

## SUMMER POLICY CONFERENCE CRAIG HILL

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The Iowa Farm Bureau uses our influence in many ways.

This morning, my first priority is to talk about an issue that is critically important and will hopefully influence the farmers of this great state of Iowa.

Farmer to farmer, let's look at one another, as stewards of the land, and take a long, hard look at how we care for "two of our most precious resources"...both soil and water.

What works...what doesn't...How can *we* "do better".

And, it's not about finger pointing...it's about us.

It has never been more important than today to have this dialog, with each other, about conservation. And to go beyond talking, to doing...to doing what is right for YOUR farm and for OUR natural resources...adopting effective practices. It is important!

Now, good farmers have always taken pride in doing things right, and are constantly striving for improvement. To quote Abraham Lincoln:

*"I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live, so that his place will be proud of him."*

So, let each of us take this assignment to heart, using Farm Bureau influence.

All of you in this room are *leaders* in Farm Bureau... and leaders in your community.

Many turn to *you* when it comes to setting an example, and conservation is *no different*.

What can all Farm Bureau members do to make a difference and be visibly seen as leading the way towards progress in water quality?

Let's not let the distraction of our many critics get in the way of our progress. Let's stay on task.

Much has been written about Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy...and I'd like to take this time to remind those in the audience that the overall goals of the critics, who are sincere about conservation, and the goals of our *farmers*, have *always* been the same; *to keep our soils strong and our water safe*.

Let's take a moment to consider why we use those natural elements; such as commercial fertilizers as well as manure in the production of our crops. It is to feed the plant...right? It's essential we feed the plant. And, feeding the plant has a cost. We have fertilizer bills that can run a few hundred dollars an acre. In the case of nitrogen; what is not optimized or assimilated by the crop is often wasted. I never met a farmer who likes waste. If we eliminate the waste...then we minimize the contribution that we make to the problem. Don't let nitrogen slip away.

And when it comes to soil retention, truthfully...I have never met a farmer who likes erosion! In other words, our goals are *aligned*. Certainly more than we are given credit.

We seek to *preserve* nutrients and focus those benefits to be utilized by the plant. And, we strive to *preserve our valuable* soil. I believe this goal is universally agreed upon.

Since the Nutrient Reduction Strategy was developed by many stakeholders and funded by the legislature, Iowa Farm Bureau has been leading the charge to encourage farmers to ‘do one more thing.’ Yes indeed we need to protect our base...our productivity is the envy of the world! But we know by changing practices, we are changing minds.

*On our farm, I know I can do more: We have nearly 5 miles of terraces, numerous buffers, waterways, and also have 5 manmade ponds, over ½ of our acres are no-till, we stabilize our nitrogen both in manure and we late season apply much of our commercial fertilizer.*

*We add to our conservation effort every year and still need to do more.*

The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy is a scientific and research based approach to help us continue to reduce nutrients in our waters.

There are a lot of ways to do that, and they will be different on every farm, because we know when it comes to conservation, there is no ‘one size fits all’ answer. Differences in our soil, how it drains, what we plant or the terrain will make some things more effective than others.

The solutions used on our farm in southern Iowa can be a very different solution for your farm.

Now, thanks to the work of the Iowa legislature, more than \$20 million in new cost share money was approved that will positively impact our conservation and water quality efforts on Iowa farms. A significant portion of these dollars will be matched by Iowa farmers to install conservation structures or implement new management practices.

We all know that in totality, farmer investment in conversation goes way beyond – but, this will help.

Secretary Northey has been touting cover crops as a new management tool, because research shows cover crops are an effective way to control erosion from wind and water and reduce the potential for nitrates to leach into our surface and ground waters.

Just since the funding was announced recently, 1096 farmers in 97 of the 100 Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Iowa have applied to participate in the newly funded Cost Share program. Farmers have submitted applications for more than 120,000 acres of new conservation practices.

*This is great news!* But we know that more needs to be done.

We know cover crops, as well as terraces, grassy waterways, wood chip nitrate-filtering bioreactors, as well as changes in our fertilizer application practices are all having a positive impact on nitrate levels in the Des Moines as well as the Raccoon River.

We also must recognize the impact of weather. I want you to take a look at this assessment of nitrate levels, taken from the Des Moines Water Works *own website*;

It shows that yes, we had a nitrate spike following spring rains which broke spring rainfall records which have stood for 141 years.... But when you look beyond that....it shows that nitrate levels from the Des Moines and Raccoon have been steadily *declining since 2006*. – *Again, this is data from the Des Moines Water Works.*

We know that we are favored by the trends.

In addition, we know how to move the needle; we've also done that with *livestock*.

My generation saw livestock come indoors with greater control of nutrients that no longer run into the stream but are injected into the soil to nourish the plant. A remarkable transition that benefited the environment tremendously, but never told by the media.

In the last 30 years, many Iowa farmers have moved livestock into climate controlled facilities, holding and capturing manure and after testing, applying only what we need, where we need it. We've reduced runoff in the past two decades, especially the last 10 years. The next generation of farmers will be even better. That is our history. A history of continuous improvement.

Consider these new opportunities:

- Establishment of a county Farm Bureau partnership with other organizations to lead development of a Department of Ag priority watershed project.
- Sponsorship of a soil and water conservation field day.
- How about recognizing your regional or state Soil Conservation Award program winner at a Farm Bureau meeting or function?

You could also nominate at least one additional farmer for the Governor's Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award, which took place at this year's Iowa State Fair. The new EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy was on hand for those awards, and later, for a meeting with farmers and leaders. At that meeting, she commended Iowa for our Nutrient Reduction Strategy. She said Iowa is a model for others to follow. That's quite significant.

When it comes to progress, this is also a good time to talk about another Farm Bureau priority; Iowa's infrastructure.

We're at the point where more and more local governments are turning to bonding as an alternative source of revenue to pay for deteriorating rural roads. This results in property owners paying for the maintenance and upgrading of local roads. In addition to the new bonding burden, rural property owners, last year alone, paid over \$140 million in property taxes to their local roads and bridges. Roads and bridges are important to farmers...it's the primary source of getting our products off the farm and to the family table. But remember, infrastructure is important to not just us, but all Iowans.

For the past couple years, Iowa Farm Bureau has called for an increase in the fuel tax to bring additional revenue for road improvements. Iowa's fuel tax hasn't been increased since 1989 and would insure that users of the roads, including out-of-state motorists, are paying directly for the infrastructure repairs. A user fee is definitely the most equitable and fair method of achieving this.

This won't be a politically easy goal to reach. But again, I am reminded of another quote from Lincoln. This was one mentioned in the movie about his life. Remember this?

*.. "A compass, I learned when I was surveying, it'll point you True North from where you're standing, but it's got no advice about the swamps and deserts and chasms that you'll encounter along the way. If in pursuit of your destination, you plunge ahead, heedless of obstacles, and achieve nothing more than to sink in a swamp... What's the use of knowing True North?"—*  
Abraham Lincoln

I am not discouraged that you have pointed true north, you are our compass. But, there have been many hurdles put before us on our march towards progress. It's not easy, but we aren't stuck in a swamp either – we will get there, but it is going to take some time to find a way.

By working together, we made a lot of progress during our last legislative session. I want you to think for a minute of the many victories, including the \$20m in water quality and soil conservation programs, - as mentioned.

We've been talking in particular about the lag in Cost Share funding for conservation for as long as I can remember. So, this is a big win for Iowa!

Another win: \$7.5m of new spending for bio research at ISU.

The Legislature also passed several different measures that are beneficial to property taxpayers.

The property tax reform package included a reduction in statewide assessment valuation growth, which will help to slow the future growth of property taxes.

As a result of the "Education Reform Package", - property taxpayers will benefit from adjustments in allowable growth, now called supplemental state aid. This reduction of future property tax growth equates to a savings of \$8.3 million next year and \$25 million in 2015.

We will also now see a \$31 million increase in property tax credits -- levels not seen in over a decade.

Then, last year there was a shocking Iowa Supreme Court decision that unsettled landowner liability protections which had persisted in place for over 40 years.

These protections were designed for farmers and landowners who allow others onto their land for recreational purposes such as hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, hiking, camping, etc. Farm Bureau was able to restore the peace of mind that this statute provides, and also clarified the activities covered under this statute, including programs which help farmers connect with consumers today.

House File 649, which Farm Bureau members like you heavily lobbied for, was passed in a bi-partisan fashion, unanimously by both chambers. That's also big win!

If we are going to lend our properties for others to enjoy, if we are going to invite the public to join us on our farms, this was essential. *There will be more successes to look forward to in this next session!*

*And, on that note.....*Many of you have been wondering about electrical inspections.

First of all: The Iowa legislature never approved electrical inspections for agriculture.... Secondly, when an overly zealous rules making committee went beyond their authority, the Governor of Iowa objected. And lastly, the judicial court system of Iowa said the rule was invalid.

Ladies and gentlemen; that is all three branches of government! This is “three strikes you’re out” for a rogue commission with a special agenda.

Paving the way for progress, preparing our farmers for the roadblocks and risks ahead, influencing our future continues to be a goal for Farm Bureau. We know how important risk management is, and that’s why our second annual Economic Summit was another important success.

A lot of vital information came out of that meeting, which hundreds of you attended. But for those who weren’t able to make it, I’ve once again put together a ‘Top 10 List’ of quotations from that Summit:

10. “This is the most uncertain time we have ever faced, be prepared for bumps in the road.”
9. “Biggest challenge in agriculture in the future will be access to capital.”
8. “We gave our corn export market away and will have to buy our way back in.”
7. "This is a well-funded and calculated attack by big oil to weaken or eliminate the RFS. They have a lot of clout in Congress."
6. “We are entering a 25 year period of yield and weather volatility.”
5. “We have had economic cycles for 400 years; as long as you have greed and fear it will continue.  
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4. “Changing nitrogen rates do not work, it’s about product, placement and timing.”
3. “Iowa farmers will not be using Anhydrous Ammonia in 2017.”
2. “This past year, Iowa became a net importer of corn, for the first time ever.”

And rounding out the top ten !!!

1. “Iowa land values have increased 303% in 10 years...that is unheard of for any market and probably not sustainable. “

With that...I would like to leave you with one final thought: I think this quote from President Lincoln sums it up well:

*“The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew.”*

The future begins today, with you, the men and women in this room, who have the honor, distinction and the responsibility of setting our policies for the coming year. On behalf of our Board of Directors, our membership and myself, I’d like to say Thank You. Thank you, for all you do, and all you *will do*.

*END*