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# From farm crisis to historic land value highs, Duffy shares the economics of hope

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Farm families and the affordable care act, continued from page 4

Internal Revenue Service provides guidance for qualification and application for the tax credit for employers of 25 or fewer employees who provide health coverage for their employees.

**United States Department of Labor - Affordable Care Act** - [www.dol.gov/ebsa/healthreform/](http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/healthreform/)  
The U.S. Department of Labor site provides legal and technical guidance for employers. A FAQ on key topics such as the notice to employees of coverage options, workplace wellness programs, summary of benefits and coverage requirements, and uniform glossary.

**References**

- <sup>1</sup> Center for Rural Affairs, Jon Bailey
- <sup>2</sup> How Iowa Farmers and Ranchers Get Health Insurance and What They Pay for Health Care, Carol Pryor, Bill Lottero, and Mark Rukavina, The Access Project; Jeffrey Prottas, Brandeis University; Alana Knudson, Center for Rural Health at the University of North Dakota
- <sup>3</sup> How Iowa Farmers and Ranchers Get Health Insurance and What They Pay for Health Care, Carol Pryor, Bill Lottero, and Mark Rukavina, The Access Project; Jeffrey Prottas, Brandeis University; Alana Knudson, Center for Rural Health at the University of North Dakota
- <sup>4</sup> State-by-State Estimates of the Number of People Eligible for Premium Tax Credits Under the Affordable Care Act. Kaiser Family Foundation Issue Brief (November 5, 2013).



**From farm crisis to historic land value highs, Duffy shares the economics of hope**

By Kristin Senty, Communications Specialist, Iowa State University Department of Economics, [ksenty@iastate.edu](mailto:ksenty@iastate.edu), 515-294-9849

**T**he world’s most productive land rests in Iowa, and extension economist Mike Duffy is known as the voice of expertise who relates its worth.

Through his trademark annual Land Value Survey, Duffy shares results and analysis with media, ranging from the New York Times to readers of Wallace’s Farmer. After 25 years, Duffy’s thoughtful delivery is so intertwined with the information itself that it’s hard to imagine one without the other.

Duffy says not a day passes when there isn’t an email or a phone call to answer. But the delivery of anything he shares, he says, is much more than just reporting results. “I know and understand the information that I work with and try to answer people’s questions—all over the board,” says Duffy. “I try to be moderate and work hard to give people as much information as I can so they can form their own opinions.” It’s not just the Land Value Survey he’s responsible for compiling and communicating to the general public—there are also surveys on land ownership, cost of production, and land sales data.

And as the former associate director of the Leopold Center, the chair of the sustainable agriculture program, the former director of the Beginning Farmers Center, or in his current work on soil conservation, there’s a distinct message around conservation and sustainable agricultural practices that he’s well

known for. As he contemplates retirement, Duffy reflects on the fact that he is so closely connected to the information he shares.

“Probably the biggest thing in my whole career has been to learn how to balance societal perspective with individual perspective.”

**Economics of hope**

Duffy honed his balancing skills in his first position with Iowa State University as an extension farm management field specialist in Cedar Rapids, counseling farmers on their financial options during the farm crisis in the 1980s. “For seven days a week I was dealing with people in crisis. There were suicides and even some murders because of the stress. It was a traumatic time, and my role was to deal with people, offer information, and to help them to have hope,” he says. “Those years had a strong influence on me.”

Duffy arrived at Iowa State’s Department of Economics in 1985, starting as an assistant professor and receiving full tenure by 1992. His research interests have focused on conservation, sustainability, small scale farm practices, and an appeal to a more cautionary approach in the use of technology in agriculture.

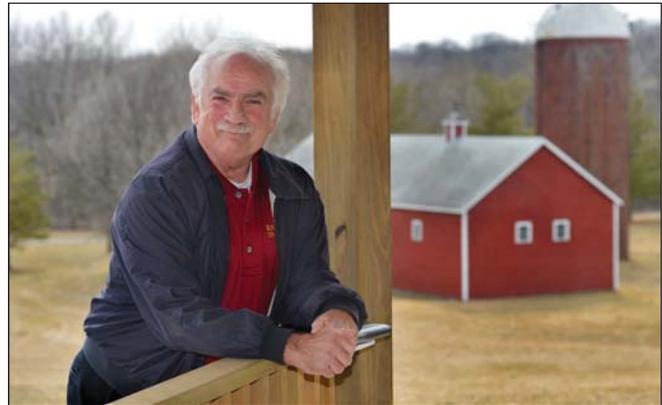
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In an era where technology-driven ag production practices are the predominant approach, he admits some of his views have had a “built-in potential for conflict.”

Yet, rather than “draw lines in the sand,” Duffy is more interested in finding ways to help people meet in the middle. Seeing both sides of the fence he expresses concern about the polarization of views in agriculture today—a polarization he sees as preventing problem-solving on critical issues that affect the future of farming, no matter what side of the fence. He points to the ongoing problem of topsoil erosion and the imminent need to improve conservation. “Farmers are only trying to make a living, whether or not they’re using good soil conservation practices. No one goes out and says, ‘how much soil can I destroy today?’” he says. Yet he knows valuable topsoil will be lost forever without active conservation.

Duffy and a team through the Iowa Learning Farm were recently able to show that erosion results in a loss of revenue for the farmer. He hopes the presentation of information that relates to everyone’s bottom line can help farmers find middle ground. “You certainly don’t move forward by being a Luddite,” he says. “But you also don’t move forward without examining things carefully.

“I try to empower people to see other points of view rather than just harden into one position—I think the future of conservation depends on our willingness to walk a mile in each other’s moccasins.” Paul



Lasley, chair of the Department of Sociology at Iowa State, agrees that Duffy is “really more interested in building bridges” than towing a hard line. The two have worked with each other closely off and on since the mid-1980s on issues around farm policy, rural development, and natural resources, and share a similar background in the use of surveys to convey information to the public.

“Over the years Mike has fostered what I would call a participatory approach,” says Lasley. “He’s come to realize that when you hold your own views too strongly, people don’t talk. So he offers information in ways that help people solve problems.”

“No matter what side of an issue you’re on, ultimately, people not only hear him, but respect him for his wisdom, knowledge, and the years of service he’s given to the public,” Lasley says.

*Reprinted from Stories Magazine, the alumni magazine for the College and Agriculture and Life Sciences. Photo by Bob Elbert.*

Updates, continued from page 1

### Internet Updates

The following Information Files and Decision Tools have been updated on [www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm).

- Monthly Cost of Storing Grain – A2-33 (Decision Tool)
- Computing a Grain Storage Rental Rate – C2-24 (3 pages)
- Renting Extra Grain Storage – C2-25 (2 pages)
- Farm Employee Management: New Employee Orientation – C1-78 (2 pages)
- Farm Employee Management: Farm Safety and Hiring Youth on the Farm – C1-79 (2 pages)
- Leasing Arrangements and Self-employment (Social Security) Tax – C2-41 (2 pages)

### Current Profitability

The following tools have been updated on [www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/info/outlook.html](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/info/outlook.html).

- Corn Profitability – A1-85
- Soybean Profitability – A1-86
- Iowa Cash Corn and Soybean Prices – A2-11
- Season Average Price Calculator – A2-15
- Ethanol Profitability – D1-10
- Biodiesel Profitability – D1-15

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