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"Building a Culture of Conservation ~ Farmer to Farmer: Iowan to Iowan"

NEWS RELEASE

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New Bioeconomy Project Underway

AMES, Iowa—The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the Iowa Learning Farm are coordinating a three-year project that focuses on cellulosic biomass management. Iowa State University was a recipient of a federally-funded Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in June of 2007.

The grant, "Stewardship in the Bioeconomy: An Iowa Market-Based Model," supports development of a profitable and environmentally-sound model for market-based pricing and procuring of biomass for cellulosic ethanol as well as residue management and removal. Through the grant, the Leopold Center and ILF will offer education and outreach opportunities to industry, farmers, crop consultants, and technical service providers across Iowa.

With the projected increase of cellulosic ethanol production facilities in Iowa, the demand for biomass will increase as well. Long-term environmental impacts to Iowa's soil and water quality may evolve if precautionary steps are not taken during biomass removal. The grant will enable the development of a pilot program for farmers to implement environmentally and socially responsible procedures in biomass harvest.

New program assistant with the Iowa Learning Farm Erin Harpenau will be coordinating soil conservation education with farmers. Harpenau's work will focus on soil and water quality concerns that may arise from biomass harvest for ethanol production and other uses.

A Remsen, Iowa native, Harpenau holds a bachelor's degree in biology and a professional science master's degree in ecosystem management, both from the University of Northern Iowa. Her project was with the Black Hawk Soil and Water Conservation District and focused on urban storm-water management and erosion in a state preserve.

She has been involved with other projects related to water and soil quality including serving as an intern for Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, traveling the state as part of a team restoring prairies, oak savannas, and woodlands; and for the Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County coordinating IOWATER volunteers to sample the water bodies in Dickinson County.

Iowa Learning Farm is a partnership between the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa State University Extension, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Iowa Department of Natural Resources; in cooperation with Conservation Districts of Iowa and the Iowa Farm Bureau.