association of Conservation Districts](http://www.michigan.org) website.

October Reader Question

This month, we are introducing a reader question to the Conservogram. We ask that our readers answer the question via email (to amy.thompson@swcs.org), and in the next issue, we will post some of your responses as well as ask a new question. We hope that this will provide a discussion forum for our readers and us! This month’s question is:

**Currently, what do you think is the number one issue facing the health of our soils?**
Chapter Spotlight: Iowa Chapter

Current chapter president: Jason Hart

History of the chapter: The Iowa Chapter was issued a charter at the National SWCS (then Soil Conservation Society of America) Meeting on October 26, 1950, in Detroit, Michigan.

What was the most successful chapter event in the last year? All of our events this year have been very successful. I would say events geared directly toward membership would be either the summer meeting that Kevin Kuhn (southwest representative) organized or the annual meeting that was organized by Tom Buman (president elect). To see a rundown of the agenda, check out the Iowa Chapter website and read the last two newsletters. Both of these meetings covered very relevant topics related to soil and water resources. Members that attended these meetings said they appreciated the agenda and the knowledge that was shared.

What other activities has the chapter been involved in this year? The chapter has been involved in many activities this year, including acting as host for cover crops workshops during the Iowa Power Show, touring the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates, and providing support for and conservation information to bicyclists during the Register’s Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa (RAGBRAI). To read about all of our 2014 accomplishments, check out the September 2014 newsletter.

What is your membership’s preferred method of communication (e.g., email, newsletters, Facebook)? The Iowa Chapter board hired CDI (Conservation Districts of Iowa) to completely overhaul our website. I feel our website does a great job and gets our message to current and future members. When it comes to the newsletter, we send that out by email and post a copy on the web. The chapter also has one member who updates our Facebook page.

What would you say are the most important current conservation concerns for your region? I feel that is always evolving, but the current spotlight is shining brightly on the importance of no-till and the use of green covers during the nontypical growing season. These two practices married together build great soil structure, enhance soil health, and store more organic matter in our soils. By consistently implementing these practices, the foreseen futuristic goal should be reducing chemical and fertilizer inputs while still producing a high yielding crop.

What is your favorite part of membership in SWCS? Knowing that I belong to a professional society that is involved in research and educational outreach related to soil and water conservation.

What advice would you give to a new chapter? Engage your membership and build partnerships with like groups or organizations. I feel this is crucial to having an active chapter. One person can’t do it all; it takes a team approach with great communication.

Is there any other information you’d like to share about your chapter? One of the great outreach events our chapter does annually is the RAGBRAI conservation tent. Our chapter partners with a lot of groups to hold a successful week of conservation outreach. To accomplish this, we partner with Iowa Department of Land Stewardship (Division of Soil Conservation), Natural Resources Conservation Service, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and the Conservation Districts of Iowa. SWCS and partners place permanent signage along the route that highlights conservation practices, offer free bananas and water to riders, offer free conservation-based postcards to be mailed free anywhere in the world, and provide daily educational conservation displays. Here is a short YouTube video featuring the backstory of the event.

Contact name for more information about the chapter: Jason Hart, President, shaghart@hotmail.com.

We are starting a new section of the Conservogram: the Chapter Spotlight. We would love every chapter to participate. If you are interested in having your chapter featured, please contact amy.thompson@swcs.org, and she will get you lined up for your month!
New Members
Welcome members who joined in September!

Arkansas—Razorback
Brandy Garrett Kluthe
Andrew Wargo IV

California/Nevada
Chris Marr

Canada—Manitoba
Carter Lintott

Canada—Ontario
Massimo Narini
Megan Quinn

Iowa
Luvis Andradigie
Ravindu Andradi
Daniel Barker
Amy Holley

Iowa—Iowa State University
Mary Adams
Lauren Gilbert
Joshua Langholdt
Sarah Leichty
Bridget McFarland
David Ortiz

Massachusetts—University of Massachusetts-Amherst
Kate Gervais

Nebraska
Will Adler

Virginia
Mahtaab Bagherzadeh
Virginia—Virginia Polytech University
Lindsay Carr

Washington—Olympic View
Nichole Emberton

Wisconsin
Mark Krupinski
Peggy Winter

Wyoming
Amanda Lee

Upcoming Events

Agroforestry Workshop
Corvallis, Oregon
October 21-22, 2014

Michigan Chapter Workshop Field Trip
Bellaire, Michigan
October 27, 2014

Southern Agricultural Cover Crops Conference
Jonesboro, Arkansas
October 28-29, 2014

21st Century Watershed Technology Conference and Workshop—Improving Water Quality and the Environment
The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand
November 1-7, 2014

Colorado Annual Meeting and Hydraulic Fracturing Workshop
Loveland, Colorado
November 10, 2014

Empire State Chapter Annual Meeting
Auburn, NY
November 21, 2014

Exploring the Linkage Between Soil, Plant, Animal and Human Health
Mandan, North Dakota
December 3-4, 2014

Kentucky No-Till and Cover Crop Soil Health Forum
Princeton, Kentucky
December 17, 2014

Iowa Cover Crops Conference
West Des Moines, Iowa
February 17-18, 2014

Current Corporate Members
For more information about corporate membership, please contact Chrissy Rhodes, 515-289-2331 x 114, corporate.info@swcs.org.

Gold
Agri Drain Corporation
DuPont Pioneer
Hickenbottom Inc.
Dow AgroSciences

Silver
Agren Inc.
The Fertilizer Institute

Bronze
Conservation Technology Information Center
Ecosystem Services Exchange
The Nature Conservancy
White River Irrigation District
From the Leadership

Experiential Learning: The New Wave of Agriculture Education

By Jon Scholl, At-Large Director

It’s October, and farmers all over central Illinois are rolling out truck load after truck load of corn and soybeans from a harvest shaping up to be the best on record. One might see this and conclude that the challenges agriculture must meet in the next 50 years do not look so daunting. Population is rising, the climate is warming, and productive farmland is being lost, but when the chorus of concerns about food shortages and high prices get the loudest, we always seem to have a way of innovating or adapting our way out a prospective calamity.

I don’t minimize our challenges, but there’s one I’m concerned often gets overlooked. Will we have the farmers, scientists, and support personnel with the skills needed to ensure our future food security? A recent report published by the USDA (online here) found that for the period from 2010 to 2015, 5% more college graduates with expertise in agricultural and food systems, renewable energy, and the environment will be needed in our workforce than in the previous five years. The study further stated that while employers prefer students from colleges of agriculture and life sciences, forestry and natural resources, and veterinary medicine, nearly 10% fewer graduates would originate from US colleges and universities in 2008 compared to 2002.

This challenge led me to give up an exciting career in Washington, DC, more than a year ago so I could play a role in a special effort at the University of Illinois. The program is called “experiential learning.”

Experiential learning is important for several reasons. For one, it seeks to more effectively connect the knowledge and critical thinking skills students learn in the regular classroom to practical, marketable skills they will need after they graduate. It also gives students the opportunity to visit firms and talk with people who have exciting and impactful careers in food and agriculture. I get a lot of comments to the effect that it is good to see a major university paying attention to details that help to round out the talent needed to sustain a bright future for agriculture.

What I have seen in the classroom has been surprising and encouraging. Enrollment in our College of Agriculture, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences has been steadily increasing over the past several years. Roughly two-thirds of my students are from urban and suburban areas. Food and agriculture seem to be in vogue. Students see options for fun, profitable, and rewarding careers. They come away with a better understanding of how they can play a role in agriculture, even if they lack agricultural experience or harbor a perception of agriculture being mostly about cows, sows, and plows.

In addition, the students are ready and able to look at food and agriculture issues practically. First and foremost, my students are driven by economics. They live on tight budgets and are very sensitive to how much their food costs. They’re interested in environmental and social sustainability, but they balance these interests with concerns about economic sustainability. From the perspective of a farmer dealing with a multitude of challenges that make planning and controlling outcomes difficult if not impossible, this is good news.

For those in agriculture concerned about where the public debate on the shortcomings of our agricultural system might take us, I find it encouraging that we have a capable group of young leaders, many of them not from a farm, who are willing to listen and engage in a dialogue driven by well-researched facts. I see potential for a new crop of leaders who can be very influential in creating a continued productive future for agriculture as well as a reasoned, sensible debate on the challenges facing us.

Leaders of the past have taken us to a marvelous place in agriculture. However, the world continues to grow more complex and challenging. Knowledge and the discovery of new ideas paired with the ability to critically analyze situations won’t alone assure future progress. All of that should be coupled with the development of new farmers, scientists, and support personnel that can successfully navigate a more complex, diverse, and interdependent world. Investing in these students will hopefully let them look back in 50 years from now with the same positive regard we have for those who made possible the terrific productivity of the food and agriculture system we enjoy today.