

# Iowa Soybean Association and Buttrick Creek

The majority of farmers and landowners in the West Buttrick Creek Watershed, which flows into the Raccoon River, have been working together for several years to study nitrogen use and management at the field, farm and watershed level. The work there predates Iowa Soybean Association involvement.

Taking a proactive approach to nutrient management is not a new idea. Current Iowa Soybean Association On-Farm Network™ efforts in the West Buttrick Creek watershed are rooted in the Raccoon River Watershed project, which started in 1991. Extensive water sampling as part of that project revealed high nitrate levels in Buttrick Creek.

This prompted the Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District to form working arrangements with other entities, including ISA and Des Moines Water Works, to continue monitoring the creek, to implement EQIP programs and to create an organized effort within the watershed to see if land management and crop production practices would affect the nitrate levels in the creek.

This is important in many ways. The farmers and landowners in the area realize that there is a problem. By organizing and working with the outside groups, they are taking ownership of the issue and making changes to try to affect the outcome. Involvement in the Iowa Soybean Association's On-Farm Network nitrogen management studies has allowed farmers to compare their current practices with alternative practices on their own farms, and with practices on other farms in the watershed.

Farmers stand to gain from their efforts through better management, better economics and better environmental stewardship. Farmers in the watershed have become proactive in asking each other, researchers and themselves, "What can I do better?"

They implement their own mini-research trials to see what works best on their own farms. They are able to make changes quickly based on their own and their neighbors' research.

Farmers aren't the only ones who benefit from projects like this. The public benefit, of course, is better land and water stewardship. As we learn more about the impact of farm and land management on water quality through projects like these, we'll recognize a host of environmental quality benefits, ranging from cleaner water to improved fish and wildlife habitat, reduced public expenses

for clean public water supplies, and more. Farmers beyond the watershed will benefit from the knowledge gained and improved environmental impacts upstream.

It's important for the Iowa Soybean Association, as well as other farmer led organizations, to be involved in this and similar projects because these issues do and will impact all farmers. Farmers in West Buttrick Creek have demonstrated their willingness to voluntarily make changes based on sound economic and environmental information. By my way of thinking, voluntary changes are better than legislated changes.

The education role played by ISA has been instrumental in getting this group organized and energized, and programs implemented. The multiple government and private agencies working together are setting a precedent on how future projects can work throughout the state and the country.

The work in Buttrick Creek has been enlightening and encouraging, but it is not finished. I see continued operational changes on farms, continued on-farm evaluations of practices and products, and continued education of farmers, landowners and the public.

I have sampled water at the same site on East Buttrick Creek weekly for about 8 years now. I have worked with the local soil and water conservation district to purchase a spectrophotometer, which measures nitrates in water.

From the work on West Buttrick Creek, Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District now has a weekly sampling program to monitor nitrate in most of the creeks in the county. Other groups can organize watershed projects and do many of the same things that local farmers are doing in Greene County. ISA's goal is to have similar programs in many other watersheds throughout the state of Iowa.



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*(For more information about organizing watershed programs similar to the one in Buttrick Creek, see the article on page 12, go to [www.isafarmnet.com](http://www.isafarmnet.com) on the Internet, or contact the Iowa Soybean Association at 800-383-1423.)*