

Mission Statement

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Board

December 5, 2018

Purpose: The intent of this statement is to articulate the mission for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Early in 2017, the Iowa Legislature removed state funding for the Center. Over the past year, Director Mark Rasmussen has met with constituents across Iowa to gather input on the needs, desires, and interest of Iowans on the future direction of the Center. It was clear from input received that there is substantial interest in the broader mission of the Center as dictated in Iowa legislation. However, with the loss of funding for this mission, Rasmussen and the Advisory Board agree that there is a need to focus on specific areas that leverage the Center's previous work, extensive network of collaborators, and that does not duplicate efforts. In particular, there is a significant need for a clear statement of purpose for the Center moving forward.

To complement the public feedback, Rasmussen formed a volunteer external committee, consisting of academic professionals familiar with Leopold's work and state agricultural needs, for recommendations on potential areas of focus. The committee identified the urgent need to support continuing research, extension and alternative approaches on soil quality. As Leopold's Distinguished Fellow Fred Kirschenmann noted in a recent letter to the board, "[we are] now at a point where creative, resilient, regenerative, agriculture practices that can restore the health of our soil, and enable farmers to make a living, financially, are critical." Below, the Board, in consultation with Rasmussen, has attempted to articulate a clear statement of purpose that encompasses the concerns of the diverse body of stakeholders and constituents across the State of Iowa.

Statement: The Iowa State Code states that the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture shall conduct and sponsor research to identify and reduce negative environmental and socio-economics impacts of agricultural practices, research and assist in developing alternative practices and inform the agricultural community and public of its findings. Over the past 30 years, the Center has proven its ability to successfully achieve this mission. The Center has been at the forefront of new practices such as cover crops, buffer strips, alternative crops and food hubs, and sponsored research that improved the environmental and socio-economic resilience of communities throughout Iowa.

Farmers in Iowa face many challenges that risk the economic viability of individual farms, the ability to attract the next generation into agriculture and the long-term success of rural communities. As such, there is a significant and continual need to enhance the resilience of farms and rural communities throughout

Iowa. The Center's contributions over the past 30 years have provided and supported research that improved the resilience of Iowa farms and rural communities.

Moving forward, enhancing resiliency will remain the priority for the Center. Resilience will require the ability to cope with changes in weather, new and changing markets and other factors that threaten fragile economies. For example, a focus on improving soil quality would buffer against extreme weather through improved infiltration rates, moisture holding capacity and retention of nutrients. Similarly, alternative crops may improve economic margins, increase value added businesses, and attract younger farmers.

Finally, connecting communities (from farms to towns and cities) will help farmers identify programs that incentivize or support changes that will make them more resilient and share the benefits of a more sustainable environment. Therefore, the objective of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture moving forward will be to leverage its continuing support from the community to focus on the education and research of alternative approaches and practices to promote resilient rural communities across Iowa.