



Conservation practice could save Iowa farmers \$265 Million

By Aaron Putze, APR, ISA communications director

Transitioning from conventional tillage to no-till and strip-tillage statewide could save Iowa farmers a whopping \$265 million annually in fuel and equipment costs.

This finding is one of many included in a comprehensive, year-long analysis measuring the effects of conservation on farm profitability. The study was undertaken by the Iowa Soybean Association (ISA) with support from the Walton Family Foundation, Environmental Defense Fund and Iowa-based Regional Strategic, Ltd.

“There are no guarantees in farming, and that includes generating a return on the implementation of every on-farm soil and water conservation practice,” says Heath Ellison, ISA senior conservation agronomist and a principle collaborator in the study’s implementation.

“But, much like other units within a business operation, income opportunities increase by paying close attention to details, maintaining timely records and communicating openly and frequently with landowners, employees and family members.”

Twenty Iowa farmers with extensive interest in conservation practices participated in the study. They farmed a combined 29,000 acres and were geographically dispersed throughout the state. Data was compiled from each operator courtesy of a series of interviews and crop budgets focused on the 2018 cropping year defined as the period following the 2017 crop harvest through the 2018 crop harvest.

Data collected by farmers and shared via interviews were aggregated and summarized. Researchers observed the crop rotations for each farmer and attempted to parse out the economic and yield impacts of conservation practices. Those of particular interest were no- and reduced tillage, nutrient management and cover crop usage.

Wayne Fredericks of Osage participated in the study. The soybean and corn farmer says the findings are worthy of closer inspection by every operator and land owner.

“Seeing is believing, but first-hand experience remains the most effective route to adoption,” says the Mitchell County farmer. “There are no shortcuts to making conservation pay. But profit incentives do exist when a hands-on, disciplined and long-term approach is taken.”

Adam Kiel, ISA director of conservation and external programs, hopes the analysis quantifying farm finance and profit incentives for engaging in conservation practices encourages greater implementation by farmers.

“We have more to learn but this is an important step in scaling up adoption,” Kiel says.

Key Takeaways

No-till, reduced tillage pays dividends for Iowa farmers: [Read here](#)

Reducing nitrogen applications could save farmers millions: [Read here](#)

A northern Iowa farmer's legacy of conservation: [Watch here](#)

Monetizing cover crops improves profitability for Iowa farmers: [Read here](#)

How conservation transitions from one generation to the next: [Read here](#)

Cover crops reduce input costs: [Read here](#)

Northwest Iowa farmer sees benefits of conservation efforts: [Watch here](#)

Manure shows value as a commercial fertilizer replacement: [Read here](#)

Change in weather shifts Iowa farmer's trajectory, saving money, time: [Read here](#)

Recordkeeping is vital to farm success and conservation adoption: [Read here](#)

Cover crops changed this southwest Iowa farm: [Watch here](#)

A summary report of the conservation profitability analysis can be accessed on the [ISA website](#).

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