

Because Performance Counts...

Iowa's fertile soils, variety of landscapes and ample rainfall present both opportunities and challenges for the future of agriculture in Iowa. Iowa's agriculture system, one that consistently leads the nation in row crop and livestock production, has been fortunate. More than 97% of Iowa land is privately owned and used for agricultural production. The sheer magnitude of this land use indicates that agriculture production significantly impacts the quality of our resources.

Societal expectations of production agriculture are becoming greater. Increasing concerns about nonpoint source pollution, particularly losses of nutrients from farm fields and associated impacts on the environment, are prompting an increasing interest in what can and should be done to bring about environmental improvements. It is clear that society wants improved environmental quality.

Regulations that focus primarily on point-source pollution have done much to protect Iowa's natural resources. The regulatory approach requires a one-size-fits-all mentality. And while regulations define the minimum acceptable practices, they do little to encourage performance above those minimums.

Below are some emerging trends in resource management that continue to present challenges to both livestock and row crop producers.

- Iowa watersheds have been identified as primary contributors to nitrogen in the Mississippi River system, affecting how water is used in downstream states.
- Citizen groups seeking environmental improvement are increasingly turning to litigation.
- The cost of pollution treatment, clean-up and remediation is growing.
- Air and water quality standards will continue to advance, bringing increased pressure on industry to perform.
- Required permits for livestock production will likely increase in both complexity and cost to implement – possibly pushing some producers out of business.
- There remains a lack of credible data regarding standards and management practices. For this reason, changes, whether mandated by legislation or made voluntarily, may not result in expected environmental improvements.
- Success of using agricultural Best Management Practices is difficult to assess.
- Farmers are concerned about how policies will impact their management flexibility and profitability.

Making it happen in Iowa

Iowa farmers pride themselves on being good stewards of the natural resources they manage and want to make the right decisions about environmental issues. Having those closest to the land making management decisions that considers both economics and the environ-

ment would be beneficial to Iowa's environment.

ISA's Environmental Programming works with farmer producers across multiple scales – field, farm and watershed – and uses information technology such as remote sensing, global positioning and geographic information systems as key tools in achieving performance. With our programs we provide technical assistance for planning, evaluation and communications, to both individual farmers and farmers who are part of organized watershed efforts. These services include the following:

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- **CEMSA Initiative:** A project to implement a feasible management system framework for working farms, improving profitability and management efficiency while demonstrating measurable environmental quality improvements.

- **Watershed Management Programming:** Project-based programming, working with multiple local, state and federal partners and collective groups of farmers, using technology for improving management efficiency and profitability, and demonstrating measurable progress in meeting national water quality objectives for agriculture at a watershed level.

- **On-Farm Network™:** A grower-based group using technology and in-field evaluation to document performance and enable growers to fine-tune their management based on performance.

These programs have provided technical support to hundreds of Iowa farmers to date, helping them collect credible data and document their good performance and/or gaining confidence for changing management. In some cases, farmers involved in ISA programs are better positioned to participate in working land conservation incentive programs, like the Conservation Security Program.

A variety of audiences are receiving information about substantive results. The key purpose of **Field, Farm & Watershed** is to make growers and others aware of the results of the ISA programs and encourage more growers to participate.

The programming is supporting new working relationships with many diverse partners at local, state and federal levels. Outputs of these projects are providing educational information to policy makers and agencies regarding new concepts and methods for developing voluntary, incentive-based options for conservation on working lands.

Performance Counts!



Roger Wolf
ISA Director of
Environmental Programs