

Message from the Director

The 20th century brought with it numerous advances in agricultural technology: hybrid seed corn, nitrogen fertilizer, and mechanization of production.



These changes spurred colossal growth in our ability to grow food and fiber. However, these remarkable developments brought with them environmental problems such as degraded water quality, habitat loss and declines in soil health.

As we work towards resolving the rift between production and protection of natural resources, the practice of sustainable agriculture is gaining traction. Sustainable agriculture rests on three pillars: economic profitability, environmental health and quality of life. The integration of this holistic perspective on farming has begun to emerge on rural landscapes across the world.

The pace of agricultural innovation in the last century, led by pioneering figures such as Roswell Garst, now positions us to proceed with breakthroughs in sustainable agriculture by building upon a century of progress.

As an important figure in my life once reminded me, we would not be able to so sharply see what we need to do tomorrow were it not for what was accomplished yesterday.

-Tolif Hunt, Executive Director



1390 Highway 141 Coon Rapids, IA 50058
(712) 684-2697
www.whiterockconservancy.org

Khrushchev In Iowa: The 50th Anniversary Celebration

September 2009 will mark the 50th anniversary of the 1959 visit of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to Iowa, a visit that showcased the power of agriculture, trade and citizen diplomacy to reach across borders and thaw Cold War tensions.

At a time when diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the United States were at a frightening impasse - Iowa farmer and seed corn pioneer Roswell Garst and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev forged an unlikely friendship. This was built on their mutual interest in agricultural technology and in growing food for hungry nations.

The historic visit of a Soviet leader to an Iowa farmer in the American Heartland has long been regarded

as an act of agricultural goodwill that had positive repercussions for decades. Many believe that this personal contact may have helped to ease tensions during that fearful time, when two rival world powers seemed to teeter on the

brink of nuclear holocaust.

Fifty years after Khrushchev's famous visit to Iowa, the people of Iowa are once again extending our friend-



Roswell and Elizabeth Garst and family pose with Nikita Khrushchev, Sept. 1959

ship and respect to our Russian counterparts. Since the 1959 visit, bonds between Iowan and Soviet farmers have continued to be forged throughout the years by Iowa State University, Iowa's Sister State program with Stavropol, the Iowa Council for International Understanding and many others.

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volunteer highlights

In June, we—

—hosted 27 AmeriCorps volunteers who spruced up the Home Farm and Oakridge Farmhouse yards, painted fences and cleared trails in an afternoon.

—kicked off the new Volunteer Land Stewardship program. With the help of local guides, 21 enthusiastic folks toured the tracts of land they will be responsible for monitoring.

—made the Home Farm trails and woodlands safer and more accessible to visitors by removing fences. The 19 volunteers braved barbed wire and intense sunshine to complete this task. A fence was also built next to Ribble Pond, east of town, to help keep horses on the trail system.



ecologist's corner

Wild Farmlands

Traditionally, agriculture has painted a specific picture of the farm landscape: corn rows are meant to be straight, fences should be hog tight, and the grass pastures free of what we think of as weeds. Common practices have nearly eliminated any semblance of *the wild* from the farm. But in the last few months, changes in the way we manage the Whiterock landscape have shown me how wildly fruitful the farm landscape can be. If you've never seen a wild farm before, these two examples from Whiterock Conservancy might change your mind:



Cows on a rotationally grazed pasture

In our current transition from a continuous to rotational grazing system, WRC has subdivided pastures into smaller paddocks and begun using portable fencing and water systems to move the cows around the pastures instead of letting them forage freely over the whole farm. This gives the pastures a rest and allows grasses and wildflowers to grow tall and lush, which creates ideal nesting habitat for a handful of grassland birds. On a short walk through one of our pastures recently, I discovered fledgling Bobolinks, Dickcissels and Grasshopper Sparrows, and even saw a Regal Fritillary, a rare butterfly, sail past on the breeze. In Iowa, the replacement of prairie with crop fields has caused a rapid decline of grassland butterflies and birds. While the pasture I was walking through didn't look like a wild prairie to me, it was functioning as one to those grassland birds.

WRC has also just begun using winter rye, a cover crop, to protect soil and water quality in a row crop field adjacent to prairie and wetland along the Middle Raccoon River. Recently, a Spotted Sandpiper nestling was seen foraging with its parent in that very crop field. Spotted Sandpipers are rare nesters in the state of Iowa, which makes it all the more exciting to have them call Whiterock their home. Whether the cover crops encouraged the nesting is to be determined, but we'll keep managing for diversity!

In her book, *The Farm as Natural Habitat*, Dr. Laura Jackson of University of Northern Iowa writes that nature preserves alone cannot preserve nature, and that "conservation of biological diversity across the entire landscape and from creek to ocean will not be accomplished by simply planting a few patches of shrubs and grasses on farms for 'wildlife habitat.' It will mean changing the face of agriculture itself." This starts with changing our perceptions of farms, and then letting the wild in. A wild farm can bring surprises, like the Spotted Sandpiper, but it also brings resilience to change, increased productivity, improved soil health and protection of biodiversity and the ecological services we rely upon to live each day. Now that's the kind of change I can believe in... how about you?



Spotted Sandpiper

Check out Elizabeth's blog at:
<http://whiterockconservancy.blogspot.com>

News Briefs

Whiterock is Breeding!

The Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas, a 5-year project documenting the current ranges of Iowa's breeding birds, chose Whiterock Conservancy as one of the blocks where birdwatchers from around the state are identifying and counting the breeding birds. WRC's block was scoured this spring and early summer, with a grand total of 106 different species of birds! Way to go birds!

Coon Rapids Named River Town of the Year

In May, Iowa Rivers Revival (IRR), a river advocacy organization based in Des Moines, named Coon Rapids the *Iowa River Town of the Year*. The award was presented at IRR's annual meeting by board president and WRC volunteer, Jerry Peckumn. Coon Rapids was selected for this award because of its dedication to enjoying and restoring the Middle Raccoon River.

Dragging logs on the Betts Farm is hard work!



Mission Accomplished

During the only cool week in July, the First Congregational Church from Moline, IL sent a hardworking group to WRC for a mission trip. The 10-person crew spent two days restoring 2.5 acres of oak savanna. They also painted a new mural on the Oakridge Farmhouse garage, spruced up the gardens at the Garst Home Farm and pruned apple and oak trees at several locations on the property. The group wrapped up their highly productive stay at WRC with a canoe float down the Middle Raccoon. Thank you so much to Heidi, Mike and Shannon for organizing the trip and a big thank you to the volunteers for their time and effort at Whiterock Conservancy.



Thanks to everyone who made our Music in the Park fundraiser a success!

Gypsy Dave & the Stumpjumpers playing at Riverside Park on June 18

Khrushchev in Iowa *(continued from page 1)*

Other organizations the World Food Prize and U.S. Center for Citizen Diplomacy, both based in Des Moines, celebrate Iowa's traditions of seeking international understanding through food and agriculture. The collective hope of these organizations, just as it was 50 years ago, is that agricultural technology exchanges as well as trade and personal relations can help to promote international understanding, mutual economic benefit and peaceful coexistence.

More than 30 Iowa organizations are coming together to hold a 2009 state-wide commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Nikita Khrushchev's visit to Iowa. The centerpiece event will be a conference and banquet at the Hotel Fort Des Moines on the afternoon and evening of August 28.

On August 29th, the celebration will travel to the farm community of Coon Rapids to commemorate the Garst Farmstead as a historical site and celebrate "Agricultural Progress Day." At 11 a.m.,

Whiterock Conservancy will host keynote speaker, Dr. Wes Jackson of The Land Institute in Salina, KS.

Additional participants will include Khrushchev's son, Sergei; Khrushchev's biographer, William Taubman; U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack; and other high-ranking U.S. and Russian agricultural officials.

The goals of the commemoration are to celebrate and honor Iowa's traditions of citizen diplomacy and agricultural innovation, to emphasize the common interest of all people in food security, and to promote current U.S.-Russian trade and positive foreign relations. Today, when international tensions continue to swirl around a hungry world, the agricultural arena can once again offer new avenues for trade, increased food production, and mutually respectful relations.

For more information or to make a contribution to the Khrushchev in Iowa events, visit www.creatinggreatplaces.org.

**"Hungry people are dangerous people."
-Roswell Garst**

Khrushchev in Iowa Signature Events



Thursday, August 27

William Taubman, Pulitzer-Prize winning author of *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (2003) will speak at Drake University in the Sheslow Auditorium. 7p.m. FREE.

Friday, August 28

"Khrushchev in Iowa" Conference will be held at the historic Hotel Fort Des Moines, with the twin themes of: 1) Agricultural Progress in the United States and Russia, and 2) Citizen Diplomacy in U.S.-Russia Relations.

1:15pm—5:15pm. \$25

Banquet following at 6:30pm. \$125

Saturday, August 29

Agricultural Progress Celebration in Coon Rapids.

10:30a.m.—Dedication of the Roswell and Elizabeth Garst Farmstead to the National Registry of Historic Places.

11:00a.m.—Wes Jackson from The Land Institute speaks

1:30p.m— Farm machinery parade

3:00p.m—Speeches on Main Street

4:00-10p.m. Live music and beer garden

Throughout the day:

Family fun activities, film clips, performance of original two person play on Garst-Khrushchev relation, plantings of corn from different eras

For more info on these events: visit www.whiterockconservancy.org or call (712) 684-2697

What's On Your Calendar?



August 8-9: Whiterock BioBlitz

Help us to measure the degree of biodiversity on our landscape. Working in shifts over a 24-hour period, volunteers will take an inventory of living organisms at WRC. Camp along the river or reserve a room at Whiterock Resort. Register online at www.whiterockconservancy.org.

August 21: Iowa Star Party

Enjoy a fun night of stargazing in one of Iowa's darkest places. Local and regional astronomers will assist in sky interpretation. Visit their telescopes to view spectacular galaxies, stars and nebula millions of light years away. Crash course in Astronomy 101 offered. FREE.

August 29: Agricultural Progress Celebration (see main article)

September 5: Osprey Celebration

Jane Cantwell, raptor biologist and Executive Director for Birds of Prey Northwest, will be speaking about the organization's project to restore a viable Osprey population to the Missouri River in South Dakota. FREE.



Osprey

For more info, call us or visit www.whiterockconservancy.org.

Opening Whiterock: Visitor's Center Nears Completion

Groundbreaking for WRC's new visitor's center was completed in May. The foundation is poured, and the main frame is now up!

The facility, scheduled to be completed this fall, will serve as a visitor's first stop to Whiterock and the Coon Rapids area. Maps, brochures and informative displays will be available to help orient people and introduce them to the diverse landscape.

"The concept of the visitor's center is to create Whiterock's 'front door,'" said Tolif Hunt, WRC Executive Director. "We have an expansive landscape that begs the question, 'where do I start?' The visitor's center will be an ideal starting point to visit Whiterock and Coon Rapids."

When it is complete, the building will be equipped with plumbing, heating, air conditioning and connected to an open air patio overlooking the scenic Middle Raccoon River Valley.

The building was not initially going to be a 4-season facility. In fact, it started out as a



When completed in the fall, the facility will overlook the river valley.

simple kiosk. But as the project matured and funds became available, the facility slowly transformed to meet a wider range of community and organizational needs.

The project is funded by a Vision Iowa Community Attractions and Tourism grant and by a Great Places grant through the Department of Cultural Affairs. Williams Construction of Carroll, Iowa, is the lead contractor on the project. "They have been great to work with," said Hunt. "We are proud to be supporting local businesses with this project."

From its location, just east of Coon Rapids on the south side of Highway 141, a low-pitched ramp will wind down the hill and

connect visitors to the newly constructed sustainable trail system. From there, guests can access restored wetlands, the Osprey reintroduction area, and fishing ponds. The nearby Roadside Park, with a bird viewing platform and sculptures by local artisans, lies just across the river from the new building and trail system.

"We expect to use the facility for educational programming," concludes Hunt, "but its primary purpose is as a staging area where visitors can learn what Coon Rapids and Whiterock have to offer before stepping out to explore."

Name Our Visitor's Center!

We are seeking a name that reflects Iowa's natural and cultural heritage. Submit your suggestion to whiterock@whiterockconservancy.org by August 20th.

If your suggestion is selected, we will award you with a Deluxe Stay Package, which includes a two-night stay in Hollyhock Cottage with breakfast, dinner for two, and a canoe or tube trip on the Middle Raccoon River.

If you prefer to receive your newsletter electronically, please let us know at whiterock@whiterockconservancy.com.



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