

Mark Claude



Dave Cunningham



tion with many grass and wetland areas. The soils are very light-textured and there are few drainage tiles. Both watersheds have already stimulated action and thinking on the part of farmers participating in them.

G. David Schmidt owns a row crop operation and manages a cow-calf enterprise in the Pike Run watershed near West Liberty, Iowa. Schmidt says that the idea of a watershed project interested him as a farmer for several reasons. “Like everyone else, I’m interested in doing my part to keep our water in good shape. And with fuel and fertilizer prices what they are, finding ways to use nitrogen more efficiently might not only improve water quality, but it seems obvious that it will help me financially. When you think about it, most of the things we are learning make sense. It’s just good management. And the sooner you start, the sooner you’re going to gain from it. I would encourage anyone to get involved, because you have everything to gain and nothing to lose.”

West Buttrick Creek – a high-priority watershed

Buttrick Creek is a 27,000-acre watershed located in the Raccoon River watershed in west-central Iowa. Early on, it was identified as a high-nitrate tributary of the Raccoon River. The Iowa Soybean Association is in its fourth year of N management evaluation of cornfields in the watershed, as well as water monitoring by both hand and automated sampling. The aim is to see if linkages develop between changes in management practices and environmental outcomes.

Dave Cunningham and his brother operate a conventional

row crop operation near Paton. “We signed up for the project because, like everyone else, we’ve seen all the discussion about nutrient contamination in surface waters beyond Buttrick Creek. We wanted to learn whether we needed to change our own nutrient use. If I were to give any advice to other growers, I’d say go ahead and do some research, but go slow. You can’t draw conclusions from one year. We’ll keep looking at variations to see how it shakes out.”

South Fork Watershed – a critical link in the puzzle

South Fork (Iowa River) is a 215,000-acre watershed in the north-central Iowa ‘prairie pothole’ region. Fifty-four percent of the watershed is productive but poorly-drained hydric (or, ‘wetland’) soils. That means that significant tile drainage is needed for farming — which provides a direct conduit from fields to surface waters. Most of the land is in a continuous row crop rotation.

The watershed is home to a large number of confined livestock production facilities, which provide abundant manure and drive a significant percentage of corn on corn.

Alan Kadolph is a farmer from Hubbard, Iowa. Kadolph says, “Everyone is concerned with water quality, but getting farmers involved can sometimes be hard. I have been involved in the Southfork Watershed from the very start after being invited to an informational meeting on the possibility of starting a watershed group. We started from scratch, because there isn’t as much information out there as we thought there was. A watershed is such a complex system that you can’t assume anything – just like in the field, everything has to be proven.”

G. David Schmidt



Alan Kadolph

