Investigating opportunities for enhancing farmer adoption of strategically targeted prairie strips in Iowa

Project researchers conducted in-depth interviews with a broad range of stakeholders from state agricultural and environmental groups and agencies. The research identified perceived barriers to adoption and gained stakeholder feedback on practical steps that might be taken to surmount those barriers and broaden awareness of and support for the technology.

What was done and why?

Based on recommendations from a 2011 meeting of stakeholders in the Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairies (STRIPs) program, the investigators proposed this research project. The purpose was to examine and evaluate two needs cited by the stakeholders: 1) identify and leverage existing roles and relationships to build the concept of multi-functionality and importance of targeted conservation into current programs and partnerships, and 2) identify available physical and social infrastructure (e.g., learning farms, conservation programs, watershed groups) and communication networks that may be used to promote the adoption of prairie strips. Three key research questions were:

1. What do key stakeholders believe about the potential for targeted prairie strips to become a widespread conservation practice in Iowa?
2. What are some practical steps that might facilitate the cultivation of broad support for incorporating targeted prairie strips into the Iowa landscape?
3. What ideas do they have regarding potential demonstration sites that could be part of a strategy for improving the visibility of prairie strips and building support among the natural resource management and agricultural community?

What did we learn?

The results of this research will inform the work of the STRIPS research team (www.leopold.iastate.edu/strips-research-team) as they continue their efforts to move prairie conservation strips from research plots to farm fields. By documenting stakeholder perceptions of the practice’s benefits, barriers to widespread use, and pathways for promotion, the project identified numerous opportunities and leverage points to help in the development of strategies that lead to broader awareness of the prairie strips technology and eventual adoption across Iowa’s agricultural landscape. (See www.prairiestrips.org for more information.)