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Iowa Ag Water Alliance to accelerate pace, scale of water quality improvement

*Launched by Iowa Corn, Iowa Pork and Iowa Soybean Associations, alliance will
advance success of Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy*

(Des Moines, IA – Aug. 25, 2014) Accelerating the pace and scale of quantifiable water quality improvements in Iowa is the mission of the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance (IAWA) launched today by agricultural and environmental stakeholders at a news conference in Des Moines.

Created and funded by Iowa Corn Growers Association, Iowa Soybean Association and Iowa Pork Producers Association, the alliance (www.iowaagwateralliance.com) will increase farmer awareness of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy and their adoption of science-based practices proven to have environmental benefits.

Gov. Terry Branstad, Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds, Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey and Iowa Department of Natural Resources Director Chuck Gipp participated in the announcement held at the Iowa State Capitol. They recognized the critical role farmers play in the strategy's success and the role IAWA will serve in facilitating their engagement and participation.

"Farmers are problem solvers and they rise to any challenge," Branstad said. "Iowa's approach to positively impacting water quality as established in the nutrient reduction strategy is unprecedented nationally in both its scope and scale. The alliance will generate additional momentum to the benefit of all Iowans, rural and urban."

The non-profit alliance is headquartered at the Iowa Soybean Association in Ankeny. It's governed by a board of directors chaired by ISA CEO Kirk Leeds. Craig Floss, Iowa Corn CEO, serves as vice chair while Rich Degner, Iowa Pork Producers CEO, serves as secretary-treasurer. Additional board members will be added.

"A simplistic, regulatory scheme will not improve water quality nor will another marketing campaign touting the importance of farming," Leeds said. "Serious matters demand a serious approach and farmers are committed to achieving results. The IAWA is one more example of their readiness to invest private resources to make a real and meaningful impact."

Organization leaders say the alliance will leverage private partnerships and investments to ramp up public support. The nutrient reduction strategy, they say, is still in its early implementation and private support is critical to boost long-term investments and progress.

Sean McMahon will serve as IAWA executive director. He lives in Cumming, Iowa and presently directs The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) North America Agriculture Program. He also served as state director of the Iowa Chapter of TNC and prior to that, directed national land stewardship campaigns with the National Wildlife Federation.

McMahon said he relishes the opportunity to serve, adding that the effort will take time and many partners and collaborators to achieve the necessary reductions in nutrient loss at the scale that's needed.

"I welcome the opportunity to lead such a unique and important effort because I care deeply about Iowa's natural resources and improving our water quality for current and future generations of Iowans," said McMahon, who will begin his role with IAWA Sept. 15. "Iowa producers have a crucial role to play in helping meet the growing domestic and international demand for food, feed, fiber and fuel and they can do so in an increasingly sustainable manner.

"I look forward to drawing upon my experiences and relationships in both the agricultural and environmental communities to help make significant improvements in Iowa's water quality."

One of McMahon's first responsibilities will be to hire additional IAWA staff including a program-project manager and communications manager. In addition to increasing awareness of the nutrient strategy and increasing the adoption rate of conservation practices, the team will:

- Enhance understanding by the public and key decision makers about the needed flexibility in addressing nonpoint nutrient sources impacting water quality;
- Support Iowa State University and other committed partners in developing environmental performance metrics and measurements supported by credible data; and
- Securing significant funding from public and private sources to accomplish the IAWA's mission and goals.

The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy approved last year is a science-based initiative to reduce nitrate and phosphorous loads in Iowa waterways from point and nonpoint sources by 45 percent.