

## 2026 Appreciation Banquet

By Elizabeth Davis

The Bates County Soil and Water Conservation District Annual Cooperator Appreciation event was held March 19, 2026, at the Adrian Optimist Building, Adrian, MO. 63 people attended and enjoyed a catered meal served by The Coop.

The program included speakers from partner agencies. Katrina O'Farrell, District Conservationist for FOSA 4A which covers Bates, Vernon, Barton and Jasper Counties. Katrina went on to say "The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Soil and Water District have a very unique partnership where we share resources, staff and customers. We strive to work with each other in order to service the producers in not only Bates County but throughout the FOSA and State. Cheyenne Reinke, NRCS Soil Conservationist and I are the only NRCS Staff assigned to Bates County. We are grateful for the help provided by Soil & Water 50/50 Technician position out of Vernon County and other counties for filling in while we are still unable to hire additional staff. Bates County is currently managing 17 CSP Contracts & 50 EQIP Contracts. We have issued about \$665,141 in EQIP and \$171,777 in CSP Payments in FY 25 and \$477,487 EQIP in FY26 to date. We are in the process of assessing and ranking several new FY26 CSP & EQIP Applications, including some new EQIP & CSP initiatives for this year including (but not limited to) the Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP) and the RCPP Mo Targeted Watershed which includes a small watershed targeted area in the Northwest corner of Vernon County/SW Corner of Bates. If any of you have questions about CSP or EQIP Programs feel free to stop by the office and make an appointment with Cheyenne Reinke or myself".

Jim Plassmeyer, DNR Director of the Soil and Water Program, gave a reviewed the history of the sales tax related to the need for funding to support the state parks and addressing soil erosion in the early 1980s. The tax was last approved by 80% of the voters in 2016 and is up for renewal in 2026. The funds from the tax support upgrades to state parks such as new playground equipment, trail improvements and other building upgrades. The tax supports the state cost-share program and soil and water conservation district administration costs. Since the beginning of the tax there has been over 194 million tons of soil saved which could fill 39,629 Olympic size swimming pools. There has been over \$975 million from the sales tax paid to landowners installing over 294,426 conservation practices. In Bates County since 2016 there have been \$1.6 million paid to landowners to install 314 conservation practices saving 57,383 acres.

Brad Powell, Missouri STAR coordinator, explained that Saving Tomorrows Agriculture Resources program is a national, non-profit organization leading work with state level affiliates and conservation partners to empower farmers and ranchers to choose conservation as the standard on all agricultural lands to ensure a legacy of economic sustainability and clean, abundant water and healthy soils for future generations. Designed and led by producers, the STAR tool utilizes science and experience to target local solutions for local natural resource concerns, and to support farmers and ranchers on their conservation journey – wherever they are. The STAR framework inspires, guides and standardizes conservation practice adoption and implementation across a variety of agricultural production systems.

State Representative, Dane Diehl, talked about what it's like to raise a family in Bates County while being a representative, discussed the counties that he covers as a representative (Bates, Vernon, Cedar), mentioned the bills that he has sponsored and the ones he is supporting and talked about water rights and solar energy.

The Annual Fourth Grade Poster Contest is always a favorite part of the banquet, and this year was no exception. This year's theme was "Soil. Where it all Begins." 178 fourth graders from eight area schools participated. A first-place winner is selected from each class; four county winners are then selected from this group and announced at the banquet. The top contest winners from each class receive a ribbon and a cash prize.

This year's Bates County winners are as follows:

4<sup>th</sup> Place – Ellie Powell – Miami Elementary, daughter of Craig & Kayla Powell

3<sup>rd</sup> Place – Holtin Gander – Hume Elementary, son of Kayla Gander

2<sup>nd</sup> Place – Briella Dizney – Adrian Elementary, daughter of Brian & Starla Dizney

1<sup>st</sup> Place – Dyxon Reinke – Butler Elementary, son of Tyler & Cheyenne Reinke



Each county winner received a plaque in addition to the ribbon and cash prize for their first-place class win. The first-place county poster will advance to the State level competition. State Poster Contest winners will be announced at the Annual Training Conference held in November, at TanTarA Resort. We would like to thank the schools, teachers and parents for allowing their students to be a part of this activity. We are especially thankful to all the students who submitted a poster. You are the future of our conservation nation. All of the posters showed a genuine interest in preserving our Natural Resources through good conservation practices.

Board Members in attendance were Mike Rapp, Chairman; David Yarick, Vice-Chairman; David Thurman, Treasurer and Tyler Reinke, Member. Ramon Arancibia, Secretary of the board, was unable to attend.

Personnel attending were NRCS Staff: Katrina O'Farrell, Cheyenne Reinke. MDC Staff: Austin Worth. DNR Staff: Cody Tebbenkamp and Jim Plassmeyer. SWCD Staff: Elizabeth Davis and Victoria Bruck.

We would like to thank everyone that attended our Appreciation Banquet. Your presence was much appreciated, and we hope the evening was as enjoyable for our guests as it was for our Board Members and Staff.