Non-operator Landownership and Conservation

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Non-operator Landownership and Conservation

Abstract
Presentation to the Iowa Land Tenure Policy Working Group about critical issues in land ownership. Results of a recent landowner survey in two Iowa watersheds also are presented.

Disciplines
Agriculture | Rural Sociology

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Non-operator Landownership and Conservation

Iowa Land Tenure Working Group
April 28, 2011
J. Gordon Arbuckle Jr.
Iowa State University
Objectives

• Overall: More proactive stance toward non-operator landowners could have large conservation payoff
• Examine magnitude of non-operator landownership in Corn Belt
• Review research on implications for conservation
• Present data from recent Iowa study
• Discuss ideas for ensuring conservation on rented land
Percent of farmland rented, Corn Belt

Illinois: 62%
Indiana: 54%
Iowa: 53%

Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture
Land tenure and conservation

- Management practices similar
  - i.e., Tillage, whether conservation or other
- Set-aside program participation similar: CRP, WRP (AELOS 1999)
- Establishment of structural practices w/longer benefit horizons differs
  - Secure tenure = long-term practice adoption (Featherstone and Goodwin 1993; Soule et al. 2000)
NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant Project: Landowners and Operators Caring About the Land (LOCAL) with Conservation Districts of Iowa and Agren, Inc.

Survey of all operators and non-operator landowners in two Iowa watersheds
What is their connection to the land?
Non-operators: There will be a major shift in landowner type

Age: 75

- Former farmer: 37%
- Spouse former farmer: 15%
- Inheritor: 26%
- Investor family ties: 14%
- Investor: 8%
They will hold onto the land, and rent it out.
Landowners will be further removed from their land, both geographically and culturally.
Connection by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Former farmer</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse former</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inheritor</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor family</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investor</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They are less likely to participate in working lands programs
They spend less on conservation (conservation expenditures, last ten years)
They are mostly satisfied with their tenants’ environmental performance
Their operators think they should do more
(“…you or your landlord should implement or improve practice…”)

- Grassed waterways: 30%
- Riparian buffers: 18%
- Terraces: 18%
- Contour buffers: 17%
- Conservation tillage: 11%
They are more concerned about the environmental impact of farming.
Percent who did not know whether or not their land experienced significant erosion during 2008 rains

- Former farmer: 5%
- Spouse: 18%
- Inheritor: 25%
- Investor family ties: 13%
- Investor: 17%
- Total: 14%
Preface in survey:

Several groups in Iowa are thinking about starting a landowner advocate service. Landowner advocates would help landowners to access conservation programs and make informed conservation decisions that ensure that their land is cared for. For example, an advocate might help landowners to find technical and financial assistance to improve wildlife habitat or address soil erosion on their property. Or, they might help landowners to communicate more effectively with renters. A landowner advocate would always work with the landowner and for the landowner.

Three questions: Yes, No, Don’t Know response categories

1. Would you be in favor of a landowner advocate program in Iowa?
2. Would you work with a landowner advocate if it were free?
3. Would you consider paying for landowner advocate services?
Percent “Yes” by Relationship to Renter

- **In favor**
  - Relative: 13%
  - Friend of family: 22%
  - Other: 29%

- **Would use if free**
  - Relative: 15%
  - Friend of family: 28%
  - Other: 38%

- **Would pay**
  - Relative: 3%
  - Friend of family: 6%
  - Other: 4%
Percent “Yes” by Distance

- **In favor**:
  - On the land: 15%
  - <25mi: 31%
  - 25 to 149mi: 32%
  - 150mi or more: 21%

- **Would use if free**:
  - On the land: 24%
  - <25mi: 35%
  - 25 to 149mi: 38%

- **Would pay**:
  - On the land: 3%
  - <25mi: 4%
  - 25 to 149mi: 7%
  - 150mi or more: 6%
Master Farmland Conservationist Program?

Preface in survey:
Several groups in Iowa are thinking about developing a voluntary program to certify farm operators as “Master Farmland Conservationists.” To become a Master Farmland Conservationist, a farm operator would complete approximately 40 hours of coursework and instruction on conservation-related topics including:

- identifying farmland conservation needs,
- understanding state, federal, and other conservation agencies, programs, and resources available to support conservation,
- planning and implementation of conservation practices,
- communicating conservation needs to landowners, and
- marketing conservation skills to landowners.

Operators would be required to complete 3 to 6 hours of continuing education each year to maintain their Master Farmland Conservationist designation. Farm operators would be able to market their Master Farmland Conservationist certification as an asset that would assure landowners that they would care for their land. Please answer the following questions regarding the proposed program.
Master Farmland Certification Program?

Questions: Yes, Maybe, No, Don’t Know response categories

1. Would you be in favor of a Master Farmland Conservationist program that “certifies” farm operators’ ability to apply soil and water conservation?

2. Would you rent to a certified Master Farmland Conservationist over someone who was not certified, if rent did not change?

3. If a Master Farmland Conservationist program were developed, would you want your renter to become a certified Master Farmland Conservationist?
Percent “Yes” or “Maybe” by Relationship to Renter

- In favor
  - Relative: 48%
  - Friend of family: 49%
  - Other: 52%

- Would prefer MFC
  - Relative: 47%
  - Friend of family: 53%
  - Other: 58%

- Would want tenant certification
  - Relative: 41%
  - Friend of family: 45%
  - Other: 48%
Percent “Yes” or “Maybe” by Distance

- In favor:
  - On the land: 42%
  - <25mi: 45%
  - 25 to 149mi: 55%
  - 150mi or more: 58%

- Would prefer MFC:
  - On the land: 49%
  - <25mi: 46%
  - 25 to 149mi: 59%

- Would want tenant certification:
  - On the land: 42%
  - <25mi: 40%
  - 25 to 149mi: 54%
  - 150mi or more: 53%
Conclusions

• Need to recognize that percentage of landowners who are geographically and culturally removed from farming will grow.
• Non-operator landowners care about the environment and the impacts of farming.
• They think conservation systems on their land are adequate, but many of their operators think they could do better.
• How to get them engaged, think about responsibilities of landownership in addition to rights?

Photo courtesy of USDA-NRCS
Non-operators as catalysts?

• Need to cultivate awareness, demand for conservation on their land

• Need to develop outreach strategies to help them get engaged
  – Get outreach materials to them: Web, print
  – Prepare local staff to actively serve them
  – Non-operator-specific programming?

• Mechanisms:
  – Targeted conservation: identification of potential problem spots and proactive engagement
  – Conservation certification or landowner advocate?
Thank you!

More information available at: http://www.soc.iastate.edu/staff/arbuckle.html