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Indiana's Forage Crisis



Conservation crusader



READY TO TRAVEL: Gene Schmidt will take his Hoosier common sense across the country this year as secretary-treasurer of NACD.

education and communication.

"I feel that a big part of NACD's role is communicating with these local districts about how we can work together," he says. "But we also need to do a better job of educating the general public, very many of whom have no clue what conservation or agriculture is about."

"We in conservation and agriculture haven't done a very good job of telling our own story. As a result, some of the problems we have are our own fault. Even in rural areas, a lot of kids riding the school bus today can't tell corn from soybeans. If I had to pick one thing I'd like to say to farmers, it would be to take every opportunity you can to tell people about what you do and why you do it."

Big challenges

Schmidt identifies some of the biggest conservation issues in the U.S. today. Leading the pack is the strong urge some feel to release Conservation Reserve Program lands for cropping. Then there are urgent water resource problems in the Southeast. Meanwhile, implementing more conservation practices to reduce the effects of major weather events, like Hurricane Katrina, remains a challenge.

"But the list goes on," states Schmidt. "There's no shortage of things that need to be done."

Boone writes from Wabash.

By **DARRELL BOONE**

LAPORTE County farmer and longtime conservationist Gene Schmidt was a double winner recently in Reno, Nev. But it didn't happen at the city's famed casinos. Instead, it was at the annual conference of the National Association of Conservation Districts.

Schmidt was elected as the organization's secretary-treasurer and also received the

Key Points

- Hoosier is elected to national conservation post.
- Same Hoosier recently received the NACD President's Award.
- Communication, education are challenges for conservation.

NACD President's Award. He says he was especially touched by the President's Award.

"I was really humbled by

that award," relates Schmidt. "I'd worked closely with the late NACD president, Olin Sims, and know the type of leadership and commitment that he brought to conservation, which makes this award that much more meaningful."

Sims was killed in an accident. He selected Schmidt for the award before his death, unbeknownst to Schmidt.

In his new post as secretary-treasurer, Schmidt will be one

of NACD's top four elected officials. While his first responsibility will be to oversee and manage the financial aspects of NACD, the job goes well beyond that.

Within NACD, four officers and seven regional directors share responsibility for crisscrossing the country to provide leadership and assistance to more than 3,000 local conservation districts. For Schmidt, a big part of that leadership role is

■ To learn more about what makes Gene Schmidt so passionate for conservation, see Page 33.

