

# FARMTIMES

## New study shows dynamic shifts in Iowa farmers’ conservation practice use

AMES, IA — A new study from Iowa State University sheds light on the evolving landscape of agricultural conservation in Iowa.

It found that many farmers who adopted two key conservation practices -- cover crops and no-till -- did not continue to use the practices over time.

The research, published in the journal *Society & Natural Resources*, explored farmers’ self-reports of whether they adopted, continued or abandoned the conservation practices between 2015 to 2019. The survey data from more than 3,200 farmers across six major watersheds in the state demonstrates the importance of factoring “disadoption” rates for conservation practices into conservation assessments and goals.

The findings showing high disadoption rates challenges conventional assumptions about conservation practice implementation and offers important insights for policymakers, extension professionals and conservation advocates.

**Adoption is not a one-time decision**

“This study shows that adoption is not a one-time decision—it’s a dynamic process influenced by a range of factors,” said co-author Suraj Upadhaya, former ISU research scientist and current assistant professor of sustainable systems at Kentucky State University. “To meet Iowa’s sustainability goals, we need to understand the degree to which farmers are disadopting conservation practices, and figure out how to help them maintain the practices over time.”

Other researchers on the study were:

J. Arbuckle, professor of sociology and criminal justice, Iowa State

Chris Morris, postdoctoral research associate in sociology and criminal justice, Iowa State

Laurie Nowatzke, social scientist, College of Public Health, University of Iowa

Suraj Uphadaya, assistant professor of sustainable system, Kentucky State University

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Zhengyuan Zhu, professor, Iowa State Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology

Funding came from the Iowa Nutrient Research Center.

**Adoption in flux over time**

Most conservation adoption research operates under the assumption that once a practice is begun, it will remain in use.

Researchers have so far understood very little about how often farmers shift or abandon their conservation practices, according to co-author Arbuckle.

“We used a three-tiered measure of adoption: non-adoption, openness to adoption and adoption,” he said. “We then tracked these adoption status categories from one year to the next. This nuanced approach allowed closer examination of practice use over time, revealing a striking flux in conservation behavior.”

The survey showed that nearly 20% of farmers who

used cover crops in one year had stopped using them by the following year.

Similarly, about 13% of no-till adopters discontinued the practice after one year. These reversals significantly reduced net adoption rates over time.

For cover crops, although 192 farmers moved from a non-adoption status to adopter status over the study period, 142 shifted out of the adoption category, leaving a net gain of 50 individuals—an overall adoption rate increase of only 1.9%.

For no-till, the overall net gain of adopters was only 26 individuals, or 1.0%.

The report also examined differences between watersheds. Of the five watersheds, the Missouri-Nishnabotna watershed that includes the Loess Hills, some of the most erosive landforms in Iowa, showed substantial shifts toward adoption relative to the other watersheds. Farmers there also reported the lowest magnitude of shift out of no-till practices.

**Greater support needed to sustain adoption rates**

The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (INRS) aims to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus runoff into waterways by 45%, requiring widespread adoption of conservation practices. Yet the new study suggests that current conservation support efforts may not be sufficient to sustain long-term practice use.

The state of Iowa and the federal government provide millions in funding for soil and water conservation programs each year, much of that going to short-term incentives in the form of cost share and technical assistance.

The study’s results suggest this support may be insufficient to help farmers maintain practices in the face of the difficult economic and operational realities of specialized commodity production. Factors such as market fluctuations and weather variability can influence farmers’ decisions to adopt or abandon conservation practices.

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The report recommends that conservation programs focus not only on encouraging initial adoption but also on supporting long-term continuance. Strategies could include longer-term financial incentives, regular engagement with adopters and tailored outreach based on regional characteristics.

“We think that providing ongoing engagement and support to adopters beyond the initial one to three years typical of conservation programs would be impactful,” noted co-author and ISU research associate Chris Morris. “We are conducting follow-up research with long-term adopters and disadopters to learn more about the factors that influence practice persistence and abandonment.”

The research team will continue exploring the interplay between individual decision-making and landscape-level influences. Their next phase will model how farm structure, social networks and environmental conditions affect shifts in adoption behavior.

## Iowa NRCS Sets Oct. 10 Cutoff for Conservation Program Applications

DES MOINES, IA - The first application cutoff for Iowa farmers and other private landowners to apply for conservation practices in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 through USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs is Oct. 10.

NRCS accepts conservation program applications on a continuous basis but sets application cutoff dates as funding allows. Iowa agricultural producers and private landowners can apply for NRCS program funding by visiting their local NRCS office. Iowa has 100 NRCS field offices located at USDA Service Centers in every county.

The Oct. 10 application cutoff includes the following NRCS Farm Bill programs:

- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Last year, NRCS obligated about \$61 million to Iowans through CSP, EQIP and RCPP. Iowa NRCS State Conserva-

tionist Jon Hubbert says the demand for conservation assistance in Iowa remains high. “We are committed to supporting Iowa farmers as they make investments in their operations and local communities to keep working lands working, while at the same time improving water quality, soil health, and wildlife habitats,” he said.

**More About NRCS Conservation Programs**

**CSP:** Through CSP, NRCS helps agricultural producers build their operation while implementing conservation practices that help ensure its sustainability. The program provides many benefits including increased crop yields, decreased inputs, wildlife habitat improvements, and increased resilience to weather extremes. CSP is intended for working lands including cropland, pastureland, non-industrial private forest land and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of a tribe.

**EQIP:** Through EQIP, NRCS offers planning and financial

assistance to implement conservation practices such as no-till, cover crops, terraces, grassed waterways, nutrient management, manure management facilities, and pasture management.

The Oct. 10 application signup cutoff includes EQIP initiatives, such as the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI), Prairie Pot-hole Water Quality and Wildlife Program, Organic Initiative, High Tunnel Initiative, and On-Farm Energy Initiative.

**RCPP:** Through RCPP, NRCS co-invests with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to resource concerns.

**More Information**

To learn more about NRCS programs, producers can contact their local USDA Service Center. Producers

can also apply for NRCS programs, manage conservation plans and contracts, and view and print conservation maps by logging into their farmers.gov account. If you don’t have an account, sign up today.

For 90 years, NRCS has helped farmers, ranchers and forestland owners make investments in their operations and local communities to improve the quality of our air, water, soil, and wildlife habitat. NRCS uses the latest science and technology to help keep working lands working, boost agricultural economies, and increase the competitiveness of American agriculture.

NRCS provides one-on-one, personalized advice and financial assistance and works with producers to help them reach their goals through voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs. For more information, visit [nrcs.usda.gov](https://nrcs.usda.gov).

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## LAND SALE AT PRIVATE AUCTION

154.91 acres per original government survey  
Woodbury County, Iowa Farmland

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:**

The Northwest Quarter (NW1/4) of Section Sixteen (16), Township Eighty-eight (88) North, Range Forty-four (44), West of the 5th P.M., Woodbury County, Iowa, EXCEPT A parcel of land located in part of the Southeast Quarter (SE1/4) of the Northwest Quarter (NW1/4) of Section Sixteen (16), Township Eighty-eight (88) North, Range Forty-four (44) West of the 5th P.M., Woodbury County, Iowa, further described as follows:

Commencing at the Northeast (NE) Corner of the Northwest Quarter (NW1/4) of said Section Sixteen (16); thence South Zero Degrees Zero Minutes (S 0° 00.0') West for One Thousand Six Hundred Eighty-one and Four Tenths Feet (1,681.4') along the East line of said Northwest Quarter (NW1/4) to the point of beginning; thence North Eighty-seven Degrees Forty-three Minutes (N 87° 43.0') West for Five Hundred Twenty-eight Feet (528.0'); thence South Zero Degrees Zero Minutes (S 0° 00.0') West for Four Hundred Twenty Feet (420.0'); thence South Eighty-seven Degrees Forty-three Minutes (S 87° 43.0') East for Five Hundred Twenty-eight Feet (528.0') to a point on the East line of the Northwest Quarter (NW1/4) of said Section Sixteen (16); thence North Zero Degrees Zero Minutes (N 0° 00.0') East for Four Hundred Twenty Feet (420.0') along the East line of said Northwest Quarter (NW1/4) to the point of beginning.

Said parcel contains a total of Five and Nine Hundredths Acres (5.09 A.). The East Thirty-three Feet (E 33') of said parcel, containing 0.32 acre, is subject to existing public roadway easement. Said parcel may be subject to any and all other easements of record.

**OWNERS: Terry Waugh and Linda Waugh Revocable Trust, Linda Baedke, Steven Waugh, Lisa Fravel and Kirk Waugh**

**LOCATION:** From Merville head East on Hwy. 20 6.1 Miles; Head South on Knox Avenue .5 Miles; Head West on 160th Street .2 Miles; Head South on Knox Avenue 2.2 Miles; Head West on 180th Street .5 Miles. Subject lies southwest of the intersection of gravel 180th Street and gravel Knox Avenue on the South side of gravel 180th Street.

Cropland - 147.73  
Average CSR 2 - 67.7  
Soil – Monona, Judson, Ida Silty Clay  
PLC Tract Yield (corn) -164  
PLC Tract Yield (beans) - 42  
Current annual real estate taxes: \$4,884.00

*The above figures are not guarantees and are estimates only.*

Seller will be accepting sealed bids on the above-described property until **October 8, 2025**. Any person interested in purchasing the property should submit a bid in writing in total dollars accurately describing the real estate and include their address and telephone number to Barry Thompson, c/o Thompson Law Office, LLP, 4 East Second Street, P. O. Box 219, Kingsley, IA 51028 on or before **October 8, 2025 by 5:00 P.M.** The highest bidders on the property will be invited to a private auction for the final sale of the property on **October 10, 2025 at 10:00 A.M.** The highest bidder on the day of sale will be expected to pay ten percent (10%) of the purchase price on that day and sign a contract for the balance of the purchase price. Seller will provide the buyer with an Abstract of Title showing marketable title on the property. **Closing shall occur on or before March 1, 2026**, when the unpaid balance shall be paid in full. Seller shall pay all the real estate taxes that become delinquent **October 1, 2026**. Buyer shall pay all real estate taxes thereafter. **Possession shall be given March 1, 2026.**

**Any announcements day of sale shall supersede any statements made.  
Seller reserves the right to reject any and all bids.**

**OWNERS – Terry Waugh and Linda Waugh Revocable Trust, Linda Baedke, Steven Waugh, Lisa Fravel and Kirk Waugh**  
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**Barry Thompson and Chad Thompson – Thompson Law Office, LLP**  
4 East Second Street, P. O. Box 219, Kingsley, IA 51028  
Phone: (712) 378-3611

## Heading into Fall

**BY LEAH TEN NAPEL**  
*Extension Field Agronomist*

The calendar has flipped to September, and the cooler weather is hinting at fall right around the corner. Corn and soybean crops are getting closer to maturity, and silage is being chopped.

It is a great time of year to look back on the conditions of the 2025 growing season to get a sense of what we can expect for yields when the combines start to roll.

The growing season began with soil profiles near full of moisture. For northwest Iowa, this is close to 10 inches of moisture in the top 5 feet of the soil profile.

Thankfully, the profiles were not over-saturated, which gave farmers in our area a long open planting season. Crops went in the ground early with few delays, and soil temperatures and conditions made for a suitable environ-

ment for seed germination in most fields.

As the crops emerged, rainfall was adequate and temperatures satisfactory, which led to quick growth in corn and average growth in soybeans. The one major pest during the vegetative growth stages of the crops was weeds, more specifically, Waterhemp. Many of my calls over the beginning of the summer focused on weed control.

Rainfall continued throughout the state, heavier than ideal in some areas of the state. Wind and hailstorms caused damage to crops in pocketed areas of our region. Depending on the growth stage of the crops, some were permanently damaged while others recovered.

As crops continued into the reproductive stages, we began to see some disease pressure. Crops had stayed relatively disease and insect-free up until this time. The main dis-

eases we are seeing now are Southern Rust and Tar Spot in corn. Both diseases vary in severity based on location and hybrid.

Fungicide applications can assist with these diseases depending on the timing of the infection. The yield effects that these diseases cause will vary based on the severity of the disease and the stage of the crop. One major issue growers are dealing with is the cost of pest control. Although additional applications may keep disease pressure low, it may not make economic sense to do so with low grain market prices. Keeping the cost of production low is critically important for farmers at this time.

Overall, I am optimistic about the yields we will see this fall in northwest Iowa, and I believe many farmers are as well. Wishing everyone a safe and prosperous harvest season!

## Preparing for fall manure applications

**BY DANIEL ANDERSON**  
*Extension Agricultural and Bio-Systems Engineering Specialist*

As harvest season begins across Iowa, it is also time to turn attention to fall manure application.

Proper preparation now ensures manure is effectively used as a nutrient resource, supports soil health, and protects water quality.

The Iowa State University Extension and Outreach agricultural engineering team has shared its annual guide on best practices for fall manure application.

This resource covers everything from manure testing

and equipment calibration to optimal timing, soil conditions and safety.

Seasoned applicators and those new to the practice are encouraged to review these reminders to help ensure compliance, efficiency and environmental stewardship.

Read the full article at the new Ag Engineering Extension and Outreach website.

Before heading out to the field, applicators should make sure their Manure Applicator Certification is up to date. Iowa law requires certification for both commercial and confinement site manure applicators.

There are three convenient

options to complete 2025 certification:

1. Visit your county extension office to view a training video.
2. Complete certification online training, including payment, through the Iowa DNR.
3. Schedule a testing appointment at your nearest DNR Field Office.

Early certifications can help avoid delays during application season.

For more information on certification or to access training materials, contact your county extension office or visit the Iowa DNR Manure Applicator Certification website.