

## HOWARD COUNTY EXPERIMENTAL CENTER

The Howard County Experimental Association Farm is located on Highway 9, three miles east of Saratoga or 12 miles west of Cresco. The 120 acre farm was purchased in the fall of 1943 for \$4,200. The association sold shares for \$10 to cover the purchase price. The farm is representative of the Cresco-Lourdes-Clyde soils found in this area. These soils have a higher clay content and more problems with internal drainage than neighboring soil associations. The Iowa Experiment Station conducted formal research at this site from 1945 to 1968. The long-term effects of different soil and crop management practices on yields, soil fertility, soil tilth, erosion control and drainage were studied. The center also provided facilities for crop variety testing, weed and disease control and pasture utilization.

Drainage, cold soils and a short growing season were seen as local problems that needed special attention. The annual reports from 1944 and 1945 indicate that corn crops for both years failed to reach maturity, emphasizing the need for localized research and extension activities. "Mole drainage", a system which formed subsurface channels by pulling a projectile-shaped plug through the soil, was tried initially as an inexpensive method to improve internal drainage. The channels quickly collapsed, however, and the method was abandoned. The Iowa State University agronomy and ag engineering departments conducted other drainage studies from 1947 to 1957. Tile spaced 84 feet apart resulted in similar corn and oat yields from drained and undrained areas on the farm. Later research done at other locations indicated that closer tile spacing is needed for desired crop response.

R.H. (Gerry) Meldrum and Sy Angstrom supervised the early research activities at both the Howard County Experimental Farm and the Carrington-Clyde Center located near Independence. The lack of living quarters at both sites required Meldrum and Angstrom to commute to northeast Iowa from Ames each week during the growing season.

The first field day, held June 22, 1945 was attended by 113 people. The 1947 Annual Progress Report states that nearly 1200 people visited the farm that year to attend field days or other group activities.

The research activities at this farm were reduced to 40 acres in 1966 and discontinued after the 1968 growing season because of the soil variability and drainage problems at the site and the desire to establish a research farm more representative of northeast Iowa. On May 15, 1968, a tornado caused considerable crop and property damage at the farm and added finality to the decision to discontinue formal research. The same tornado system struck Charles City and Elma earlier in the day. Debris from the research farm was found as far as 20 miles away.

When formal research was discontinued, the local association rented the farm for 10 years to the Crestwood FFA in Cresco. According to the original memorandum of understanding, half of the original farm was deeded to the Iowa Experiment Station and subsequently sold in 1985.

Since 1981, the 62 remaining acres have been rented to the Riceville FFA. The local association continued to cooperate with the FFA and Iowa State University Extension crop specialists in conducting yearly research and demonstration projects on the farm. I recent

years, the Howard county farm has been the northeast Iowa site for statewide research projects coordinated by campus-based state extension staff. Projects have included: comparisons of Bt and non-Bt corn hybrids; mycotoxin levels in Bt and non-Bt corn hybrids; soybean population and row spacing studies; nitrogen management in corn; economic comparisons of specialty soybean varieties and economic comparisons of genetically modified and conventional soybean varieties.

The Howard County Experimental Farm Board has established a scholarship fund to encourage Howard County graduates to continue their formal education in an agricultural field. In the last 20 years, more than \$50,000 in ag scholarships have been awarded to over 130 Howard County youth.

Current offices and directors of the Howard County Experimental Farm include: Cory Christensen, President; Dean Runde, Vice President; Brent Bronner, Treasurer; Charlie Baier, Secretary. The annual meeting is held each January at the Howard County Extension Office in Cresco.

Information from Advancing Agriculture Through Research and Extension.