

Iowa Agriculture



AG
BRIEFS

Pledge to ISU

Jeff and Deb Hansen of Iowa Select Farms have pledged \$2 million to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences for a new learning center for students at Iowa State University.

"We are so grateful to the Hansens for their generosity in making this facility a reality," said Wendy Wintersteen, endowed dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

The center will be located on land south of campus now used by the Department of Animal Science's equine program. The facility will include an indoor 125-foot-by-250-foot arena with seating for 1,000 people, a set of classrooms and a conference room.

Fake USDA letters

Individuals and businesses in at least four states have received fraudulent letters bearing the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) seal and requesting personal and financial information, the USDA has warned. The USDA says the letters are false and those who receive them should not respond or reveal personal information.

Letters have been received via fax in Alabama, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. The signature on the letters is that of "Frank Rutenberg," using a title of "senior procurement officer." The USDA has begun an investigation and asks anyone who has received such a letter to contact the USDA at procurement.policy@dm.usda.gov or call 202-720-9448.

EU trade concerns

An ad hoc coalition of 40 food and agricultural organizations led by the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) in a letter sent to the Obama administration and Congress expressed concern that a proposed free trade agreement between the United States and the European Union might fall short of long-established U.S. objectives for trade pacts.

"The EU's free trade deals with other countries do not meet the high standards of U.S. trade agreements," added Nicholas Giordano, NPPC's vice president and counsel for international affairs, "and we doubt that the EU would ever agree to open its market to agricultural commodities unless it was obliged to do so as part of a comprehensive trade agreement."

Livestock award

Jodi Sterle has been named the second recipient of the Eldred and Donna Harman Professorship for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Iowa State University's Department of Animal Science. Sterle will be taking over the responsibilities as the department's undergraduate program coordinator from Doug Kenealy, a university professor of animal science. Kenealy is retiring after 37 years on the faculty.

Iowa company's software tools help farmers plan conservation structures

BY DIRCK STEIMEL

By walking his land and closely monitoring his fields, Bill Foell had a pretty good idea where he wanted to locate a couple of grassed waterways to reduce soil erosion and improve overall crop conditions.

But the Sac County Farm Bureau member said it was tough to determine exactly where in the field to build the waterways by just looking at conditions at ground level, especially where the slopes flatten out.

Foell and his wife, Laura, want to install waterways yet this spring on their farm near Schaller. But past experiences have shown them that it is often difficult to get a quick response from often-understaffed area conservation offices. Through another project, Foell was introduced to Agren, a Carroll-based consulting firm that is dedicated to helping farmers and landowners find solutions to environmental issues.

Agren has developed software tools that integrate several web-based mapping databases of Iowa farmland, including new meter-by-meter elevation maps called LiDAR. The tools then interpret that information to provide very accurate information on the best sites and dimensions for conservation structures anywhere in the state. The company's software can help landowners get a plan to build a wide range of conservation structures, including ponds, waterways and wetlands.

Interpreting results

The software's ability to integrate a range of databases and interpret the results is giving conservationists, farmers and contractors' new tools, state conservation officials said.

The Agren software doesn't replace field surveys. But it does allow landowners to see a computer image of how a conservation structure, like a waterway or pond, will look on their fields and provides an accurate estimate of what



Stan Buman of Agren, left, and Bill Foell discuss the potential location of a grassed waterway on one of Foell's fields. Buman used the Agren's web-based tools to help determine the best sites and dimensions of the waterway on Foell's Sac County farm. PHOTO/DIRCK STEIMEL

it will cost to build, said Stan Buman, who founded Agren with his brother, Tom, in 1996.

Buman offered to look at Foell's farm last week and come up with an estimate for a couple of waterways.

"This really helps you see how big of a waterway you need to control erosion and where it should be," Foell said while working at the computer with Buman. "It lets you quickly see all of the options you have."

Laura Foell appreciated Agren software's ability to show a broad view of the landscape around each field. "It helps you see the entire watershed, so you can see where the water is coming from," she said.

Sketching on a computer

Using the web-based WaterwayBuilder tool via Foell's laptop, Buman quickly pulled up a detailed map of Foell's farm. Then, by using the software to determine the elevation, soil types and other key factors, Buman was able to sketch out potential water-

ways on the computer in about 30 minutes.

Those drawings can then be used by a contractor to build the waterways on the Foell's Sac County farm.

"I just don't like to have any soil erosion," Foell said. "I've already switched to no-till and installed terraces, and I feel I've done about all I can do there. So these waterways are my next step."

Promoting conservation

Software programs, which are cost-effective and fast, can be used to promote more conservation projects on Iowa farms, Buman said. By allowing landowners to quickly see the advantages of the structures, and by offering a range of options, it gives them more of the information they need to make decisions on conservation projects, he said. They can see the location, size and the estimated cost. In the end, it gets more conservation on the ground because landowners have the information they need to make a decision.

"It really speeds up the planning process for these conservation structures," Buman said. "In Iowa, between the time when crops are on the fields and there's snow on the ground, you just don't have that much time to do extensive surveys, so this can really help."

Iowa conservation officials agree.

"It's really a good set of tools," said Jim Gillespie, director of the Division of Soil Conservation for the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS). "It won't replace the face-to-face work by people in the NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) office, but can really help work through the process."

IDALS, which operates the Soil and Water Conservation offices in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's NRCS, has urged the offices to adopt the Agren software, Gillespie said. "It allows things to be done so much faster and gives you so much more flexibility," he said.

Helping contractors

Contractors who build conservation structures are also enthused about the Agren software, Buman said. "It helps give them information and planning they need to construct waterways and other structures for landowners," he said.

Most Iowa farmers are likely to come in contact with Agren's suite of conservation software through their county conservation office. The software is now used in more than half of the 100 Soil and Water Conservation offices in Iowa and is also available directly from the company. Buman thinks that these tools can help get more people in the private sector involved in conservation projects.

For more information on the Agren tools, farmers can contact their local Contact Soil and Water Conservation District office or contact Agren at 712-792-6248 or www.agreninc.com.

Iowan works to keep U.S. meat export momentum

BY BETHANY PINT

Iowa Farm Bureau member and Humboldt County corn grower Jay Lynch of Humboldt was one of 15 representatives of the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) member organizations who recently got an in-depth look at the red meat industry in South Korea, China and Hong Kong and the prospect for continued U.S. exports.



LYNCH

Lynch, who raises corn and soybeans and is a member of the Iowa Corn Growers Association, took part in the 2012 USMEF Market Education Program. Participants came from the United Soybean Board, the National Pork Board and pork, beef, corn and soybean producer organizations from Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska.

For Lynch, the trip was an opportunity to look at how the corn he grows plays a part in the world market.

"We (corn growers) need the livestock industry to utilize all that we grow," he said. "As their industry grows, it's relying more and

more on exports. We think this is a good way that we can help promote their exports, to grow their industry, which in turn filters back to the price of our corn."

Lynch noted that South Korea is still rebuilding its sow herd from foot-and-mouth disease and won't be rebuilding fully because of the availability of U.S. pork.

Chinese wet markets

The group visited Guangzhou, China, a major commercial center in southern China. Lynch said the team saw the wet markets in action. Wet markets are those that contain meat slaughtered in the U.S. and shipped to China for fur-

ther processing. The markets sell the frozen and chilled products, he said.

The group's last stop was to Hong Kong, where they visited the duty-free markets.

"It was just interesting to see how a free market — no tariffs on our products, let alone any products around the world — compete against one another," Lynch said. "You had Australian beef sitting next to U.S. beef. It comes down to price, comes down to traceability, safety and getting the cut that the people want. That was very interesting. We were competing on a free and open market, how we want the markets to be."