

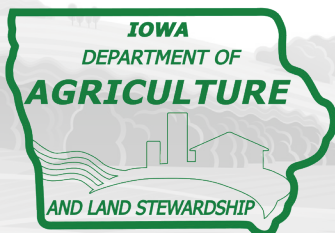


Conservation Infrastructure Report and Action Plan



About the Conservation Infrastructure initiative

Co-led by the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance (IAWA) and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), the Conservation Infrastructure (CI) initiative seeks to increase the investment and engagement from both public and private sectors in implementing the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS). This will be achieved by accelerating farmer and landowner demand for conservation practices – through outreach, education, and training – and harnessing economic drivers, innovative market-based solutions, and new revenue streams to improve water quality.



The CI initiative identifies barriers to scaling up conservation practices from current rates of adoption to the levels necessary to achieve the nutrient load reduction goals of the Iowa NRS as well as potential solutions to overcome those obstacles. The CI initiative recognizes that as the pace and scale of conservation practices increase, there will be job creation and economic development opportunities as well as water quality improvements that benefit all Iowans. At the same time, the CI initiative seeks to signal to the private sector that there are robust, long-term business opportunities for investing in conservation related business lines.



Vision – “We envision a prosperous, sustainable and resilient Iowa with HEALTHY SOIL AND WATER and ECONOMICALLY VIBRANT COMMUNITIES that is recognized as THE national leader in both agriculture and conservation.”

Definition of Success – Conservation practices are economically compelling and easier for farmers and landowners to implement and increased investments in conservation practices lead to healthy soil and improved water quality for the benefits of all Iowans and downstream communities.



Who is involved?

In the first 18 months, more than 100 representatives from the public and private sectors have been engaged in defining and developing the initiative. This includes rural and urban organizations, agricultural associations, conservation and environmental groups, agribusinesses, food companies, engineering firms, farmers, academic institutions, and federal, state, and local governments.

The overall Co-Chairs of the CI Initiative are Iowa Secretary of Agriculture **Mike Naig** and farmer-leader **Ray Gaesser**. The CI initiative is organized around three **Working Groups** related to overall **Strategy**, **Cover Crops**, and **Conservation Drainage**.



The Strategy Working Group

is co-led by Matt Lechtenberg, Water Quality Coordinator, IDALS, and Brian Selinger, Energy Team Leader, Iowa Energy Office of the Iowa Economic Development Administration (IEDA).



The Cover Crops Working Group

is co-led by Sarah Carlson, Midwest Cover Crop Research Coordinator, Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) and Bert Strayer, Western Cover Crop Lead, La Crosse Seed.



The Conservation Drainage Working Group

is co-led by Chris Hay, Senior Environmental Scientist, Iowa Soybean Association (ISA) and Charlie Schafer, Chair of the Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition and President of Agri Drain.



What has the CI Initiative accomplished?

Developed recommendations – The three Working Groups have led diverse stakeholder engagement with public and private partners to develop 47 CI Recommendations. When implemented, these recommendations will help achieve the CI Definition of Success and make substantial progress towards the Iowa NRS goals.

The CI recommendations were developed through an 18-month process to review and address the key sociological and economic forces that create barriers or opportunities to implementing the Iowa NRS.

Facilitated progress – There are current, ongoing efforts to directly or indirectly advance 36 of the 47 CI recommendations.

Implementation – The CI initiative has provided a pathway for stakeholders to collaborate on projects. Six sample implementation projects that highlight specific activity and progress planned towards 14 of the CI Recommendations are outlined in the full Action Plan. Implementation of other projects continues.

Provided focus – The example projects include the following elements that will support selected CI recommendations:

- 1 Cover crops stakeholder training and education
- 2 The economics of cover crops
- 3 Conservation drainage training and education
- 4 Expanding technical assistance capability and capacity for conservation drainage
- 5 Renewable energy-water quality nexus
- 6 Amplify the watershed approach

What is next for CI?

CI members are focused on advancing these recommendations and projects in ways that improve soil and water quality, create jobs and business opportunities for Iowans, bring economic development opportunities to Iowa's rural communities and cities, and provide opportunities for farmers to increase their profitability and productivity.

Collaboration, continuous improvement, and sustained effort will be needed to further the CI initiative. To be successful, there must be greater participation in these implementation efforts. Additional partners will continue to be recruited to join these efforts.

IAWA has committed to track the progress in implementing the CI initiative and will provide regular reports to partners.

