



USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference

[Developing Producer Driven Research and Education Programs](#)

The systems research approach used by the UW-Discovery Farms Program evaluates the effects of agriculture on the environment while evaluating the impact of implementation on farm management and profitability. The partnership between Discovery Farms, USGS, and the farm community allows for collection of high-quality research data (water and farm management) in an environment where producers are asking for assistance. The greatest challenge is responding to requests for information. Last year we conducted >100 programs for producers, agency personnel, and consultants. The water-monitoring and design challenges of working on farms is the responsibility of the USGS. UW-Discovery Farms works with the producers to collect farm management and financial data. These on-farm personnel develop strong relationships and work to understand the farming system, management conditions, and value systems of each producer. Understanding producers and knowing what changes they are willing to adopt, allows the program to develop recommendations that are implemented during the study and continued after the study period. This differs from other projects because we don't identify changes in practices before collecting data. Research indicates that most producers don't believe their farms are a significant source of nonpoint pollution; they feel it is other farming systems that are the problem. As a result of these perceptions, UW-Discovery Farms establishes a monitoring program that determines the extent of nutrient and sediment losses on farm. Once losses are identified, meetings are held between producers, researchers, agency personnel, and producer groups to identify practices that will reduce these losses. While there are several challenges the research community must deal with when conducting systems research on commercial farms, the benefits greatly exceed any disadvantages. Involving producers in the design and implementation of the research and giving them an equal stake in identifying changes in management practices is a critical step in improving water quality.

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