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February 2018

Water Quality Management  
in Iowa





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Iowa State Association of Counties

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To promote effective and responsible county government for the people of Iowa.

#### ISAC's Vision:

To be the principal, authoritative source of representation, information and services for and about county government in Iowa.

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# Feature - Iowa Watershed Approach

## Iowa Watershed Approach: A Vision for Iowa

It may not be possible to completely stop floods, but a collaborative effort in the state of Iowa is working to help communities better understand and reduce their flood risk.

Across the state, the Iowa Watershed Approach (IWA) is working with landowners and other stakeholders to implement watershed projects to reduce flooding and to improve water quality. The IWA is a five-year project to minimize flood risk in Iowa that began in 2016.

The IWA aims to bring Iowans together to address the factors that contribute to floods, and in the process to also increase rural and urban resilience to flooding. This approach builds upon other statewide programs in Iowa designed to reduce flooding and to improve water quality, such as the Iowa Flood Mitigation Program and the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

## The Program

The premise of IWA is to slow down the movement of water through the landscape by strategically building farm ponds, wetlands, and other conservation practices in the watershed. IWA stakeholders hope to restore some of Iowa's natural resiliency to heavy rainfall, while also improving water quality, adding natural beauty to the landscape, creating wildlife habitat, and restoring ecosystems. Local stakeholders and landowners from eight rural watersheds and



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three cities (Storm Lake, Coralville, and Dubuque) voluntarily engage with IWA. The project's sponsor, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), agreed that these regions were the most impacted and distressed by recent flood events. IWA will strive to accomplish six specific goals in each watershed:

- Reduce flood risk;
- Improve water quality;
- Increase resilience;
- Engage stakeholders through collaboration and outreach/education;
- Improve quality of life and health, especially for vulnerable populations; and
- Develop a program that is scalable and replicable throughout the Midwest and the United States.

## Funding

HUD awarded the state of Iowa nearly \$97 million for IWA, which is a collaboration of many organizations and agencies statewide, including the Iowa Flood Center (IFC). IFC provides Iowans with the latest technology and resources to better monitor and prepare for flood events. When the Iowa Legislature created the center in 2009, they made the state a national leader in flood prediction and mitigation, says IFC Director Witold Krajewski. "Iowans now have access to the nation's most advanced statewide information system of flood conditions, forecasts, and maps," Krajewski says. IFC's tools and resources are an essential component of IWA.

IFC also played an important role in developing the project proposal. IFC co-founder Larry Weber, who serves as the IWA's primary investigator (PI) in the rural watersheds, helped develop the concepts of the project and also led the grant-writing effort. Weber compares the proposal-writing process to a game of high stakes poker. "We were all in," he says. "We put in every effort — we put every chip on the table."

The gamble paid off. The funding will support construction of flood mitigation projects in eight rural watersheds, as well as flood-related infrastructure improvements in three Iowa cities. A resilience component will focus on the human aspects of flooding, acknowledging that flooding doesn't just destroy buildings and infrastructure, Weber says. "It destroys lives."



# Feature - Iowa Watershed Approach



## Local Community Involvement

The IWA's system-based approach includes a hydrologic assessment of the watershed, as well as planning, monitoring, and modeling efforts. This work culminates in the implementation of conservation practices in the watershed. One of the unique aspects of IWA is its collaborative approach, which brings together groups and constituents from across the state. "This Iowa Watershed Approach is about everybody coming in and lifting a little bit for the benefit of the greater all, if you will," Weber says.

A watershed project coordinator coordinates these efforts in each watershed. These coordinators serve as the primary point of contact in the watershed and work closely with partners to effectively communicate with stakeholders.

Landowners will have the opportunity to implement in-field and edge-of-field practices with **75% cost share** to reduce flood potential and to decrease nutrient concentration in surface water.

## Simulating the Watershed

IFC researchers are conducting computer modeling in each watershed. This detailed modeling calculates surface runoff, infiltration, soil moisture, and more. Each watershed model is coupled with physical details such as topography, land use, and existing best management practices (BMPs). "It not only relates to the physical landscape," Weber says, "It also describes that physical landscape with first principles — fundamental equations that govern water movement in the natural environment." The model also offers researchers the ability to quantify the impact of existing and potential BMPs. The end result will help prioritize areas for practice implementation where they will have the greatest impact.

IWA researchers are also deploying technologically advanced tools in the watersheds. These tools include stream-stage sensors and hydrologic sensors that collect real-time data on river conditions, streamflow, rainfall, soil moisture and temperature, and wind speed and direction. These tools provide data that enables IFC researchers to validate their models and to assess the flood risks and potential impacts on watershed improvement. With this information, they can develop and evaluate future scenarios to maximize results from IWA resources.



All the data is housed and will be made publicly available on the newly developed Iowa Watershed Approach Information System (<http://iwa.iowawis.org>). For more information, resources, and upcoming events, please check out the new Iowa Watershed Approach website ([www.iowawatershedapproach.org](http://www.iowawatershedapproach.org)). For detailed flood forecasting be sure to check out the current Iowa Flood Information System (<http://ifis.iowafloodcenter.org>).

## Resiliency

Community flood resilience is the ability of a community to prepare for, respond to, and recover from floods. The IWA Flood Resilience Team helps communities improve hazard mitigation efforts and disaster recovery plans. Funding through federal disaster assistance programs is often contingent on having such a plan in place. The IWA resilience team will work with watershed communities to lower the barriers to effective hazard mitigation planning, particularly for floods, so communities will be eligible and ready for action when funds become available from sources such as the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

## Collaboration

The success of the IWA depends on collaborative partnerships among many statewide organizations and local stakeholders who together will carry out the work necessary to achieve the IWA goals. Partners include, but are not limited to: Iowa Economic Development Authority; Homeland Security and Emergency Management; University of Iowa; Iowa State University; University of Northern Iowa; Iowa Department of Natural Resources; Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship; cities of Coralville, Dubuque, and Storm Lake; and many Iowa counties.

# Feature - Watershed Management Authorities

Everyone in Iowa lives in a watershed. In 2010 legislation was passed in Iowa allowing the formation of Watershed Management Authorities by local leaders. Of the 7 duties of a Watershed Management Authority according to Iowa Code Chapter 466B.22 the top 3 are: 1) assess the flood risks in the watershed; 2) assess the water quality in the watershed; and 3) assess options for reducing flood risk and improving water quality in the watershed. Iowa legislation goes on to state that a Watershed Management Authority shall not acquire property by eminent domain and does not have taxing authority.

Watershed Management Authorities are formed through a 28E agreement between two or more eligible participants within the watershed. All political subdivisions (cities, counties, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs)) within a specific Hydrological Unit Code (HUC) 8 watershed are eligible to be members; however, they are not required to join. Watershed Management Authorities have a board of directors made up of all cities, counties, and SWCDs within the watersheds who are members. A Watershed Management Authority is strictly a voluntary program. They act as a facilitator in a collaborative effort for local water quality and quantity improvement. One advantage of being a member of the Watershed Management Authority is that the local official is given a voice to make decisions within the region on watershed issues on behalf of their constituents, the landowner.



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There are twenty two (22) officially formed Watershed Management Authorities or coalitions within the state of Iowa. Seventy one of the 99 counties in Iowa have a watershed within them that is part of a Watershed Management Authority. Some counties have multiple Watershed Management Authorities.



A Watershed Management Authority is formed within a specific HUC 8 watershed. A HUC is a number assigned to that watershed. The United States is divided and sub-divided into successively smaller hydrologic units. The smaller the unit the larger the HUC code. For example Iowa is part of two HUC 2 regions the Missouri and the Upper Mississippi. Those two regions are divided further into sub-regions (HUC 4); sub-regions are then divided into a basin (HUC 6); and the basins are divided into sub-basins (HUC 8). Iowa has 55 HUC 8 sub-basins.

There are many advantages of having an active Watershed Management Authority. One advantage is that with a Watershed Management Authority being made up of local leaders (county supervisors, city officials, and SWCDs) within the watershed, the decisions are locally driven and represent those of the landowners within that area. Every resident of Iowa is affected by water quality and water





# Feature - Watershed Management Authorities

quantity. The members of a Watershed Management Authority are able to look at things more globally on a HUC 8 sub-basin level and take a holistic approach when addressing the concerns that most affect their region. Whether it be water quality, drought, flooding, or something altogether different related to the watershed, it is the local residents making local decisions that are for the good of the region. A Watershed Management Authority brings local leaders from different areas to the table to discuss a common interest. For example, a community from the lower region of a watershed that is flooded on a regular basis can discuss a solution with a county from the headwater area and work to find a solution. Water runs downhill. The goal is to put practices in place where the rain falls. This slows down runoff allowing it to slowly saturate into the ground keeping the water, sediment, and nutrients in place instead of the rainfall barreling down the river taking sediment and nutrients with it. This improves both water quality and quantity. Everyone wins. Although water quality and water quantity are often looked at separately they are not mutually exclusive and are in fact tightly intertwined. Practices should be looked at to address multiple issues taking this interconnection into account. Slight modifications can be made to practices that are being put into place to reduce flooding that will also improve water quality and vice versa. It reduces cost to both landowners and tax payers to look at water quality and water quantity this way. In essence it gives a bigger bang for our buck.

The biggest struggle within Watershed Management Authorities is keeping the progress of the Watershed Management Authority moving forward, as well as ongoing reliable funding. It has been found that one of the most important factors of success in a Watershed Management Authority is having a project coordinator to organize and keep the program moving forward. There also needs to be the ability to put practices into place in order to make a positive impact within the watershed. Practices include: the construction of farm ponds, wetlands, and storm water detention basins; restoration of floodplains and oxbows; and implementation of perennial cover and buffer strips. Planning and practices take money. Moving dirt and planting seed take money. By having reliable ongoing funding as annual seed money, Watershed Management Authorities are better able to seek matching grants as well as partnering with landowners to leverage funding for projects and implementation of practices. Iowa strives to be on the forefront of addressing water issues. This was highlighted when Iowa was awarded a Disaster Resilience Grant titled the Iowa Watershed Approach (IWA). This program uses a one-time source of funding to help Iowans collaborate and make our communities more resilient to flooding and to improve water quality. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funded a \$96,787,177 statewide grant award. IWA has six specific goals: 1) reduce flood risk; 2) improve water quality; 3) increase resilience; 4) engage stakeholders through collaboration and outreach/education; 5) improve quality of life and health, especially for vulnerable populations; and 6) develop a program that is scalable and replicable throughout the Midwest and the United States.



An example of two HUC 8 watersheds benefiting from this HUD Grant are the East and West Nishnabotna River watersheds. The East Nishnabotna Watershed Coalition Board of Directors consists of 21 members comprised of county supervisors, SWCD commissioners, and cities, and the West Nish River Watershed Coalition has the 24 members with similar representation. These boards meet on a quarterly basis. The goal is to have a watershed wide comprehensive plan completed for each watershed by the fall of 2018. Project design and implementation will begin mid-year 2018.

This approach is consistent with other statewide programs in Iowa. For example, IWA will compliment the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, as the hundreds of built projects will help to improve Iowa's water quality. These projects will also com-

pliment the Iowa Flood Mitigation Program by reducing downstream flooding. All projects will be locally driven and voluntary with landowners receiving 75% cost-share assistance on constructed practices. These projects will range from construction of farm ponds, wetlands, and storm water detention basins; restoration of floodplains and oxbows; and implementation of perennial cover and buffer strips.

Great strides are being made throughout Iowa to address water quality and water quantity issues by Watershed Management Authorities, as well as many others, but more needs to be done. There are 33 HUC 8 watersheds within Iowa who are not represented by a Watershed Management Authority. There is no ongoing, reliable funding source for Watershed Management Authorities. Water quality and water quantity are often looked at as separate issues when they are greatly intertwined. Local leaders, landowners, and residents are key components in making a major difference in water quality and quantity in Iowa. It does not matter where you live, you live in a watershed.

# Feature - Water Research

## Iowa Soybean Association Researchers Work for Water, Soil Improvement, and Farmer Success

Iowa's soil and water assets are precious, and they are interconnected with decisions made on the land, in watersheds, and in communities. Iowans have the potential to positively impact these natural resources by continuing to improve water and soil quality on their own land.

The Iowa Soybean Association (ISA) research team is helping farmers, landowners, and communities with decision-making that will improve their competitiveness and their environmental stewardship. To achieve this, the ISA research team strives to increase farmer and landowner engagement.

**What's the big deal with water quality in Iowa?** Iowa receives a yearly average of 34 inches of precipitation that end up in the state's 70,000 miles of rivers and streams. There are 26 million acres of row crops, of which most are treated with chemicals and manure to help grow crops or to kill weeds and pests. For optimal production, crops (and farmers) rely on extensive subsurface tile drainage systems for ideal soil moisture conditions.

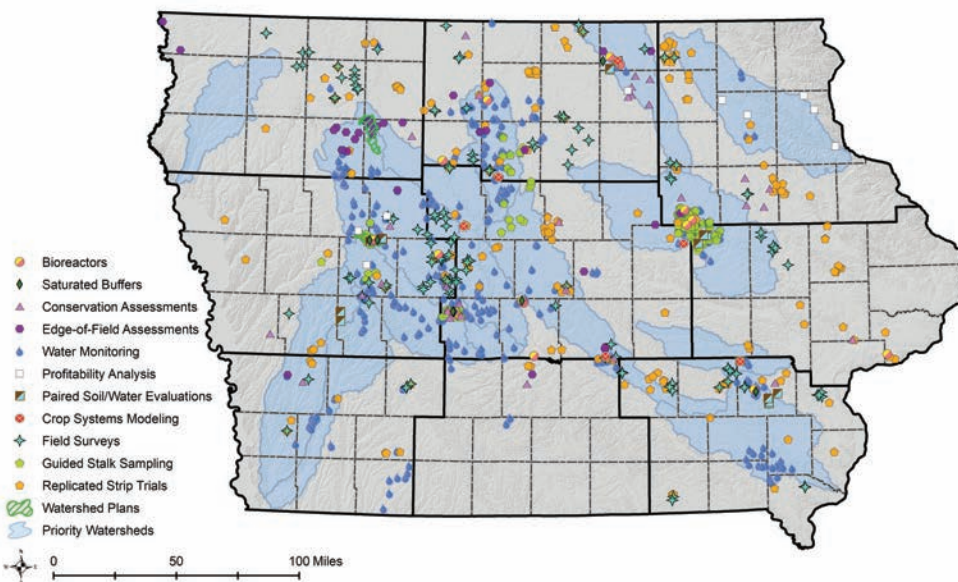
About 75% of Iowa's drinking water is provided by groundwater, 21% through rivers and streams and the remaining four percent comes from lakes and reservoirs. The nutrients that aren't used by crops may be stored in soil and biomass, or possibly lost to atmosphere, rivers, or groundwater.

To reduce the amount of nutrients entering Iowa's waterways, the ISA research team works with farmers and landowners individually and on watershed-level projects to implement more in-field conservation practices and edge-of-field water quality structures in place.

When discussing water quality, conservation, and soil health must also be included in the conversation as they are inter-related. In Iowa, the average soil loss to erosion is estimated at 5.8 tons/acre per year and is increasing. This rate of erosion is not sustainable; today's farming practices cannot replenish the topsoil at the rate it is being lost.

**Work on a Watershed Scale** A priority of ISA research is connecting urban and agricultural stakeholders around a watershed plan. Watershed plans lay out a pathway within a certain watershed for achieving farmer and community-established goals that align with the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (INRS). The goal of the INRS is to reduce levels of nitrogen and phosphorus entering Iowa waterbodies by 45%. All of Iowa's rivers and streams eventually drain into the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. INRS is one of several state-based strategies created to meet the Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Action Plan.

A watershed plan usually includes objectives to improve water quality, soil health, increased habitat, or flood reduction targets. The planning process helps stakeholders focus on how to accomplish their objectives and helps the watershed coordinator visualize the steps farmers and landowners will need to take. Each watershed plan may use different tactics to achieve specific goals, but they all strive for cleaner water for Iowans and for those downstream.



**Roger Wolf**

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Watershed plans being implemented through ISA leadership include Headwaters of Cedar Creek, Pocahontas County; and Swan Lake Branch watershed, Dallas County.

"Through ISA research, we can help farmers improve their soil health and water quality by collecting data and evaluating the performance of practices through our research programs," says Roger Wolf, ISA director of environmental programs and services. "They see first-hand how



# Feature - Water Research

practices can work with their soil types, land topographies, and production methods.”

Groundwork done by ISA researchers with Des Moines, Charles City, and Eagle Grove will lead to partnerships between these communities and farmers to improve water quality in and around these areas. These cities are working with the Iowa DNR and State Revolving Fund to add nonpoint source practices in the watershed and are finding innovative ways to pay for structure installation such as bioreactors and wetlands. These structures benefit the communities by removing nitrogen from the water naturally and reducing the costlier removal at water treatment facilities.

**One Farm at a Time** The ISA research team works with farmers across the state to conduct on-farm replicated strip trials to see how various agricultural products and practices function in a farmer’s production system. In addition, trials on conservation practices such as reduced tillage methods, cover crops, saturated buffers, and bioreactor performance are explored. A portion of this assessment may include soil and water sampling and analysis.

Researchers at ISA offer conservation technical assistance to farmers by giving them feedback so they can make more informed management decisions. They assist by delivering to farmers conservation assessments, soil and water test results, and protocols for evaluating a new practice.

ISA conservation agronomists conduct conservation assessments for farmers across the state. The assessments establish a baseline of conservation performance for a farm and provide details for adding a conservation practice, such as no-tillage or cover crops, and their potential impact on water and soil quality. The assessments also list which U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and state cost-share programs could assist the farmer to pay for conservation structures or things such as cover crop seeds.

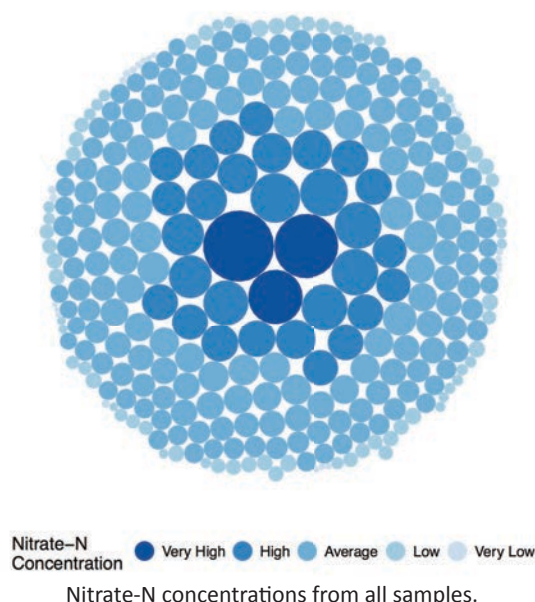
A research and demonstration project aimed toward improving cover crop seeding began in 2017. Funded by the Iowa Nutrient Research Center (INRC) at Iowa State University, the ISA research team leads this project focusing on using corn and soybean planters to seed a cereal rye cover crop. They will compare this with other seeding methods such as drilling and aerial application. The team evaluates and compares how each method performs.

Combined water monitoring sample results for nitrogen:

Category	Nitrate-N Concentration (mg/L)	No. of Sites	% of Sites
Very Low	0 to 5	27	8%
Low	5 to 10	79	24%
Average	10 to 20	197	59%
High	20 to 30	29	9%
Very High	30 +	1	0%

farmers of the amount of soil and nutrient loss from their fields. In 2017, the ISA research team collected 2,500 water samples at 333 subsurface drainage systems across Iowa, measuring amounts of nitrogen and other nutrients in the water. The samples were analyzed at ISA’s accredited water laboratory in Ankeny. Results are shared with the farmer participants which gives them perspective of how well practices and structures may be performing. This also helps them target areas to add conservation practices that present the largest opportunity for improvement.

With so many ways that Iowa has to reduce soil and nutrient loss in the myriad of miles of rivers and streams, ISA researchers are working diligently for more citizens of the state to join in and participate – whether they are urban dwellers, townspeople, or rural residents.



“Our research teams at ISA are experts on soil and water as well as crop production,” says Ed Anderson, ISA senior director of research. “We are concerned about soybean farmers’ productivity and profitability as well as the environmental quality of their cropping systems.”

Surface and subsurface drainage water quality informs

# Feature - Conservation

## Addressing Water Quality Issues in Iowa

Iowa has a storied history when it comes to water quality. The early story begins with the transformation of the Iowa landscape. Iowa was once dominated by tallgrass prairie and prairie wetlands. Prior to statehood, approximately 85% of what is now Iowa was covered by deep-rooted grasses and wildflowers. Forests and forested wetlands were only common along creeks, rivers, and in some regions of Eastern Iowa. Today, Iowa is sometimes referred to as “the most altered state” because, compared to any other state, this is a landscape that has been converted to modern agriculture, towns, and roads.

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Less than one-tenth of one percent of Iowa’s native prairie remains today, and more than 90% of wetlands have been drained. This widespread alteration of our state has had huge impacts on hydrology. Prairie plant cover and root systems once held water on the landscape and directed runoff through a filter of living soils. Today’s crop lands, lawns, and pavements largely are designed to shed water into creeks, rivers, and lakes as completely and quickly as possible. Contained in the runoff are a wide variety of nutrients, pesticides, and other pollutants. The largest “pollutant” by volume is Iowa’s agricultural soil – the “black gold” that is the basis for a sustainable farm economy. The “new Iowa hydrology” also exacerbates flooding by increasing the speed and volume of water reaching creeks and rivers.



The story of Iowa’s altered hydrology and land practices is well known. Also well studied are the techniques that protect water quality. Not surprisingly, the techniques that have the most “bang for the buck” are those that mimic the native prairie and wetland landscape. Practices that slow water runoff, hold water in wetland basins, and allow water to filter through layers of healthy soil are the key. Another emphasis is for people to take care with anything applied, dumped, or littered on the land. The fact that we know how to solve water quality problems begs the question, “Why isn’t the problem fixed?” Part of the answer is, “not for a lack of trying.”

The Dust Bowl and Great Depression Era led to the first national attempts to protect soils, to reduce runoff, and to improve farm income. The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)) was established in 1933. Throughout the decades, the SCS and NRCS implemented federal programs that promoted establishing windbreaks, and planting trees and grassland ground cover. Programs also were used to idle the planting of crops on more erodible land. Some farmers saw the value of receiving payments to grow clean water and wildlife rather than crops on some of their properties. In 1985, new Farm Bill rules were put into place, commonly known as swamp buster provisions that restricted draining of wetlands for farmers to be eligible to remain in farm subsidy programs. A myriad of Conservation Reserve Programs have come and gone during the years, with varying levels of funding and scope. In addition to federal programs aimed to encourage farmers, elements of the Clean Water Act largely addressed point source pollution from factories and municipal sewage treatment facilities. Unlike voluntary agricultural programs, Clean Water Act rules were largely mandatory.

In the late 1980s, Iowa led the way in passing state legislation to address water quality, with the 1987 Groundwater Protection Act and the 1989 Resource Enhancement and Protect (REAP) Act. REAP remains the most comprehensive state initiative to address the broad array of natural resources needs in Iowa. In the 1980s, County Conservation Boards jumped more heavily into the water quality pool by hiring naturalists. These education professionals began presenting information and messages about water quality. Iowa DNR also reached out to the public through a program of volunteer water sampling. Public engagement is especially important in a state where private citizens have control over land management on 98% of the landscape.

In 2013, the state adopted a Nutrient Reduction Strategy designed to address nutrient pollution in Iowa’s waterways and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico. Costs to implement the Strategy are estimated in billions of dollars and the Strategy contains no regulations to assure practices to reduce pollution will occur. The Strategy is to use a science and technology-based approach to reduce point and non-point source pollution in our waterways. A collaborative effort is being led by the Iowa Department of Land Stewardship, Iowa State University, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. However, funding adequate to address the strategy has not been allocated by the state, and all elements of the Strategy remain voluntary. Therefore, progress



# Feature - Conservation

has only accounted for a small part of Iowa's efforts to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus in our waters.

With all of the information known about water quality problems, and after having implemented many programs to address these problems, why does Iowa continue to have some of the most polluted waters in the country? The answer to this question largely is a matter of scope, universal buy-in, and long-term commitment.

Recently, high profile stories about Des Moines Water Works suing three counties over nitrate levels have brought Iowa's dismal water quality into the spotlight. Water quality is not an urban vs. rural issue. It is not about assigning blame and pointing fingers, and it certainly should not be a partisan issue. We are all in this together. All Iowans must become engaged in solutions to our water quality problems.



The process of cleaning up our streams and lakes is not fast or cheap, but, with time, dedicated funding, collaboration, and a common vision, Iowa's water quality can be greatly improved. A watershed approach to addressing nutrient levels has proven to be most effective for reducing nutrients and improving local waterways. For this reason, Watershed Management Authorities are an excellent tool for identifying water quality issues, setting priorities and implementing proven practices on the ground in a local watershed. The state's Lake Restoration Program and Rivers Program also work to protect, enhance, and provide citizen awareness of Iowa's lakes, rivers, and streams. Proper management and availability of natural areas managed by Iowa DNR, county conservation boards, and private citizens provide some of the best ground cover for holding and filtering water – just like the hydrology nature had planned for our state.

Watershed Management Authorities; Iowa DNR Programs that emphasize lakes, rivers, and ground cover; NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation District initiatives; County Conservation Boards; and dedicated and educated private citizens throughout Iowa have the wherewithal to make progress in cleaning and protecting our water. What they do not have is a statewide mandate, backed with dedicated funding, to get the job done.

In 2010, Iowa citizens overwhelmingly approved creating a trust fund to provide the mandate and money needed to seriously address water quality and other natural resources needs. They cared so much that they voted to include the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund in the Iowa Constitution. However, not a single cent has been deposited in the fund. The Trust Fund is dependent on passage of an increase in Iowa's sales tax by 3/8 of one cent. It doesn't seem like much, but the Legislature and Governor have continued to ignore Iowans for the past seven years. The Trust Fund is estimated to generate \$180 million dollars annually, with approximately 60% of those funds eligible for water quality improvement practices. That's approximately \$756 million dollars that haven't been put toward water quality efforts due to state politicians' refusal to fund the Trust for the past seven years.

The other statewide funding program that addresses a broad array of water quality and natural resources needs is REAP. Last year, REAP funding was cut, and REAP has never been fully funded. Legislators and the Governor need to fund REAP at the funding level in Iowa law. This would be a great first step to demonstrate Iowa's true commitment to addressing water quality. Other current state programs administered by DNR and IDALS also need adequate support, and Watershed Management Authorities are unable to reach their full potential without funding. It may seem like a lot is being asked from state dollars, but keep in mind that Iowa has been allowed to sink to near-bottom (49<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup>) nationally on what it spends per capita on natural resources. All budgets are statements about priorities. However, the beauty of funding the Trust Fund is that the mechanism already is in the state constitution, and could be implemented without any effect on the state budget.

The process of reducing nutrients and improving Iowa's water quality is a long-term, watershed approach that requires dedicated funding and a common vision. Success relies on building partnerships, managing local watersheds, implementing nutrient reduction strategies on farms and urban settings, and protecting and managing natural landscapes. These things can only happen with a statewide commitment and dedicated funding. The Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) continues to play a role through legislative priorities that call for full funding for REAP and the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. ISAC is joined by scores of other groups, and the vast majority of Iowa citizens, who want to ensure a legacy of clean water in Iowa.

# Feature - Master Matrix

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## Too Much Manure, Too Little Political Will: A Call to Action

I was in the Senate Majority leader's office in February 2002 when a new idea called the Master Matrix was introduced to a group of 12 legislators who were meeting to draft a bill to overhaul Iowa's confined livestock regulations. The idea that became law is the scoring system that gives counties a voice when large concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) are proposed. It was supposed to protect neighbors from health risks and the environment from pollution by requiring producers to adopt practices greater than the minimum required by state law.

In reality, the Master Matrix is so easy to pass it amounts to little more than a rubber stamp. Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) records show that only 2% of all applications have been denied since it went into effect.

After retiring from the Iowa House in 2010, I've served seven years on the Floyd County Board of Supervisors reviewing Master Matrix applications and listening to the concerns of neighbors who are fed up with a system that allows producers to score only 50% of possible points to get a passing grade.

An analysis of the Master Matrix by IDNR revealed that many questions pertaining to separated distances from residences and waterbodies are so easy to score points on that nearly every application does. Other questions requiring air and water quality monitoring or the installation of filters to reduce odors are almost never answered.

The Master Matrix is a pass-fail test that has failed Iowans. It hasn't been tweaked even once in 15 years. It is out-of-date and needs to be reviewed for many reasons.



**Mark A. Kuhn**  
Floyd County Supervisor  
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## Top ten ways to improve the Master Matrix

1. Require a higher minimum passing score.
2. Increase the separated distance between CAFOs and schools, homes, public use areas, waterbodies, and drinking water wells.
3. Add questions that protect unique characteristics in individual counties that pose a threat to groundwater, such as Karst topography in northeast Iowa.
4. Add questions that mitigate Iowa's existing 750 impaired waterbodies.
5. Increase the time a county has from receiving a Master Matrix application to making a recommendation to IDNR from 30 to 60 days.
6. Require that both the applicant and the company responsible for preparing the applicant's Master Matrix application attend the public hearing to answer questions about the proposed CAFO. Under current rules, neither is required to attend the public hearing, which often leads to distrust and battles between livestock producers, their neighbors and the board of supervisors.
7. Add questions to incentivize practices that reduce dangerous ammonia and hydrogen sulfide air emissions.
8. Allow counties a one-time enrollment in the Master Matrix, rather than the current requirement that counties must readopt the Master Matrix every year.
9. Reduce the threshold for construction permits from 1,000 animal units to 500 animal units. This would close the loophole commonly used by the pork industry to build barns with a capacity of 2,499 head, just one hog short of the permit threshold.
10. Enable counties to collect a Master Matrix review fee to offset the cost of significant staff time during the review process. The cost of the review should be paid by the CAFO applicant, and not be subsidized by county taxpayers.



# Feature - Master Matrix

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## **Hog wild: Major expansion ahead spells trouble**

Prior to the Master Matrix in 2001, there were 722 large DNR-permitted CAFO's in Iowa. Today, there are more than 3,000. Iowa CAFO's produce over 10 billion gallons of untreated manure each year.

Hold your nose and pass the bottled water, because Iowa is on the verge of another major swine expansion.

An unprecedented increase in packing plant capacity will likely result in an onslaught of CAFO's in Iowa. Last September, Seaboard Triumph Foods opened a plant in Sioux City where it slaughters 10,500 hogs per day with plans to add a second shift to increase the kill to twice that number. Prestage Foods plans to open its plant near Eagle Grove in Wright County in November 2018 and start processing 10,000 hogs a day.

The vast majority of hogs needed to fill this record growth will come from Iowa.

"What is really driving the expansion are the new packing plants coming online," says Jeff Hansen, owner and founder of Iowa Select Farms, in a recent article in *Successful Farming* magazine. Iowa Select added 36,000 sows in 2017; its first sow expansion in 12 years.

It should come as no surprise that Iowa Select is also adding more finishing barns. Iowa's largest pork producer recently submitted applications for 20 CAFO's that would add almost 90,000 hogs, with the majority of those applications located in counties surrounding the new Prestage Foods packing plant. According to Iowa State University's manure estimator, Iowa Select's expansion could add another 37.8 million gallons of manure to Iowa's already polluted landscape.

## **A two-step Legislative Call to Action**

Enough is enough. That's why 20 Iowa counties have passed resolutions or sent letters to IDNR and legislative leaders calling for changes to the Master Matrix.

Instead of addressing our concerns, lawmakers seem content to do nothing. Their inaction allows the battles at county supervisor meetings to continue, even though we have no authority to regulate CAFO's.

It takes political will and courage to take a stand and fight for the rights of all Iowans to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and enjoy their quality of life. This isn't a rural vs. urban issue. It affects all Iowans. It pits neighbor vs. neighbor. Often times it pits farmer vs. farmer.

It's time for counties to take the lead by adopting a two-step Legislative Call to Action:

1. Adopt a resolution calling for changes to the Master Matrix.
2. Contact your state senators and tell them you support Senate File 2009, a bill by Senator David Johnson (I - Okeyedon) that creates a 19 member Master Matrix Evaluation Advisory Committee to review the Master Matrix and make recommendations on how it could be improved in a report to the Governor and the Legislature.

The advisory committee would be comprised of a representative of all 10 stakeholder groups that created the Master Matrix in 2002, including ISAC. It adds nine more members to insure an even representation from all agriculture and livestock producer organizations, as well as organizations concerned about the health of Iowans and our natural resources. House File 2081, a companion bill that needs county support, has been introduced in the Iowa House by Representative Sharon Steckman (D - Mason City).

The bills do not call for a moratorium on new CAFO construction nor do they call for local control of siting. While I support both of these measures, it's time to focus our efforts on the advisory committee bills that have a better chance of passing.

But that will only happen if county officials take a stand and put people ahead of pigs and politics.

# Feature - Master Matrix

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## Has the Master Matrix worked for Clay County?

Clay County has used the Master Matrix since its implementation. It has several aspects that are very important to Clay County. The setback distances need to allow for suitable air, water, and community standards. Clay County is very aware of its rural roots, and at the same time must balance

the agricultural business interests with residents and resources around these businesses. The matrix gives the County a point system to help ensure in each of these areas that all of these sensitive resources, residents, and areas are protected.

## Barry Anderson

Clay County Supervisor

[banderson@co.clay.ia.us](mailto:banderson@co.clay.ia.us)

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Water quality is a huge topic these days. It is the responsibility of the farmers and county supervisors to look closely at the proximity of these operations to water sources, wells, and drainage intakes. Water quality is something that is not to be taken for granted. The system that is currently in place requires the county supervisors to dot I's and cross the T's when it comes to this precious resource. In each of the areas, depending on the location of the site, additional points can be gained with the movement of the proposed site to a location with greater distance from one or more of these sensitive areas.

Safety is always important. The matrix allows for points in the matrix for truck turn arounds. This may not seem to be a big item to some, but with the number of farm tractors, feed trucks, delivery semis, rendering trucks, manure haulers, daily chore people, veterinarians, repair people, and power washers, throw in school buses passing by daily, road maintainers, and general road users, this area must not be overlooked. Along with the area of safety, the prevention of disease is a huge factor, and the matrix makes a producer look at surrounding confinements. Disease can travel by air, birds, or tracked in by traffic, so distance from a neighbor is important. Companies that farmers have dealt with are very aware of other sites. They know that it is in their best interest to find the correct place to locate the new site, not only for the welfare of the animals, but also for their bottom lines.

The area of community standards and air quality is where most public comment occurs. Clay County uses the matrix to look at proximity of the proposed site to churches, schools, businesses, and neighbors. Air quality is an area that is hard to agree on. To some, the quarter-mile distance is acceptable, and to others the half-mile distance is nowhere near enough. Everyone has their own feelings, but county supervisors must rely on science to say what is necessary. The Matrix allows people and companies to take points for extra distances from neighbors. They can look at several things like buffer strips, filters, landscaping such as wind breaks, and pit additives to list a few to help with air quality. Also, the manure storage and spreading practices can add points to the Matrix and can help in a huge way. If a producer has a covered storage pit for manure and then incorporates the manure into the soil, the air quality is improved in a large way.

It is in this area of community standards that has had the largest benefit to Clay County. Clay County makes sure that neighbors are notified, and a public meeting is held. The producer attends and supports the plan or dream, if you will. Neighbors get to come with their concerns. Many times things are brought up that sometimes the numbers on the Matrix don't catch. Everyone gathers and talks through the plan. Does everyone come out perfectly happy? Of course not. The Clay County Board of Supervisors have had some plans the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) has approved, and the producer has gone ahead and built even with neighbors with concerns, as it met the required points on the Matrix. There have also been some changes to plans to shift to a different location, or altered their plan due to comments made at the public hearing, and then built with the suggested changes. And there has been a proposed site that IDNR approved but the company decided not to build due to the comments made by the public.

It is the feeling that the Master Matrix does work in Clay County for this reason. Clay County is trying to find that balance of feeding an ever-growing world with a high quality protein product, and to maintain the high quality of life that we all enjoy.



# The ICAP Grant

## Counties Receive \$138,000 From the ICAP Grant

*And they can apply again!*

In 2016, the Iowa Communities Assurance Pool (ICAP) Board of Directors launched The ICAP Grant, a program through which every ICAP member is eligible to receive \$1,000 per year for the purchase of approved safety, loss control, and risk management items. Since then, ICAP has given nearly \$138,000 in grant funds to Iowa counties, including almost \$74,000 in 2017 alone!

The thing about those totals is they are for county members *only*. All in all, since April 2016, the Pool has given nearly \$1,000,000 back to its members through the grant. In 2018, we intend to take those totals *even higher*. In fact, ICAP's ultimate goal is to ensure every ICAP member utilizes the maximum \$1,000 in grant funds per entity this year. That's \$73,000 to Iowa counties alone in 2018!

### What's ICAP's motivation?

The ICAP Board of Directors decided to continue the grant solely because it benefits you, both as Iowans and as ICAP members. And it helps that the Pool knows its members are putting the funds to good use. ICAP distributed nearly \$1,000,000 in less than 24 months – that's a lot of money, and many ICAP members have received great bang for the buck.

Participating counties have used grant funds to purchase a range of necessary safety items, including search and rescue equipment, security camera systems, personal protective equipment (PPE), and more, as shown in the graph below.

John Riherd, Butler County Engineer, commented, "This grant was really a wonderful opportunity for our county. We used grant funds to purchase new protective chainsaw chaps, which are essential when employees are out trimming brush and working in the ditches. We had chaps already, but some of them were pretty worn and really needed to be replaced." Riherd continued, "The ICAP Grant enabled us to do that. It helped us purchase something we wouldn't ordinarily be able to buy."

Kossuth County Sheriff, Steve Kollasch, seconded that. In 2016, at the encouragement of their local insurance agent, the county requested grant funding to purchase a Phantom 4 drone.

"We'd been tossing around the idea of purchasing a drone, but it wasn't in our budget," Kollasch commented. "With the help of The ICAP Grant, we were able to purchase the drone."

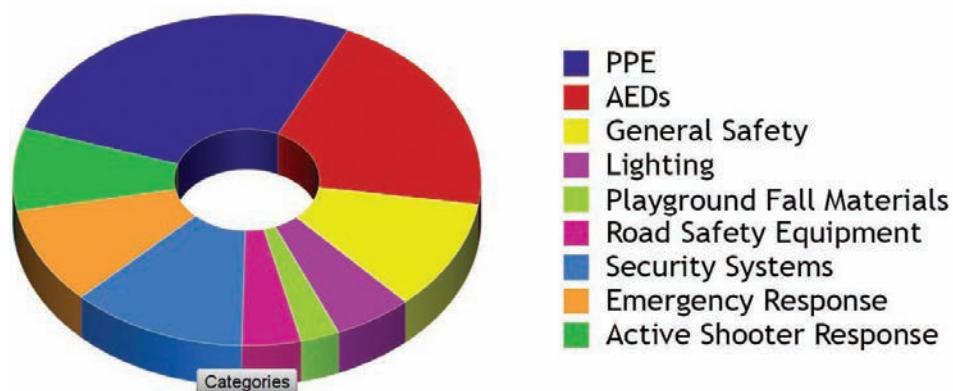
As it happened, the county made the purchase none too early. The drone had been flown just a couple of times before it was needed for a life-saving search and rescue mission, which enabled the Kossuth County Sheriff and Kossuth County Emergency Management to locate a missing boater who was having a heart attack.

"Without the help of that drone, time could've been an issue," David Penton, Kossuth County Emergency Management Coordinator, commented. "Quite frankly, we received it (the drone) just in time."

On behalf of ICAP, we are glad they did. The goal of the grant program is not only to give back to the ICAP membership, but also to provide individual entities access to materials and safety gear they need. For this reason, the ICAP Board of Directors has approved continuation of The ICAP Grant through 2018. This means every ICAP member county is eligible to apply for the

grant *again* this year. This is a great opportunity for our communities, and we urge every member county to take advantage.

To view a list of items that are eligible for the grant, or to proceed with a request for grant funds, ICAP members can visit [www.icapiowa.com/grant](http://www.icapiowa.com/grant). If you have questions, contact your ICAP underwriter or local agent for assistance.



# NACo News

“We’re all in this together.” – Red Green

NACo’s Board of Directors meeting and Poverty Summit was held last December in Tarrant County, Texas, President Roy Brooks’ home county. We heard numerous reports from staff. Legislative Director Deborah Cox gave a briefing on Hill happenings, and Dr. Emilia Istrate talked about the new Counties Futures Lab, which was formerly the Research Department. It has been expanded by more staff as well as its scope and mission. Cheryl Burnett from County Solutions and Innovations said that their work has expanded also, and NACo staff has increased from 62 to 99. It’s good to hear about and see all of the great things NACo is doing for counties across the country.

During the business meeting we passed the \$24 million budget that Executive Director Matt Chase presented. We also reviewed and approved our legislative priorities. Among them were: Infrastructure, PILT (as always), WOTUS rewrite, Farm Bill reauthorization, and funding of programs to reduce poverty. President Brooks’ initiative is addressing childhood poverty.



**Melvyn Houser**  
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The day and a half Poverty Summit featured many speakers, panel discussions, and a mobile workshop. Dr. Caroline Ratcliff of the Urban Institute made some thought provoking points. Official statistics underestimate the scope of poverty. Forty percent of our children are poor at some point by the age of 18. Children who are born poor tend to stay poor, living in persistent poverty. Their children will probably suffer the same fate. Poverty is a stressor, and one of ten adverse childhood experiences, known as ACES, which leads to food insecurity, poor nutrition, and toxic stress. A child’s brain is about 80% developed by the age of three. This is actual physical underdevelopment that then leads to poor social development, education, and employment. This is a \$500 billion cost in crime, poor health, and workplace productivity. The Center of American Progress figures it would take \$77 billion to solve the issue. Rachel Schumacher from the Pritzger Foundation said that 48% of low income children are not ready for school by age five. Early childhood funding is much less than the funding allotted for those ages six to 11. The Foundation says that investing in early childhood programs gives a 13% return and that local participation is key.

We also watched a film entitled “Resilience.” If you ever hear of it being shown in your community, I recommend that you see it. The medical profession is finding that four or more ACES can affect the physical development of an infant’s brain. They are finding a correlation between these ACES and future chronic ailments such as diabetes and heart disease. These long term impacts give reason to now declare ACES as the number one medical crisis in America. Rather than doctors asking what’s wrong with you, they will ask what happened to you.



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The mobile workshop that I attended was at the Tarrant County Food Bank. It is a central warehouse that serves multiple agencies, shelters, and schools. One of the school superintendents talked about the advantages of feeding the students. When he first started his job, the attendance rate was abysmal, and the graduation rate wasn't much better. They decided that they would concentrate on doing one thing - making sure all of the students got well balanced meals. They partnered with the food bank and now every child is assured of breakfast, lunch, dinner, and meals for the weekend. Their attendance rate is 99%, and the graduation rate is an astounding 100%. "It's not difficult," he said. "Just feed the kids, and they will show up and perform."

Our local Early Childhood Iowa programs use state and federal dollars to support providers of zero to five programs in our communities. Maybe we should approach this a bit differently. On one of our nights out in Fort Worth, a bunch of us went down to Billy Bob's dance hall in the old stockyards. Naturally it was a lot of country music, but I went anyway. There, something struck me as odd. Here we were in Texas, with all these independent minded folks. But, on the dance floor they all get in a line and do the same steps in unison. They tried to get me out there and teach me, but I just couldn't or wouldn't learn to do what everyone else was doing. It's not that I like being different. It's just that I don't like being the same.

Our regional CAP agency, West Central, was in recently asking the Board of Supervisors for monetary support for their Head Start program. One of the supervisors questioned county government's role in funding education. It is a legitimate question. Education is not one of county's mandated functions, but we put plenty of money into public safety, community services, and economic development programs and incentives. Why not invest some in our future workforce and citizens of the community. It's probably not a silver bullet by any means, but a better investment than tax breaks for a corporation that doesn't need it.

Another question from that same supervisor was directed specifically at me. Why should a county auditor be attending a Poverty Summit? He's right. It's not really in my job description. But, as a supervisor in my previous life, I sat on our De-Cat and Empowerment Boards and still do. I've learned that families in our community are struggling with poverty, teen pregnancies, drug and alcohol addiction, mental health issues, broken dysfunctional families, crime, and the list goes on. We all pay for it in one way or another. Maybe we should do something differently and invest more in our children and young families so we wouldn't have to invest so much later.



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# 2018 Calendar

## **February 2018**

- 1 Statewide Supervisors Meeting  
(Embassy Suites Des Moines Downtown)
- 9 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting  
(ISAC Office)

## **March 2018**

- 3-7 NACo Legislative Conference  
(Washington, D.C.)
- 14 County Day at the Capitol  
(Iowa State Capitol, Des Moines)
- 15-16 ISAC Spring Conference  
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit  
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

## **April 2018**

- 10-11 Iowa Governor's Conference on Public Health  
(Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)
- 15-18 ISSDA Civil School  
(Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)
- 19 HIPAA Program Meeting  
(Polk County River Place, Des Moines)
- 26 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting  
(ISAC Office)

## **May 2018**

- 16-18 Treasurers Conference  
(Burlington)
- 23-25 NACo WIR Conference  
(Sun Valley, Idaho)

## **June 2018**

- 10-14 Iowa County Attorneys Spring Conference  
(Okoboji)
- 12-15 ITAG Conference  
(Sheraton, West Des Moines)
- 20-22 Records Summer School  
(Gateway Hotel and Conference Center, Ames)
- 27 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting  
(ISAC Office)

## **July 2018**

- 11 ISAC Scholarship Golf Fundraiser  
(Toad Valley Golf Course, Pleasant Hill)
- 13-16 NACo Annual Conference  
(Nashville, Tennessee)
- 25-27 Auditors Annual Conference  
(Iowa City)

## **August 2018**

- 21 ISAC LPC Retreat  
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit  
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)
- 22-24 ISAC Annual Conference  
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit  
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

## **September 2018**

- 16-19 ISSDA Jail School  
(Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)
- 20 ISAC LPC Meeting  
(ISAC Office)

## **October 2018**

- 3-5 ISAC Board of Directors Retreat  
(Johnson County)
- 21-24 Assessors Fall Conference  
(Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)

## **November 2018**

- 15-16 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting  
(ISAC Office)

## **December 2018**

- 2-5 ISSDA Winter School  
(Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)

If you have any questions about the meetings listed above or would like to add an affiliate meeting to the ISAC calendar, please contact Kelsey Sebern at [ksebern@iowacounties.org](mailto:ksebern@iowacounties.org).

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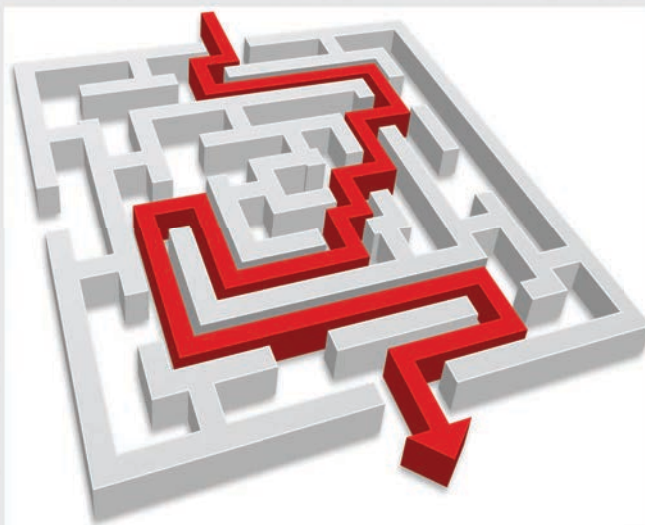
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