

FFA students will call on area farmers

Project protects watershed

Equipped with farm assessment booklets and training by area professionals, members of the Manning FFA chapter are preparing to visit area farmers to talk about water.

"The students will meet with farmers and do a step-by-step assessment of their farmland," said Manning FFA instructor Larissa Rupnow.

It was originally hoped that 20 FFA members would visit two farms each, thus reaching a total of 40 farms.

Rupnow said, "I am really pleased with the number of students who have shown an interest in this project. While the goal was to have 20 kids involved, I might even have more."

The students are volunteering to support work of the WELL (Water Education Locally Led) Committee, a sub-committee which formed last fall as a result of meetings that focused on the Upper West Nishnabotna Watershed.

Tom Gach, Carroll, IA, a WELL volunteer who works for the Department of Environmental Health, stated, "If someone from the county or a

neighbor were to ask questions about a farmer's well, it may cause the farmer to become defensive. We don't want to be threatening."

Gach continued, "The FFA seems like an ideal group to help with this project."

The students and farmers will go through an assessment process to help the farmer realize any problems he may have, as well as options that are available. The results of the assessment is strictly for the landowner. After

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the student works through the assessment with the farmer, the information will be left with the farmer.

Approximately 60 people took part in the series of watershed discussions last fall.

"At the final meeting the group identified the priority areas they wanted to work in - water quality, streambank stabilization, soil erosion, and education. The group broke into four groups to focus on those topics," said Tom Buman of Agren, Inc. of Carroll, IA, who coordinated the meetings.

Since that time, the committees have worked independently. Some have had guest speakers address

meetings in an effort to better understand their objectives. Each committee was to establish goals and a work plan to accomplish the goals by December 2003.

The WELL Committee is one of four sub-committee established. Its members are aggressive and moving forward.

"Our group is education, but we are focusing more on wells, septic systems and buffer strips. We want to educate people about those things," stated Rupnow.

The group has prepared a work plan to accomplish the following goals. To motivate the residents of the Upper West Nishnabotna River Watershed to

- close 80-100 abandoned wells,
- renovate 10 wells,
- bring five septic systems that are out of compliance up to code,
- enroll a total of 100 acres of filter strips (approximately five acres per landowner).

"We want to educate people as to things they can do, like the buffer strips. There is probably more (money) in buffer strips than you can get out of that land by farming it," said committee member Larry Genzen, Manning. "We want people to know what's available."

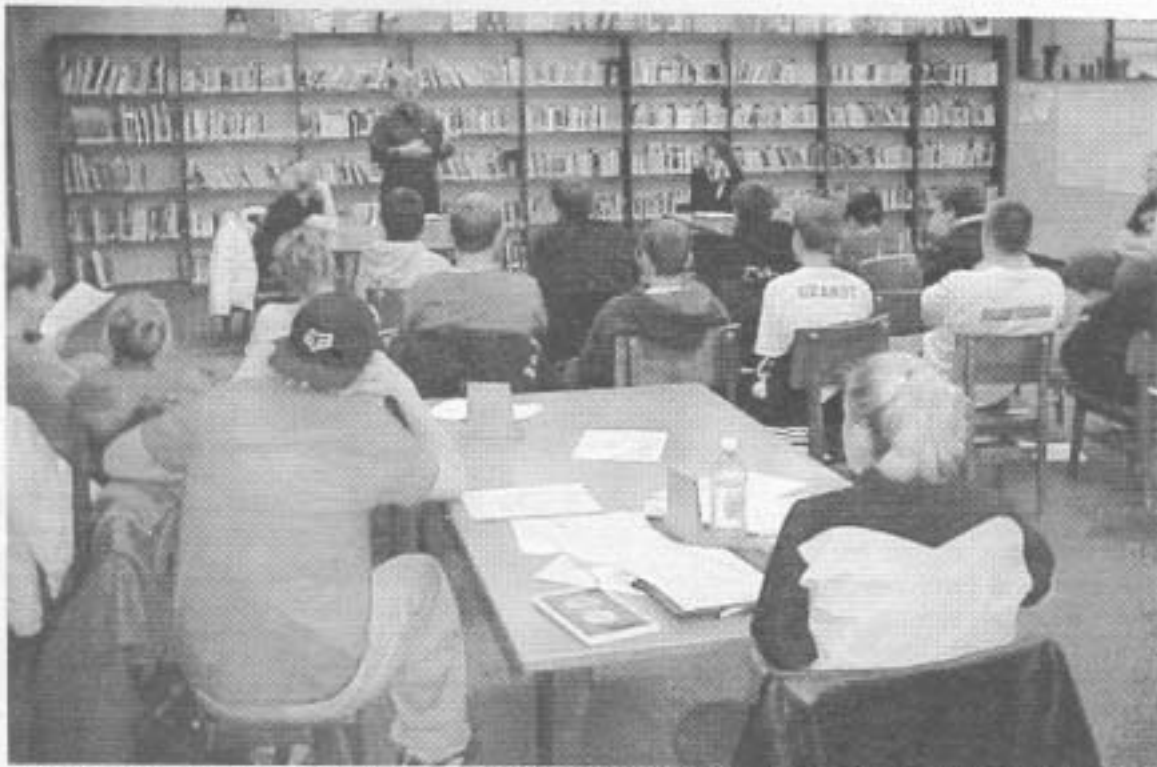
Gach commented, "A lot of people are im-

pressed to learn that you can get \$150-\$175 an acre for buffer strips and a \$10 a year sign-up bonus at the beginning. There's money out there to help close wells, and water testing is done for free. We want to let people know what is available."

"But we won't tell people what they have to do," added Rupnow. "We want to let them know the options that are available and the reasons why it would be beneficial to them, as well as to the environment."

A series of 11 informational *Iowa Farm*A*Syst* booklets, published by the Iowa Farm Bureau and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, are being utilized by the WELL Committee. The first brochure, entitled "Assessing the Characteristics of Your Farmstead", is a site assessment guideline the students and farmers will use. It asks questions, such as, "Is your farmstead susceptible to contamination?" and "How do the physical characteristics of my farmstead affect the quality of groundwater?"

"The booklet about assessing really ties everything together. It helps you realize why you need to know where your septic system is located and why you need to know where your well is," said Gach. "After going through the assessment, it helps you realize that maybe the fuel



Tom Gach, Carroll, IA, a WELL volunteer who works for the Department of Environmental Health, recently met with Manning FFA members, informing them about an upcoming farm assessment program and asking for their help.

shouldn't be stored next to the well, or where you would not want to store your pesticides."

Before the on-the-farm visits begin in March, the students will test their knowledge by performing an actual farm assessment.

"We'll take them out and go through the assessment process with them so they know what to do when they are on their own," said Gach.

Genzen made reference to a field day held on the Duane Karsten farm in November. He expressed appreciation for Karsten's cooperation, stating the experience was helpful for the committee members.

"We looked at his wells and his feedlots and how they drain. We filled out an assessment sheet and left it with Duane," said Genzen.

question, we know where we can go to get the information," said Gach.

Farmers can expect to be contacted by the FFA students in March. Anyone interested in having an assessment completed on their farm can make sure their name is on the list by calling Agren, Inc. at 712-792-6248, or they can e-mail Gach at tag@win-4-u.net or Rupnow at lrupnow@manning.k12.ia.us.

Genzen said the watershed discussions began in search of ways to address flooding by slowing water flow through the area. The committee also reflected on how changes in farming practices have affected water quality and lifestyle.

"When we were kids working out in the field, and we got thirsty, we'd run over and lay on our belly and take a drink out

Genzen, who teaches FFA in the I-K-M schools, is hoping members of his chapter can perform some farm assessment in the Irwin, IA, area.

Active members of the WELL Committee include Genzen, Buman, Rupnow, Gach, Dave Kusel, Nancy Gach, Karen Lampman and Ralph Lampman of the Soil and Water Conservation District.

of the creek," said Genzen. "You wouldn't do that today."

Members of WELL are currently looking for exposure. In the months ahead, they hope to share information with farmers at various events and meetings sponsored by area ag businesses. They also want people to contact the committee if they have questions.

"We have enough contacts, that if we don't know how to answer a