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ACWA supports collaboration and conservation to protect water quality

Ankeny, Iowa – Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance (ACWA) supports and promotes a collaborative approach to improve water quality in Iowa. Water monitoring and conservation practices tailored to specific farms and watersheds have already improved water quality from nonpoint sources across Iowa and ACWA will further those endeavors in the coming year.

The scope and complexity of nonpoint water quality issues is extensive, however agriculture is up to the challenge. ACWA is working with local partners and farmers to advance strategies and technologies identified in the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. This includes supporting the Water Quality Initiative (WQI) demonstration projects in the Boone River Watershed, which brings together farmers and other stakeholders to implement watershed planning and conservation practices. Greater awareness and cost-share funding increases the use of cover crops, bioreactors, buffer strips, gated tile systems and other practices proven to have a quantifiable impact on water quality.

This year, ACWA, in collaboration with the Iowa Soybean Association and WQI projects, funded edge-of-field tile monitoring with 779 samples collected and analyzed. During the past 15 years, we have monitored nutrient levels in the Raccoon, Boone and Des Moines River watersheds, collecting about 10,000 water samples, and invested in conservation practices to help producers improve water quality. Our extensive water quality database shows a modest but statistically-significant decline in Raccoon River nitrate concentration since 1999, although we all agree improvement efforts must continue.

In the past year, farmers and land owners invested \$22.5 million in conservation practices to prevent soil erosion and improve water quality, of which \$13 million came out of farmers' own pockets. Also, many ACWA member retailers have Certified Crop Advisers on staff, who provide support to farmers on products and services for optimizing nutrient management.

We encourage scientifically-based actions to positively impact environmental performance and water quality. We support water monitoring at multiple scales, including edge of field tile monitoring and tributary levels. Resulting data is useful with targeting new practices and initiatives. ACWA, along with other stakeholder groups, will continue to invest in solutions and simultaneously, Iowa farmers and landowners will continue to implement in-field and edge-of-field practices proven to have a quantifiable impact on water quality.

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The ACWA is an association consisting of 12 ag retailers and three associate members operating in the Des Moines and Raccoon River basins. ACWA focuses on creating a better understanding how water, weather, landscape and farm management interrelate. Their work on direct, targeted watershed projects create a baseline for current conditions and enable measured evaluation of new or change practice implementation. Since 1999, ACWA members have invested more than \$1 million in funding for water quality monitoring in the Raccoon River and, since 2008, in the Des Moines River and their largest tributaries.