

## The 1956 National Matches

At a meeting held in New Orleans, Louisiana, early in 1954, Iowa was designated by the National Association of Soil Conservation Districts as host to the 1956 National Field Days and Plowing Matches. Soon after the decision, Jasper County was named as site for the 1956 event. Outstanding achievements in soil conservation, a continuous fourteen-year record of plowing matches, two state champion plowmen, an interested group of district soil commissioners, an exceedingly capable work unit conservationist, excellent rural-urban relations, a strong county bankers association, and dozens of signed pledges of cooperation were important factors in the selection of Jasper County.

A tailor-made site for the 1956 National was offered in the Washington Center community. Henry Steenhoek, a strong conservation enthusiast, had bought a run-down, hilly farm much in need of rebuilding. In the same section, the Daft sisters and Mr. and Mrs. Joe Cross had a farm where conservation has been practiced for several years. Across the road were the farms of Walter Telfer and Roland Krebs. Other co-operators with the event in that area, almost all of whom



were also co-operators with the Jasper District, were: Esther Cross, Josie Daft, Ed Slings, Lyle Schmitt, Charles and Francis Hadsall, Ed Craig, Kenneth Berkey, Lester and Wm. VanPeursem, Melvin Guy, Maggie Hayes, Vinton Ward, Howard, John, Dave, and S. DenHartog, Earl McReynolds, Luke and Maggie VanderLinden, Adrian VandeKraan, Gerritt Lourens, Ferd Brunk, Earl Baird, and Martin VanZee.

The site committee, mindful that show places were not required, lost no time in designating the Washington Center Watershed for the 1956 event.

Some of the most elaborate planning ever to go into any project was done for the 1956 National. The name "Operation Conservation" was chosen. Soil Commissioners Merrill Anderson, Harold DePenning, and Joe Cross then authorized John Wilson, veteran work unit conservationist, to proceed. An executive committee was carefully selected and was headed by Anderson, a young Newton farmer, and a leader in Farm Bureau and Grange circles. Others named were Joe Mc-Klveen, Prairie City lumber dealer and Lions Club president; Tim Campbell, Jr., Newton attorney and Rotarian; Howard Bell, Colfax banker and Community Club official; Al Disrud, Monroe editor and Kiwanis club president; Lawrence Hammerly, pioneer Jasper County conservationist; and Francis Hadsall, young farmer and 1949 National Plowing Match runner-up.



The Jasper County Bankers Association underwrote a \$5,000 loan to the Field Days group. A \$20,000 budget, to be financed by displays, was planned. A great deal of care was taken in the selecting of committee chairmen and members. Ten of the group went to the 1954 National at Olney, Illinois. Then, in 1955, an air-conditioned bus was engaged to transport 22 Jasper County leaders to Wabash, Indiana.

The dates, September 20, 21, and 22, were selected for the 1956 event. Hundreds of volunteers were enlisted, and sales of display space were started a year ahead of time.

Work on the Steenhoek and other farms actually started early in 1954. Among the things done prior to the event were tiling, putting in a tube and riser structure to control erosion and possible flood waters, establishing waterways, completing diversion terraces and pasture improvement, demonstrating tillage, testing crop varieties, remodeling and home improvement, building a livestock watering pond, and erecting a culvert drop-box. Unfortunately, severe drought in 1955-56 hampered plans and severely reduced crop yields.

By doing some work ahead of the Field Days, and much more while the event was underway, the committee made "Conservation City," as the area was called, a city complete with water, light and telephone facilities, an official newspaper and post office, radio and TV broadcasts, etc.



Hundreds of other preparations were made by the committees, numbering a thousand persons by contest time. The committees and chairmen were:

Concessions & Exhibit — Chess Bell  
Emergency Radio — Bob Denniston  
Facilities — Leslie French  
Farm Family Activities — Belva Covey  
Finance — Roger Wheeland  
Flying Farmers — Frank Krohn  
General Traffic — Jack Wormley  
Grounds Traffic — Royal Cross  
Hospitality — Neal Hammer  
Livestock Exhibit — Henry Kling  
Materials & Equipment — Jet Adams  
Planning — Harold DePenning  
Plowing Contests — James L. Paul  
Program & Special Events — Henry Little  
Publicity — E. K. Shaw  
Wagon Train — Earl Brubaker  
Water — Wiley Roberts  
Youth Activities — Jasper Risdal  
Sheep Dog Trials — L. C. McLean  
Utilities — J. W. Ferguson

As for the 1956 Plowing Matches, James Paul and the Executive Committee named Herb Plambeck of WHO-TV as Director, with Frank Mendall, Iowa Soil Conservationist Service Director, in charge of the contour section, and Dale Hull, Iowa State College Extension agricultural engineer, to head the level land division. Plowmen from more than a dozen states, most of them 1956 state contest winners, were invited to make up the



strongest entry list ever to compete on American soil. Prizes exceeded \$1,500. Top national and Iowa farm leaders were named to officiate. Feature of the Plowmen's Banquet was presentation of sixteen All-American plowmen awards and the introduction of the "Queen of the Furrow." Newton JC's arranged the elaborate parade.

Top Iowa farm and conservation leaders were named to an advisory committee including: Frank Schaller, Iowa State College; James Foster and Othie McMurry of the State Soil Conservation Committee; Harlan Backhaus, S.C.S.; Wayne Pritchard, Soil Conservation Society of America; Clyde Spry, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture; Ed Baur, NASCD; Grover Hahn, Iowa County Extension President; and William Mitchell, of the Iowa Association of Soil Conservation Districts.

Mindful that 1956 was another presidential election year, and that attendance might again reach the 100,000 mark, officials extended early invitations to the National Republican and Democratic party chairmen to have their candidates deliver their farm speeches at the National in Iowa. Radio and TV networks made early plans to cover the plowing and related events. Other program highlights planned for the 1956 event included the University of Iowa Scottish Highlanders and the International Sheep Dog trials.

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