

CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM: *A Good Idea, But Must be Better Funded*

Many farmers had high expectations from the Conservation Security Program.

A number who have participated in the Iowa Soybean Association's On-Farm Network, the CEMSA program, or one of the ongoing Watershed Programs, have found these programs to be helpful in preparing them for the Conservation Security Program (CSP). The evaluations and record-keeping components of these programs are steering them toward improved farm management practices – the very practices that the CSP seeks to reward.

But some have found that the CSP program can be difficult to work through, and has many loose ends that need to be tied up. And at the end of the day, without adequate funding, CSP is doomed to fail.

Gourley Brothers | Hamilton County

Gerry Gourley and his brothers Gerald, George and Gene, have been working with Gary Hammitt, an ISA Agricultural Environmental Specialist, to evaluate their Hamilton County farming operation and help them put an environmental management plan in place through the ISA CEMSA program.

Gourley says the CSP application process was confusing from the farmer point of view. “We went to one of the area meetings NRCS held, and it partially cleared up some of our questions, but it raised some new ones,” he tells.

“We didn't understand the Tier system very well, but Gary explained that, as well as the soil conditioning index (SCI) and the water quality evaluation tool (WQET), so that we could get as high a score as high as possible. It really helped to have the book Gary put

Farmers speak out on the ‘crown jewel’ of conservation programs

together with everything in it for all of our fields. We went through that and in the end it all went extremely well because of the help he had given us,” Gourley continues.

He says one of those fields has been in continuous corn for a number of years, and it has no wildlife habitat or buffer strips around it. For the other

field, it's simply a matter of soil type.

“I'd encourage farmers to look into the program and get prepared before their watershed is selected. The application windows are not that long, and if you wait to start until they open up for applications, it will be very difficult to get things in line,” Gourley says. “The Iowa Soybean Association programs are a great way to do that – they help you get things done ahead of time that will make the CSP application process simpler.”

Hammitt says that the big challenge for the Gourleys was manure. “Since they use an umbilical hose as much as possible, they cut down on compaction and can reduce tillage while enhancing soil quality. The problem came from



George and Gerald Gourley, Hamilton County