



USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference

Integrating Social Science Methods into an Assessment of Conservation Programs

This paper will discuss the contributions of social science methodology to a larger project assessing the impacts of changes in conservation behavior on water quality in a Northern Utah watershed. As part of the national Conservation Effects Assessment Program, our team is working to link data from long-term water quality monitoring efforts with information about conservation behavior among landowners who participated in an intensive USDA watershed project during the 1990s. While we have used official USDA records to assess the 'formal' BMP activities that occurred as part of the project, we have also conducted extensive field interviews with participating landowners to complement the formal file data. Our interviews have given us an ability to (a) understand the complexity of BMP adoption patterns, (b) document variability in the compatibility or viability of different types of BMPs under actual working conditions, (c) track the impact of farm enterprise and land use changes on BMP maintenance and (d) develop a more accurate spatial and temporal record of land management behaviors that are 'water quality relevant' than would have been available from the formal USDA files. Findings suggest that face-to-face contact with project participants provide rich information about project performance and more closely identify the relevant land management behaviors that should be the focus more technical water quality modeling efforts.

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