

Bringing it together



OCTOBER 2006

### Our Mission:

Agren, Inc. responds to agricultural and environmental challenges by providing comprehensive, integrated services to groups and individuals to positively impact our natural resources. The Agren team is dedicated to achieving client objectives through a commitment to quality and excellence.

## Farmers & Hazardous Materials: Doing the Right Thing

Burning and burying are traditional forms of disposal on Iowa's farms. These have been the quickest, least expensive ways for farmers and rural residents to get rid of their trash and hazardous materials.

But for anyone who cares about Iowa's groundwater, burning and burying obviously are not the right ways to dispose of hazardous materials.

For the past year, Agren has been working on an educational outreach project with the goal of showing farmers and rural residents a better way to dispose of their waste. The project is based on the Farm\*A\*Syst publication *Assessing Your Hazardous Materials Storage & Management*. The work is funded by a grant from USDA Solid Waste Management and Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

The project targeted farmers and rural residents in three pilot counties – Crawford, Jones and Union. Other rural residents include people who've recently moved to an acreage from an urban area, or people who perhaps inherited a farmstead and want to rid it of hazardous and unknown materials.

A summer intern, or outreach coordinator, was hired to work in each county. A licensed school teacher with a natural resources background was hired to work in Crawford County. The Jones

had been raised on a farm and was a long-time 4H member, but otherwise had little agricultural background.

Agren met with Regional Collection Center directors and interested partners in each county to determine their needs and options for outreach.

### Starting Outreach Efforts

Outreach in each county began in June with an on-farm training using Iowa's Farm\*A\*Syst materials, specifically the publications related to well water, septic systems and hazardous waste disposal. The trainings were organized by the outreach intern, with Agren staff conducting the training.

During July, each intern pursued their own marketing plan, which included such activities as public meetings, a media campaign, manning a booth or display at the county fair, creation of educational materials, and other outreach options. The interns in

Union and Crawford counties prepared displays and activities for their respective



Agren president Tom Buman (far left) leads discussion with a group of Jones County farmers about potential sources of groundwater pollution.

County intern was an ag teacher/FFA advisor with extensive ties to the ag community in his county. In Union County, Agren hired a recent college graduate who

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## Farmers & Hazardous Materials: Doing the Right Thing (cont.)

county fairs, and also attended several meetings to promote the proper disposal of hazardous waste. The Jones County intern spent most of his time attending meetings and promoting the project one-on-one with farmers and rural residents.

### 'Special Projects' for Long-term Use

The interns were encouraged to create some sort of "special project" that their county could keep for future education and outreach. In Jones County, the intern designed a school curriculum to be used by ag teachers and FFA advisors. It emphasizes the proper disposal of hazardous materials and how that ties in with safe drinking water. Special projects in Union and Crawford counties included fair displays, a Jeopardy-type game to test hazardous materials knowledge, and a surface-water flow model for use with adults and youths. Personalized promotional items included refrigerator magnets, paint

stir sticks and drinking cups promoting the local RCC.

### Cleanup Events in Each County

In addition to providing general education, the interns also encouraged county residents to dispose of their farm hazardous waste at a special cleanup event in each county. The success of these events varied greatly depending on the types of promotion done and interest in the county. For instance, nearly a ton of farm hazardous materials was collected during a one-day cleanup in Crawford County. Only a handful of residents in Jones County took advantage of the cleanup in Anamosa, while about 10 people in Union County disposed of their hazardous materials during the cleanup period.

### Final Workshop and Farmer Panel

The Rural Outreach project will culminate in November with a statewide

workshop and farmer panel for all Regional Collection Centers and landfill associations in Iowa. Discussion topics will include outreach efforts that worked and what didn't. A panel of farmers will talk about their disposal habits and preferences. Also discussed will be factors to consider when hiring a summer intern. Each participant will receive a detailed tool kit about Rural Outreach and templates for various materials that were developed.

"I believe the overall goal of this project – to educate farmers and rural residents about proper disposal methods – was met in all three pilot counties," said Mary Bower, Agren employee who oversaw the outreach project. "While we were disappointed that more farmers didn't take advantage of the cleanup events, we were pleased by the response the interns got to their outreach efforts. They accomplished a lot in the short time they were on the job."

## New Uses for Technology May Lead to Quicker, Better Conservation Planning

Using current techniques, conservationists work with farmers and ranchers to plan contours, waterways, terraces and other structures using 10 or 20 foot contour maps with limited accuracy. But a new tool for conservation planning, currently under development by Agren, promises to increase vertical accuracy to within eight inches under the proper conditions.

Agren and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) recently received a Conservation Innovation Grant to develop an expert system using Light Detection And Ranging (LiDAR) technology for conservation planning. The three-year grant was awarded by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

LiDAR is a process of scanning the earth with lasers from an aircraft to obtain accurate elevations. It is similar to sonar in that it measures distance by the time it takes for the laser to reach the ground and bounce back to the aircraft. The result is a digital elevation map of the property.

Agren's LiDAR project will create software that allows conservationists to plan conservation practices on their computer quickly and with greater accuracy than currently possible. A minimum of three expert systems will be developed, each designed to lay out a different conservation practice. Possible practices that can benefit from this technology include contour grass strips/strip cropping, waterways, filter strips, terraces, and water/sediment control basins.

"Soil and water conservationists have been dreaming of more accurate contour lines for years," said Stan Buman, Agren vice president. "The LiDAR technology, giving us eight-inch accuracy in contour lines, is the tool we were looking for."

Use of the LiDAR decision-support tool has tremendous

application for conservation planners working one-on-one with farmers. For example, a producer applying for EQIP funding may be interested in how terraces would be laid out across his 80-acre field. A technician could ask the farmer a few basic

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Stan Buman, Agren vice president

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questions, enter some specifics on the type of terraces desired, and the program would generate a map of the field with the terraces drawn out. Within a matter of minutes, the technician and farmer could consider various "what if" scenarios and discuss suitable alternatives for the farmer's land.

The LiDAR project will kick off in October with a meeting of about 15 conservation planners, watershed specialists, farmers and others. These stakeholders are invited to participate in the planning process because they are potential users of the tool.

After comments and suggestions from the stakeholder meeting are evaluated, Agren will proceed with the next stage of the project. The potential use of LiDAR for conservation planning in Iowa will be further developed, demonstrated and evaluated. The actual computer software will be developed with assistance from an expert IT consultant.

## New Loess Hills Grassbank Benefits Cattlemen, Conservationists & the Public

When a homeowner is looking for extra cash, he goes to the local bank. When a cattle producer needs some extra forage for his herd, he now has the option to check out the Loess Hills Grassbank.

A grassbank is a system that allows cattle producers to rent public or private grasslands for their cattle while improving or restoring their own land. By using the grassbank, the producer makes use of available grazing in exchange for the opportunity to better his own land by implementing conservation practices, including prescribed fire, tree and brush removal, native grassland restoration, or pasture rest.

Agren and the Loess Hills Alliance introduced the grassbank model to Iowa this year with development of the Loess Hills Grassbank. It's designed to make it easier for producers to improve their land while contributing to the overall conservation of the Hills.

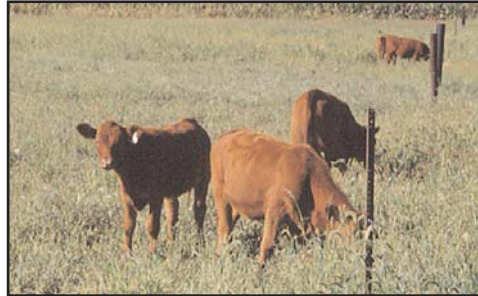
The three-year project is funded by a grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

While the concept of grassbanks is new to Iowa, it has been used successfully in several western states, including Wyoming, Montana, Arizona and New Mexico.

"A grassbank network is a great way to accomplish conservation goals and introduce local cattle producers to good grazing practices that maybe they have not seen before," said Austin Sewell, Agren's grazing specialist. "It serves as a double-edged sword – encouraging

conservation through proper grazing on the grassbank and implementing conservation practices on surrounding land."

Currently, the Loess Hills grassbank includes two parcels of land near Pisgah in



**The Loess Hills Grassbank promises to benefit cattle producers, conservationists and the public.**

western Iowa owned by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). Additional sites will be added throughout the Loess Hills Region during the next two years.

Ben Andersen of Dunlap grazed some of his cattle in the grassbanks this year. "Our pastures are in need of some rest and improvement after several years of dry weather," Andersen said. "This program allows me to give one of my pastures some rest and make some improvements to it in the coming years."

Several criteria are used to select cattle producers, including the value of the producer's improvements to the health of the Loess Hills; how well his management methods demonstrate good grazing practices; and how well his herd requirements meet the grazing capacity of the grassbank.

Fences and water are provided in the grassbank, but it is the responsibility of the cattle owner to regularly check both and to make necessary repairs. The cost to producers for using the grassbank is significantly less than renting pasture, and is based on the value of the improvements the producer makes on his own land.

During the second phase of the project, more land will be made available for grazing and additional producers will be encouraged to apply to use the grassbank. The goal during the three-year project is to develop a 750-acre Loess Hills Grassbank.

The Loess Hills grassbank was showcased during an evening pasture walk in August. It also will be featured in upcoming issues of *Iowa Outdoors* (formerly the *Iowa Conservationist*), a publication of the Iowa DNR, and *Midwest Woodlands & Prairies*.

Anyone interested in learning more about the Loess Hills Grassbank may contact Austin Sewell at 712-792-6248 or by e-mail at [austin@agren-inc.com](mailto:austin@agren-inc.com).

## Agren on RFD-TV

Agren employee Jamie Ridgely will be featured in a six-minute segment on the RFD-TV program "Living the Country Life" on **Tuesday, December 5**, at 6:30 p.m. CST. In the segment, Jamie discusses the potential for drinking water pollution on rural acreages and how the Farm\*A\*Syst program can help assess problems.

*RFD-TV appears on satellite and cable TV. Check local listings for the channel.*

## Free Farmstead Assessments

Using Iowa Farm\*A\*Syst publications, Agren staff are available to conduct one-on-one farmstead assessments to determine potential sources of groundwater pollution. Twelve specific topics may be assessed, including well water, septic systems, livestock operations and others.

To arrange an on-farm assessment, call Iowa Farm Bureau at 515-225-5490.

Free assessments available to Iowa Farm Bureau members only.

- **Simple** step-by-step approach
- **Confidential** assessments & recommendations
- **Accurate** information based on state law

All Farm\*A\*Syst publications are available online at [www.iowafarmbureau.com](http://www.iowafarmbureau.com) (click on Programs, then Environment, then Iowa Farm\*A\*Syst)



## Get to Know.....Stan Buman, Nature Photographer & Agren VP



**Stan Buman,  
Nature Photographer  
& Agren VP**

Even when he's on vacation, Stan Buman is working. Agren's co-owner and vice president spends all his spare time pursuing his interest in nature photography. But getting just the right shot means getting up early and staying up late, something he does every day at Agren.

Stan has been Agren's vice president since early in 1997 when his brother, Tom, invited him to join his new venture, Agren, Inc. Stan said he wasn't actively looking for a new position, but he was open to the idea when Tom broached the subject. At

the time, Stan was completing his seventh year as district conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Oakland, IA.

"I didn't think a position in the area or state (NRCS) offices would have suited my style, and I couldn't see myself doing the same thing for another 10 years," he said. "The idea of having my own company interested me greatly. I'm my own boss, and there's a little less bureaucracy and paperwork here. I also have input into

who we hire. It is a pleasure to come to work each day because of our wonderful staff members."

As vice president, Stan provides day-to-day directional and administrative support for all projects at Agren. In addition, he supervises contractual services and financial affairs for the business and provides background and leadership in the areas of nutrient management and conservation planning.

The company has grown significantly in its first 10 years, and Stan sees potential for continued growth at Agren. "Given the projects we're working on now and the potential projects, Agren will continue to grow," he said. "One of the things we've found out is that it's hard for us to work one-on-one with landowners. Our niche is working with agribusiness and government agencies than it is delivery to the farm."

Stan's interest in nature and the environment was nurtured on his family's farm in rural Harlan. He earned a degree in agronomy from Iowa State University in 1984 and worked as a crop scout/researcher before joining NRCS in 1987. He formalized his love of photography by forming Fenceline Photos in the mid '90s, specializing in birds and nature photography. Stan is a member of the North American Nature Photography Association.

Whether it's working at Agren or photographing birds on our public lands, Stan puts in long hours and loves every minute of it.

