

Farmers Find Value in Iowa Soybean Association Watershed Programming

Watershed programming started at the Iowa Soybean Association in 2001. It was designed to provide leadership and applied environmental research to farmers, while working cooperatively with locally-organized watershed improvement efforts.

Activities include data collection and analysis, communications and outreach, technical assistance for individuals and area-wide planning. And throughout, the work has illustrated the value of monitoring, measuring and validating performance as part of a comprehensive watershed plan.

Performance data is collected on priority topics – such as nitrogen management and water quality. By doing this, the Iowa Soybean Association can either lead or contribute to ongoing learning about the effects of implementing management practices to enhance water quality and farming efficiency.

The watershed work has grown from a single watershed in the beginning to four participating watersheds today. Each of the four watersheds is unique from the standpoints of production and land use, and variability in soil and weather.

Two watersheds in Iowa – Boone River and Pike Run Creek – have been identified by a non-profit environmental group called The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as sites focused on conserving aquatic diversity in Iowa. The Iowa Soybean

Association and TNC are working together with farmers in these two watersheds to learn about the efficiency and the effectiveness of new management techniques in hopes of finding a way to meet the goals of both farmers and TNC.

Boone River Project

The Boone River project area is a 20,000-acre prairie pot-hole watershed in west-central Hamilton County. A tributary of the Des Moines River – a secondary source of water for the city of Des Moines – the Boone River watershed is dominated by row crop and confined animal feeding operations.

Mark Claude farms in Webster City. He lists several reasons for being involved in the Boone River watershed project.

“We wanted to explore the idea of reducing N rates with our side-by-side strip tests to see if we can impact the environment and find ways to apply less nitrogen while maintaining optimum yields,” he says. “In the long run, the importance of these trials might go beyond possible environmental impact. We’re seeing how the high costs of fertilizer and fuel alone might force farmers to learn to do this kind of research on their farms.”

Pike Run Watershed

Pike Run is a slow-moving tributary of the Cedar River in eastern Iowa. There is significant corn and soybean produc-

