



Protecting Iowa's Land Legacy: Soil and Water Conservation Policy—Past, Present and Future

Abstract:

Bringing together a broad range of stakeholders to consider how Iowa has dealt with conservation and environmental issues in the agricultural sector was the prime focus of this project. The combination of a two-day conference (Sustaining Our Iowa Land 2015), pre- and post-conference surveys, and educational materials gave participants an in-depth view of the situation.

Investigators:

Neil Hamilton

Matt Russell
Agricultural Law
Center
Drake University
Des Moines, Iowa

The yearlong project relied on surveys, focus groups, legal research, and a two-day conference to explore this issue. While disagreements among stakeholders remain, there were many examples of policy options that resonate with a broad cross section of Iowans including focusing work at the watershed level, expanding the use of cover crops, and increased public funding for conservation focused on data-driven solutions.



P O L I C Y

What was done and why?

This project created a forum for stakeholders to consider how the existing institutions and policy approaches being used to address soil and water conservation may need to evolve to address a series of new issues and challenges shaping Iowa agriculture. The PIs produced educational materials on Iowa's rich legacy of conservation leadership by engaging agricultural sustainability stakeholder groups in regional discussions, and convening a successful state-wide conference on these themes in fall 2015; Sustaining Our Iowa Land (SOIL).

What did we learn?

Short-term impacts include:

- Iowa agriculture stakeholders will use materials from the conference to better understand the challenges and opportunities for improving Iowa water quality.
- Iowa agriculture stakeholders and water quality advocates will continue conversations started at the conference to find common ground and win/win strategies for improving Iowa water quality.
- More Iowa farmers will be encouraged to use practices like cover crops and longer crop rotations.
- Iowans will better understand existing policies and Iowa's precedent from the legislature and Supreme Court in protecting soil.

More than 500 individuals have been reached, as measured by visits to online resources and attendance at regional workshops and the conference.

Long-term impacts, which are more speculative, include:

- Policy solutions to water quality issues will be explored by farmers and municipal water users working together.
- Farmers will innovate to develop and implement more effective farming practices for improving soil health and water quality.
- Stewardship of Iowa farm land increases by integrating strategies for greater soil health and improving water quality.