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**CONTACT:** Michael Woods | 217-744-3414 (O), 309.721.9902 (C)

**Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD)  
Welcomes Dr. Michael Woods as New Chief Executive Officer**

**Springfield, IL** – The Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD), a grass roots organization founded in 1948 to represent and empower Illinois’ Soil and Water Conservation Districts, is thrilled to announce the appointment of Dr. Michael Woods as its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Woods, with more than 30 years of community organizing, education, and government experience is an accomplished and visionary leader, and brings a wealth of experience to AISWCD. With a proven track record of driving growth and innovation in the agricultural industry through conservation and education, Woods is poised to lead AISWCD into a new era of inspiration and service.

Woods succeeds Grant Hammer, who announced his departure from the association effective December 31st. His appointment comes after an extensive selection process by the board.

“We are delighted to welcome Dr. Woods as our new service-oriented leader and chief executive officer” stated Tom Beyers, AISWCD Board President. “His exceptional leadership skills, strategic insights, and deep industry knowledge made him the ideal choice to lead the AISWCD. We have great confidence in his ability to steer the Association towards even greater achievements that support the mantra, clean water, healthy soils.”

Woods has experience leading multidisciplinary, cross-functional teams across a wide range of public and private sectors. Additionally, he is well-versed in grassroots organizing, fiscal management, strategic planning, training, and stakeholder engagement.

“I could not be more honored to lead this association,” Woods says. “At its core, AISWCD is an assembly of innovative and inspired conservation professionals who seek to protect Illinois’ greatest resources...soil and water. AISWCD is an essential voice and partner for the 97 Soil and Water Districts and hundreds of SWCD staff and board members across the state doing transformational work in all 102 Illinois counties. As CEO, I will strive to enable our association, partners, and stakeholders to achieve even greater success in fulfilling our shared vision of clean water and healthy soils.”

“Woods’ enthusiasm for framing key issues, harnessing creativity, securing vital resources, and building conservation alliances will be instrumental in driving AISWCD’s continued service and voice for conservation” stated Grant Hammer, former AISWCD Executive Director. “Under his guidance, we are confident that AISWCD will reach new heights and create lasting value for all stakeholders.”

In Dr. Woods’ previous role as the Manager of the Division of Natural Resources within the Illinois Department of Agriculture, he successfully elevated focus on conservation, leveraged vital resources and united partners with a vision to enhance the states commitment to soil and water conservation.

“Dr. Woods played a vital role in building out the Illinois Department of Agriculture’s conservation initiatives” stated Jerry Costello II, Director Illinois Department of Agriculture. “The IDOA team looks forward to continue our strong working relationship with the AISWCD as we have a shared vision of ensuring that the agricultural industry is resilient to shifts in weather while protecting our soil and water resources across the state.”

“In his prior leadership role with the Illinois Department of Agriculture, Dr. Woods showcased his commitment to engaging diverse and divergent voices into the conservation conversations and seeking vital resources to support soil and water conservation capacity building needs,” Sarah Earles, SWCD Employee Group Co-Chair. “AISWCD is poised for even greater success in the future because of the depth of knowledge, capacity and abilities Woods brings to this new leadership role, and the SWCD employees are primed to work with the Association through grassroots advocacy, education and partnerships.”

"Dr. Woods has been seen as a vital voice in the Illinois environmental community, and his new leadership for AISWCD is sure to elevate and amplify a message that ensures our mutual vision of healthy soils, clean water and healthy communities" said Eliot Clay, Land Use Program Director, Illinois Environmental Council. "IEC is thrilled to advance our partnership with AISWCD under Woods’ leadership as he has earned a reputation across the state as a voice for advancing conservation strategies that make Illinois agriculture and communities more resilient.”

“My vision for the Association centers around increased service, organizational resiliency, and an amplified voice for conservation professionals” declared Woods. “With this clear direction, AISWCD is poised to tackle the challenges of the ever-evolving conservation sector landscape and capitalize on emerging opportunities.”

### **About Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts:**

The Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD), is a grass roots organization formed in 1948. It is made up and serves Illinois’ 97-member Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). Soil & Water Conservation Districts work to protect Illinois’ greatest assets – the rich, fertile soils and water resources of the state through strategic conservation efforts. Soil and Water Conservation Districts, working in conjunction with agricultural as well as environmental stakeholders, have for decades over played a central role in efforts to protect and sustain the viability of Illinois’ natural resources for future generations.

**About Michael Woods:**

A self-proclaimed Conservation Crusader and the CEO of the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Dr. Michael Woods works at the intersection of policy, education, communication, and advocacy to find creative, practical solutions for better soil and water conservation across Illinois. Responsible for overseeing all facets of the association, Dr. Woods drives the mission, operations, and engagement with the board of directors and members.

Exuding a dynamic, engaging, and influential leadership style that motivates, Michael has successfully aided in securing extensive investments into Illinois' soil and water conservation and capacity building initiatives. Michael is a strong leader within the Illinois agricultural industry and throughout the conservation sector, making him a dynamic advocate for STAR. He has extensive experience as a connector, fundraiser, educator, and communicator focused on agriculture, conservation, and grassroots community development, serving as a catalyst for the agricultural industry over his 30+ year career.

A native of Illinois, Michael holds a PhD from Iowa State University in Agricultural Education, along with a Masters in Extension Education and a Bachelors in Agricultural Communications from the University of Illinois and an associate in agriculture from Black Hawk East. Prior to joining AISWCD, Michael worked for the Illinois Department of Agriculture, Cornell University Extension, Illinois College, University of Illinois Extension, Michigan State University, Iowa State, Slovak Agricultural University, Ukrainian Agricultural University, Oscar Mayer Foods, and Bader Rutter Advertising. He is blissfully married, has three daughters, one son, a dog, and over 50 chickens and runs a 5-acre community-based farm.

**For media inquiries or more information, please contact:**

Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
Michael Woods, CEO

Assoc of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
201 W Lawrence Ave, Springfield IL 62704-2611

Cell: 309.721.9902

Office: 217-744-3414

Fax: 217-744-3420

Web: [www.aiswcd.org](http://www.aiswcd.org)

Email: [michael.woods@aiswcd.org](mailto:michael.woods@aiswcd.org) or [info@aiswcd.org](mailto:info@aiswcd.org)

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