

IOWA AGRICULTURE-IT'S IMPORTANT TO US

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey spoke to a crowd of over forty at the early Saturday meeting of the Optimist Club of Treynor. Northey, a farmer from Dickinson County, spoke about the state of Iowa agriculture. This meeting was one of many planned during his tenure to visit all counties in Iowa. Northey noted that the Iowa Agriculture Department has about

400 employees and over half work at the Wallace Building in Des Moines. Other employees are located across the state. Iowa is a foremost agricultural state, and Northey noted Iowa is ranked number one in production of eggs, corn, soybeans, hogs, biodiesel, and ethanol. Iowa is about third in wind based energy production and is fourth in the number of farmers markets. Overall Iowa agriculture is in an exciting time with high commodity prices and high demand for products. Northey noted that agricultural exports are near record, demand is increasing, and we are operating in a world market where weather disasters elsewhere in the world affect local market prices.

Northey stated he wants to continue efforts of renewable energy development. The ethanol plants currently in operation produce more than the volume of gasoline used in Iowa. Better and more efficient technology is evolving to increase energy conversion efficiencies. Northey noted the positive secondary impacts of ethanol plants on local livestock production and community development. Northey said the department is always working to protect Iowa's soil resource and water quality through conservation programs. Cost share with farm owners to install conservation practices has increased, but more is needed. Practices to minimize adverse urban effects on water quality are increasing.

Another emphasis of the department, Northey stated, is education about Iowa agriculture to youth and adults. Most of Iowa agriculture production is done on family farms. But these farms have been increasing in size and decreasing in numbers for many years. Each generation there are fewer who experience or witness production of products consumed. But because of the current exciting agricultural climate there is increasing interest in young people to work in agriculture and related businesses. Northey noted the enrollment in university agriculture studies was increasing.

Environmental challenges remain with changes in methods of agricultural production, Northey noted. Treatments developed by university research studies to eliminate livestock emissions from confinement facilities are going to be tested on farms across Iowa to find effective practices before any rules are set.