

News Release

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ACWA Leads Agronomist Education Session

Alliance of co-ops pushing the envelope on Iowa conservation efforts.

By Tom Collins

Ankeny, Iowa (ACWA) – Agriculture’s Clean Water Alliance partnered with the Iowa Soybean Association and Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition to deliver state-wide, hands-on training for Conservation agronomists this month.

Conservation agronomists and similar professionals are now more prepared for farm visits and projects with in-depth training on edge-of-field practices. This includes bioreactors, saturated buffers, wetlands, and more. This breakthrough style of educational session combined classroom-style learning with hands-on experience on the farm.

“This training is critical,” said ACWA board member Craig Mouchka of Landus Coop. Landus has two conservation agronomists who help their farmers balance sustainability with profitability. “Knowledge and education make sure people know where to get started.”

ACWA has a network of conservation agronomists across the state. Instead of limiting the training to only these co-op employees, the nonprofit decided to invite conservation professionals from partner organizations, agencies, and businesses. In total, over 40 people attended from ACWA, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, IDALS, and similar partners.

The training featured sessions on topics such as an overview of edge-of-field practices, their design and application, and strategies for engaging farmers to implement conservation. Sessions like this provide conservation professionals with the real, applicable knowledge to go out and do make an impact for Iowa’s farmers.

One attendee was Nolan Grove, a conservation agronomist with Heartland Co-op. To Grove, these events are also valuable spaces for networking and finding new resources. A highlight of the day was learning from Brandon Iddings, Senior Conservation Services Manager at the Iowa Soybean Association.

“Specifically, this training is very helpful with oxbow restorations. And having the expertise of Brandon and his willingness to be open is really valuable to us because I know that’s something we want to jump into in the future, so that’s someone I can reach out to.”

Grove also looks forward to future ongoing education, emphasizing the value of hands-on field experience.

The Nature Conservancy's Iowa Agriculture Project Manager, Malu Menon, said these trainings bridge the gap between knowledge and application in the conservation space.

"A lot of people may not have enough working knowledge and experience with some of these programs. So having a well put-together and all-around education session is really valuable," Menon said.