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AGRICULTURE'S CLEAN WATER ALLIANCE

Land use, data and the future

Raccoon River Water Quality How we got here — and where to look in the future

This article is based on a research paper by ACWA members Dr. L.D. McMullen of the Des Moines Water Works, Chris Jones of the Des Moines Water Works, and Dr. Jerry Hatfield of the National Soil Tilth Laboratory.

Improved water quality — a shared goal

Stakeholders from all sides of the issue agree that water quality in Iowa must improve. For example, in the Raccoon River, nitrate-N (NO3-N) concentrations have increased since the early 1970's, often rising above the federal drinking water standard. Because the Raccoon River is the predominant water supply for the city of Des Moines, there is concern about a broad spectrum of potential impacts from NO3-N concentrations above the federal drinking water standard. It has also raised questions about the potential sources of nitrogen (N) and the impact of agricultural practices on the river.

The search for solutions

Ultimately — in order to link action to results — it's important to learn what the problems are and what factors affect water quality in the Raccoon River watershed. Further, from the point of view of agriculture, if there are factors within the control of farmers that can improve water quality, they need to be discovered, quantified and proven effective before ag is asked to implement them.

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