

Welcome to the Leopold Center Symposium

Good morning. On behalf of President Greg Geoffroy and the other members of the Advisory Board of the Leopold Center, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the 20th Anniversary Symposium of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. This year's conference — "Building on the Past, Growing for the Future" — will cover topics including People on the Land, Food and Health, Bioeconomy, and Healthier Natural Resources. In light of the current challenges and opportunities that we all face as global citizens, I'd say that there will be a lot to talk about.

At its inception, the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture was established at Iowa State University to study agricultural impacts on groundwater quality. Over the years the scope of the Center's mission has broadened to include three highly relevant initiatives — marketing and food systems, ecology, and policy. Marketing and food systems focuses on market-based approaches that reward Iowa farmers for protecting Iowa's water resources while producing highly differentiated food, fiber, or energy products of superior quality. The ecology initiative supports a wide range of research and demonstration anchored in the development of ecologically friendly production systems, systems that are more resilient and less costly to farmers, communities, and the environment. These include identifying how farming practices can use free ecosystem services, enhance biodiversity, and use natural processes as models to increase agricultural productivity. The policy initiative supports policy options that foster a sustainable agriculture. This includes policies to help beginning farmers establish ecologically sound and profitable farming and marketing operations, that reward farmers for producing public goods such as ecologically restored landscapes, and that modify regulations which sometimes put locally owned micro-enterprises at a competitive disadvantage. I cannot think of a more germane set of initiatives for Iowa at this moment in time.

In preparing for the conference, I noted that the Leopold Center's mission statement — The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture explores and cultivates alternatives that secure healthier people and landscapes in Iowa and the nation — is in total alignment with Extension's operating values of healthy people, healthy environments, and healthy economies.

The Leopold Center has a national reputation for cutting-edge research on nitrogen management to improve water quality, cropping systems, and alternative swine production systems (hoop barns). The Center's work is leading to significant dividends for Iowa — cleaner water, better conservation of natural resources, and greater agricultural vitality. Especially important is its exploration of new production and marketing opportunities for Iowans.

The Leopold Center also has been a catalyst. Many of the competitive grants funded by the Center and work of its multi-disciplinary issue teams have become long-term programs to make farms more profitable and more environmentally-friendly, and to strengthen Iowa's rural communities.

The Center collaborates with ISU Extension and other university, state, and local organizations to communicate research findings, and supports conferences, seminars, and special events related to its three research initiatives.

These collaborations and partnerships are a vital part of the Center's future. The Leopold Center's Advisory board is a distinguished partnership among agriculture and resource conservation interests that are represented by the Advisory Board's membership. Besides Iowa State University, the other members of the Board are the University of Iowa, University of Northern Iowa, the Iowa Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and a man and a woman actively engaged in agricultural production, who are appointed by the State Soil Conservation Committee. The board also includes representatives from four Iowa farm groups: Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Agribusiness Association of Iowa, and the Iowa Farmers Union.

If you are familiar with Aldo Leopold, you know that he is considered to be the "father of wildlife management" in the United States. He founded the first department of wildlife, at the University of Wisconsin, and he authored the first wildlife management textbook, entitled "Game Management." Over the years I have quoted him often in my own work as a wildlife professional. Indeed, it was Leopold who first tied the future of the natural world — what he called land, what we now call environment — to the human conscience. Later today, I will be participating in a panel on Leopold and will take the time then to discuss further those connections with Leopold and the impact that his thoughts and actions have had on wildlife conservation and sustainable agriculture.

In preparation for today's symposium, I thought the following Leopold quote from his essay entitled "The Land Ethic" is especially significant:

"There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it ... The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations ... Obligations have no meaning without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to land."

An interesting thought as we begin today's discussions. Enjoy the symposium.