Help farmers overcome cost barriers to conservation

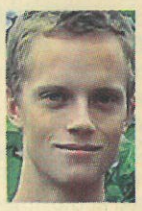
IOWA VIEW

When discussing how to clean our waterways, we cannot ignore the fact that agriculture accounts for 90 percent of our state's water pollution. But we can reduce that amount.

Agricultural conservation policy developed with farmers' conservation views in mind can more effectively reduce agricultural pollution, because it results in policy that farmers are more willing, able and eager to implement.

In 2004, I received a fellowship from Brown University to study farmers' views on conservation issues, with the help of Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development and the Upper Iowa River Watershed Project. The results show it is not the indifference of farmers that prevents conservation improvements. Instead, it is the cost of improving conservation and the need for greater outreach from the state.

It would, indeed, be difficult for farmers to be more concerned about conservation. The average agreement rating to the statement "soil and water conservation is important" was a 9.5 on a 10-point scale. This was also reflected in words at various forums. One farmer simply stated, "Conservation and environmental issues are among the most important of all issues facing us." Farmers do not undervalue soil and water conservation. They recognize that without proper conservation efforts, their business is not sustainable.



Rob **SAND**

What makes it difficult for farmers to improve conservation practices is cost. Eighty-four percent of farmers surveyed cited cost as a major obstacle. One farmer raved about the benefits of no-till farming during a forum. When asked if he practiced it, he said no — the startup costs, mostly for equipment, were too high.

As an older farmer stated, "I think by and large farmers know what's right. They don't always do what's right. I'm sure finances are behind it."

Knowledge — or lack of knowledge — about various state programs to improve conservation is also an important issue. While 55 percent of farmers thought there is effective cooperation between farmers and conservation managers, 80 percent think more coordination is needed, and only 20 percent thought they knew about all the programs available to assist them. This is a complex issue, but we must do more to inform farmers of opportunities for assistance.

Including farmers' views while creating conservation policy doesn't just make effective policy; it also makes efficient policy. Watershed-based conservation programs that are developed by local landowners, farmers and stakeholders with guidance from the state can be extraordinarily cheaper than conventional policy. Seeding waterways to reduce erosion costs $4.74 per foot if done through the federal Conservation Reserve Program. The Hewitt Creek Watershed Council, using a locally developed program, did the same thing for less than $0.10 per foot. While these results may not be replicated every time, there is undoubtedly a great deal of money to be saved while cleaning our waterways.

Another example of effective and efficient policy is a "fee-bate." A fee-bate places a fee on an unwanted action to fund a rebate on a desired action. Over time, the negative action is reduced because of the financial incentives for individuals or groups to switch to the positive action. We could tax the usage of dangerously polluting agricultural chemicals and use the money collected as a subsidy for organic farming, which is chemical-free. Farmers get to do what they want — improve conservation — because the fee-bate reduces the major barrier of cost. Everyone enjoys the benefit: cleaner water.

The time has come to clean up our waterways. This effort can be complete, effective and cheap, if we center our conservation-policy efforts around the deep concern for the land among those who are closest to it — farmers.

ROB SAND is a Decorah native who now lives in Des Moines.

Contoured strip cropping in Winneshiek County

SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

IOWA VIEW

Use Borlaug's rich legacy to inspire new scientists

A confluence of events presents the opportunity to honor Iowa native Norman E. Borlaug, father of the Green Revolution, and create a program to encourage future generations of Iowans to push the frontiers of science.

Last month, President Bush presented Borlaug with America's highest scientific honor, the National Medal of Science. Borlaug was recognized for his breakthrough achievement in dramatically increasing wheat production, which led to the Green Revolution, credited with saving a billion lives.

The president used the occasion to called for greater emphasis on science education in the United States, a goal that Gov. Tom Vilsack and leaders of the Legislature have all urged.

Michael **GARTNER**

Kenneth **QUINN**

Janis **RUAN**

Borlaug, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, is founder of the $250,000 World Food Prize, presented each October at the Iowa Capitol. World Food Prize activities include an international symposium, bringing scientists and policy leaders on food and agriculture from over 60 countries to Des Moines, and the World Food Prize Youth Institute, involving 75 Iowa high school students and their teachers from schools across the state. The students rub shoulders with the global experts, attend a briefing session on careers in science and learn lessons about poverty.

The students also present their own research papers and get feedback from Borlaug and World Food Prize laureates. The top 12 Iowa students are chosen as Borlaug-Ruan Interns. They are sent the following summer on eight-week assignments at agricultural research centers in Kenya, Ethiopia, India, Egypt, the Philippines, China, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Malaysia and Costa Rica. Participants describe their internships as a "life-changing experience."

With that framework to build on, we propose revising the World Food Prize Youth Institute selection process to inspire study of science in every Iowa high school. Currently, it's simply an open-application process.

Instead, it could work this way, to involve every Iowa high school: Each March, every high school would select one high school junior to be its Norman Borlaug Scholar, based on overall achievement in science and other interests that emulate his life, such as his commitment to humanitarian endeavors, athletics, foreign languages and international affairs. That designation alone would be a special honor.

That student, under the direction of a faculty mentor, would then prepare a paper on the subject for the forthcoming World Food Prize International Symposium. Topics in previous years have included biotechnology, agro-terrorism and global water insecurity.

In September, regional competitions would be held, perhaps organized by Iowa's private colleges or public universities, and 75 finalists would be chosen to attend the World Food Prize events.

That way, 75 of the top science students in the state would interact with World Food Prize laureates and other international experts. They would present their papers to a panel of laureates, as is done now. The top 12 would be chosen to be Borlaug-Ruan Interns, sent to work at prestigious research centers and asked to prepare a report about their scientific work and cross-cultural experiences.

The following October, the two Borlaug-Ruan interns who have written the best reports would be honored at the Capitol award ceremony, broadcast around the state on IPTV.

The program would focus greater attention on achievement in science in every

Another View

Life is too good or al-Qaida beast

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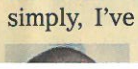
Commandment for literalists: Thou shalt not quote the Bible selectively

An open letter to Donna Reddick:

I'm writing this for Desiree. She's a student at Miami Sunset Senior High, where you teach business technology. A few days ago, she sent me an e-mail recounting an incident that happened on campus last week.

It seems that on three successive days, the morning announcements, which are televised throughout the school, featured student-produced



you crossed the line between church and state, an accusation about which I'm more conflicted. It seems to me there's a difference between proselytizing for a religion and explaining how one's faith has influenced one's opinion. You're entitled to think what you think, no matter how stupid it might be.

But I'll leave those questions for others to parse. My biggest frustration lies elsewhere. Put simply, I've had it up to here with the moral

I'm going to speculate that you don't observe or support those commands. Which says to me that yours is a literalism of convenience.

You resemble many of your and my co-religionists, whose faith so often expresses itself in an obsessive focus on one or two hot-button issues — and seemingly nowhere else. They're so panicked at the thought that somebody might accidentally treat gay people like people. They run around

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— From the New York Daily News

Commandment for literalists: Thou shalt not quote the Bible selectively

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It seems that on three successive days, the morning announcements, which are televised throughout the school, featured student-produced segments on the subject of gay rights. On the first day came comments from students who took the pro position. On the second day came remarks from a counselor who spoke of the need for students to respect one another. On the third day came you.

You and a few students, actually. One told classmates homosexuality was "unacceptable in the eyesight of God." Another said gays were "unrighteous." The coup de grace, though, was you, invoking Sodom and Gomorrah and telling students homosexuality was "wrong according to the Bible" because God ordered humanity to multiply, which gay couples cannot do.

Desiree was, to put it mildly, upset. In the e-mail, she accused you of bigotry and wondered how a gay student could ever again feel assured of fair treatment in your class. I tend to agree. She also suggested that you crossed the line between church and state, an accusation about which I'm more conflicted. It seems to me there's a difference between proselytizing for a religion and explaining how one's faith has influenced one's opinion. You're entitled to think what you think, no matter how stupid it might be.

But I'll leave those questions for others to parse. My biggest frustration lies elsewhere. Put simply, I've had it up to here with the moral hypocrisy and intellectual constipation of Bible literalists.

Leonard **PITTS**

By which I mean people like you, who dress their homophobia up in Scripture, insisting with sanctimonious sincerity that it's not homophobia at all, but just a pious determination to live according to what the Bible says.

And never mind that the Bible also says it is "disgraceful" for a woman to speak out in church (1 Corinthians 14:34-36) and that if she has any questions, she should wait till she gets home and ask her husband. Never mind that the Bible says the penalty for going to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:1-3) is death. Never mind that the Bible says the man who rapes a virgin should buy her from her father (Deuteronomy 22:28-29) and marry her.

I'm going to speculate that you don't observe or support those commands. Which says to me that yours is a literalism of convenience.

You resemble many of your and my co-religionists, whose faith so often expresses itself in an obsessive focus on one or two hot-button issues — and seemingly nowhere else. They're so panicked at the thought that somebody might accidentally treat gay people like people. They run around Chicken Little-like, screaming, "Th' homosex'shals is comin'! Th' homosex'shals is comin'!" Meantime, people are ignorant in Appalachia, strung out in Miami, starving in Niger, sex slaves in India, mass murdered in Darfur. Where is the Christian outrage about that?

Just once, I'd like to read a headline that said a Christian group was boycotting to feed the hungry. Or marching to house the homeless. Or pushing Congress to provide the poor with health care worthy of the name.

Instead, they fixate on keeping the gay in their place. Which makes me question their priorities. And their compassion. And their faith.

If you love me, feed my sheep.

For the record, Ms. Reddick, the Bible says that, too.

LEONARD PITTS JR. writes for the Miami Herald.

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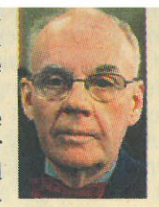

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The program would focus greater attention on achievement in science in every county. There would be no new cost to taxpayers. The World Food Prize Foundation already pays all expenses for the students and teachers attending the Youth Institute in Des Moines and for the Borlaug-Ruan internships. All that is needed is for an organization or organizations to undertake the screening process to select the 75 finalists.

Borlaug has said his greatest legacy will be the young people he leaves behind to pursue careers in agricultural science. The Youth Institute and Borlaug-Ruan internships could become the crown jewel of the Iowa high school experience and recognized as one of the most innovative programs in America for encouraging and rewarding students who excel in science.

On Thursday, Borlaug is scheduled to address the Legislature, and on March 25, he will turn 92. There could be no better birthday present than to connect his legacy to every high school in the state in which he was born.

KENNETH QUINN is president of the World Food Prize Foundation. JANIS RUAN and MICHAEL GARTNER present awards each fall to the top two Borlaug-Ruan interns as part of the World Food Prize ceremonies.