



Curt Sindergard, ISA president
Opening Remarks
ISA On-Farm Network™ 2008 Conference
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Good Morning! And welcome to the Iowa Soybean Association's Annual On-Farm Network™ Conference.

I am sure some of you were present at our first conference in February, 2001. The people who attended that year could all sit in the front row of seats here in this auditorium. This year we have about 500 people registered for the conference, which means that there aren't enough seats here for everyone. That is just one example of how this conference, and the On-Farm Network have grown.

Our initial focus was nitrogen fertilizer management. If you have been involved with this program for long, you have probably been asked why the soybean association is interested in nitrogen fertilizer.

The fact is the first goal of this program is to help farmers improve profits and we are all growing both corn and soybeans. Our second goal is no less important. It is to help growers avoid the unnecessary and sometimes unreasonable interferences with their business that come to us in the form of government regulations.

The more we know about managing nitrogen, the less of it we need. That improves our profits. And when we manage it right, our impact on the environment is minimized.

We benefit. The people who drink water from rivers downstream from our tile lines benefit. These benefits continue all the way down through the watershed, through the Mississippi basin and into the Gulf of Mexico, where hypoxia, caused partially by losses of nitrogen and soil, is still a concern.

Over the past eight years, we've seen that nitrogen applied at less than 100 lbs. per acre can still produce a 200-plus bushel corn crop in a corn-bean rotation – in a good year.

After eight years of on-farm testing across the state, we've seen just about everything nature can throw at us that might affect nitrogen losses.

We know that when we conduct on-farm tests, we can do a better job of predicting needs. Then we can apply only what's needed to get the job done.

We've documented that there can be substantial losses of spring applied liquid nitrogen when weather does not cooperate and we have extremely heavy spring rainfalls like many of us did last year. By testing soils and setting up strip trials with extra nitrogen last spring, we were able to show that losses occurred and we have a system in place that growers can use to recover from what could have been a disaster in corn yields.

We saw again this year that even when we apply enough manure to provide for the total nitrogen needs of corn, yields are still improved by the addition of more nitrogen fertilizer.

Farmers involved in the On-Farm Network have learned to use the tools that have been developed for studying crop nutrient use to look at other practices and inputs.

This past year, working with fungicide makers and farm supply dealers, the On-Farm Network established more than 400 replicated strip trials designed to give us the best study ever of fungicide use in corn and soybeans. No one has as much credible data from on-farm crop fungicide studies as we do.

Today, you'll have the opportunity to hear about studies involving insecticides, lime and soil pH, cover crops, developing an energy audit for your farm, plus a couple dozen other topics that my fellow ISA board member, Dean Coleman, will tell you about in a few minutes.

It is a known fact that what we are doing is being watched by others around the country. We are developing an unprecedented database of information on the impact of a number of practices on crop production.

We also want to emphasize that having the data is not enough. To have an impact, it must be used.

This program has spearheaded a movement to balance science and regulations. The science suggests that manure management regulations don't reflect agronomic performance. This is one place where our data can have an impact.

ISA is not alone this effort. The program began with soybean checkoff dollars and the checkoff remains as the base funding. ISA has leveraged that money with grants, legislative earmarks and in-kind support from a variety of sources. ISA has been awarded four Conservation Innovation Grants over four years, amounting to a total of more than three-and-a-half million dollars. Financial and in-kind support also come to us from a wide variety of private and corporate entities, all of whom have an interest in expanding farmers' understanding of the value of nitrogen and other crop production inputs and practices.

All of this work has two focal points. The first is putting more money in farmers' pockets by helping them learn to better manage production inputs. This might seem less important with prices for corn and soybeans higher than many of us have ever seen, but higher prices don't mean we can ignore proper stewardship. This brings us to focal point number two, which is managing our productive resources and protecting the environment so that we can leave the land more productive than we found it.

On behalf of the Iowa Soybean Association including the directors and staff, welcome to this year's conference and we hope that you find all the information provided today to be very helpful in your operations.