



News release

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NATIONAL MEETING HELD TO ADVANCE AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Ankeny, Iowa — A meeting was held recently in Des Moines, Iowa, with more than 100 leaders in attendance from across the country representing agricultural retailers, conservation and commodity groups. They gathered to share ideas for scaling up the adoption of conservation on the agricultural landscape.

The “Making Retail Conservation Real” event, held Feb. 21-22, included fast-paced presentations and small group discussions about the current state of agricultural conservation, why advancing ag conservation is important, and how to make advancements in this space. Agriculture’s Clean Water Alliance (ACWA), Iowa Soybean Association (ISA), and the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) co-hosted the event, and they enlisted executives with Bâton Global, a Des Moines-based company, to facilitate the discussions.

“Agricultural conservation has been going on in the U.S. for a long time. Since the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, our government has been intentionally working to improve soil protection and water quality,” said Roger Wolf, Director of Conservation at ISA and ACWA Executive Director. “Through this meeting, I hope we can accelerate ways that integrate retail agriculture, farmers and landowners, and public programming to increase and speed up the process of conservation implementation.”

Agricultural conservation includes the goals of building soil health and reducing excess nutrients in waterbodies. Farmers can help achieve these goals by planting cover crops, reducing tillage, and

managing nutrient application. They can install bioreactors and saturated buffers, which are structures that reduce nutrients in the water leaving ag fields before entering a river or stream. Currently, government agencies are heavily relied upon to implement these practices.

The Making Retail Conservation Real meeting opened doors for finding additional, innovative ways these conservation practices get on the landscape. To launch the discussions, key guest speakers included Iowa Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Grant Menke, and Robert Bonnie, USDA Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. They shared their thoughts on the need for conservation and how ag retailers have an important role in increasing conservation.

Other speakers included representatives from ag retail companies including Heartland Co-op, Perdue AgriBusiness, and Nutrien Ag Solutions; and non-profit groups such as the Environmental Defense Fund, The Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment, The Nature Conservancy, and more. They shared the current trends and the existing drivers for conservation implementation, discussed challenges that slow the process of implementing conservation and offered ways to meet those challenges.

“The private sector has a great opportunity to engage in projects and make conservation practice adoption as easy as possible for farmers and landowners,” said Ben Gleason, Executive Director of the Iowa Nutrient Research and Education Council (INREC) and event attendee. “We need to be open to new ideas and not remain in outdated methods of conservation delivery.”

Meeting attendee Melissa Miller, Project Director for the Iowa Nitrogen Initiative, agreed. “Our success in working with farmers is dependent on mutual trust and cooperation,” she said. “We can meet the goals of the Iowa Nitrogen Initiative by working with ag retailers and farmers to better understand how different farming systems impact optimum nitrogen fertilizer rates, including those who implement conservation practices.”

In his closing remarks, Wolf said this isn’t an either/or conversation, rather it’s an ‘and’ conversation and stakeholders need to be adaptable to use technology as it develops and as policies change.

“To truly make retail conservation real, these discussions and sharing of ideas can help meet the need for scalable conservation,” he said. “There are ways to include everyone involved in agriculture in some way, from farmers and landowners, to retailers, policymakers and government agencies. We all have roles in scaling up conservation on the landscape.”

Notes from the small-group discussions and presentations are being compiled and results will be shared with attendees and their staff. Wolf expects this to be the first of several meetings of this group and plans to add key stakeholders as ideas are developed and conservation practices are adopted.

Additional sponsors of Making Retail Conservation Real include: Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance, The Campbell Foundation, Great Outdoors Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy; also Central Valley Ag, Gold-Eagle Cooperative, Heartland Co-op, Helena Agri-Enterprises, Landus Cooperative, NEW Cooperative, Inc., Nutrien Ag Solutions, Pro Cooperative, and Van Diest Supply.

For more information about Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance: www.acwaiowa.com

For information about Iowa Soybean Association: www.iasoybeans.com

For information about the Soil and Water Conservation Society: www.swcs.org

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