

Objectives for the **Policy Initiative** are to:

- Link potential local, state or regional policies to enhanced sustainability of Iowa's natural resources, and
- Provide basic research or benchmark data analysis needed to help assess or implement possible new local or state policies and alternatives for Iowa

Organization

The Policy Initiative is one of three program areas at the Leopold Center. Program leader is Jerry DeWitt, jdewitt@iastate.edu, (515) 294-3711. Work in this initiative is coordinated by Mary Adams, Leopold Center outreach and policy coordinator.

Activities, research and outreach

The Policy Initiative sponsors competitive grants, workshops, and programs with local or regional policy implications. The smallest of the three initiatives, it is intended to support policy-related aspects of work being conducted by the other two initiatives and funds far fewer stand-alone grants. The initiative has made a major commitment to Iowa Landowner and Sustainable Agricultural Land Stewardship Project with Drake University Agricultural Law Center, which is being partially funded by Policy Initiative funds and strategic investment support from the Center.

Competitive grants

The Leopold Center has conducted a competitive grants program since 1988 in accordance with the legislation that established the center. Summaries of completed projects can be found on the Policy Initiative page on the Leopold Center Web site. Three policy projects currently underway are:

- Policy alternatives for the biofuels industry
- Iowa farmers and credit, crop insurance and sustainable agriculture
- Shaping a functional and sustainable biofuels industry through bridging industrial needs with farmer production capabilities

Focus for the Policy Initiative

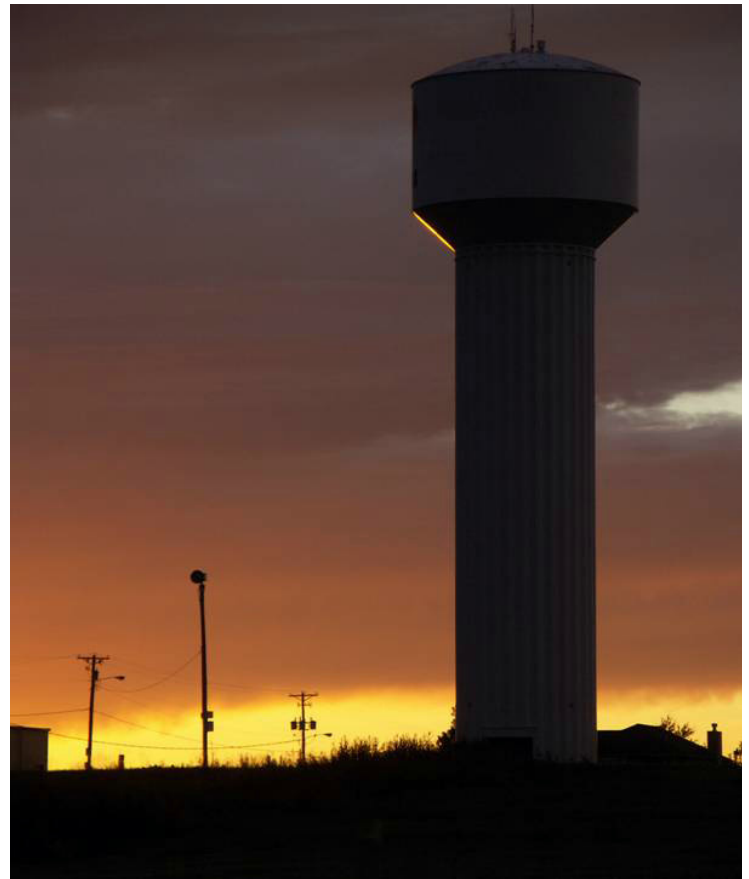
Local and regional (not national) policy research and outreach aimed at:

- State agencies
- Conservation and natural resource partners
- County boards of supervisors
- Cities/municipalities
- Iowa General Assembly
- Iowa legal community

Strategic investments in policy research

The Iowa Landowner and Sustainable Agricultural Land Stewardship Project

This two-year partnership with Drake Agricultural Law Center and other agencies including the USDA tackles many questions about what has happened and what will happen to Iowa's prime asset, its rich farmland. Under the direction of Neil Hamilton at Drake University in Des Moines, a staff attorney and ag law students will explore trends in Iowa farmland ownership and the transition of land to a new generation of owners, many of whom will rent or lease farmland to others. They will examine the proliferation of other legal agreements affect-



ing farmland, such as wind-right leases, manure contracts and conservation easements. They will use the project's findings to draft a model sustainable agricultural leasing guide. The Agricultural Law Center is working on an educational documentary titled "The Land Remains." Filming was conducted at more than a dozen farms and locations around the state and interviews were taped with Iowa sustainable ag leaders. A possible related fall 2009 conference in Washington, D.C. will partner with USDA to discuss beginning farmers and ag policy.

Land ownership and tenure in the United States

This faculty sabbatical research paper by ISU economics professor Mike Duffy includes data collection to be done in New England, Mississippi, Idaho and California. Duffy, whose work is being coordinated with the Drake land tenure project, is particularly interested in where we might be going with the wholesale changes in land ownership. His research is attuned to the issues of fewer beginning farmers and an agricultural system geared to getting rid of small farmers. What do we do? What do these trends mean long term for conservation in the United States?

Crop enterprise budgets for alternative crops

ISU economics professor Mike Duffy has been working with economics students to develop budgets for various alternative agricultural enterprises (crops and livestock outside the conventional corn/beans regimen). These will be simple two- to four-page handouts and will explain alternative enterprises using a whole farm context. Beginning farmers must consider the risk, marketing, labor (quantity, timeliness and skill), capital needed, time to pay off, traditional costs and returns, and a myriad of other aspects before starting a new enterprise. The series (which may

eventually include 40 different items) is jointly issued by Leopold Center, ISU Extension and the Beginning Farmer Center.

2009 survey of Iowa county boards of supervisors

The Policy Initiative, working closely with Iowa State Association of Counties staff and officials, conducted an electronic survey to determine what issues Iowa's county supervisors viewed as most critical. Several questions were related to ecological and food production and marketing concerns as well. The survey was sent to all county boards in early July and results were compiled by a Drake University law school student. Data from the survey were shared internally and with ISAC and used to inform the 2009 policy pre-proposal review process.

Policy-related workshops

The Policy Initiative (working with the Ecology Initiative) was instrumental in planning and conducting two events on key Iowa water quality issues in 2008.

Hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico: Implications and Strategies for Iowa

ISU economics professor Cathy Kling, who served on the EPA Science Advisory Board, made the case that a forum was needed to keep the hypoxia conversation going, especially among Iowa entities that had not been involved in preparing the federal report. The event explored how and what Iowa might do in response to the continuing challenges of hypoxia and other water quality issues. The 125 attendees—state agency personnel, NGO representatives, watershed councils, extension and research staff from ISU, water policy and regulatory group representatives—represented all sides of the hypoxia challenge. The Center for Agricultural and Rural Development assisted with the conference administration.

Learning from the Floods of 2008: Practical Strategies for Resilience

Widespread summer flooding in Iowa made it apparent that the state needed to make significant changes and improvements to mitigate future flooding. Farmers, policy makers, environmental scientists, city officials and representatives from state agencies and conservation offices offered their take on the flood realities and repercussions. There was general agreement on the urgent need for new state flood plain maps, better enforcement of restrictions on developments of all types in flood plains, conservation planning geared to the watershed level and increased public education about Iowa's river systems. The event was sponsored by the Policy and Ecology Initiatives and the Center for Energy and Environmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa.



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