



USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference

Watershed Resident Determination of Performance-based Environmental Management Incentives

Northeast Iowa residents living in priority watersheds are implementing locally-determined, targeted incentive programs that reward improved environmental performance of refined nutrient and soil management practices. This paper will describe how watershed councils organize around this concept, how private sector organizations support these innovative local demonstrations and how Iowa State University Extension plays a role in the process. One pilot watershed has completed a cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and refinement of their program. The results will be reviewed along with first-season experiences of two other watersheds. The outcomes of these demonstrations have implications for environmental policy, natural resources education and sustainable watershed management. In these watersheds, performance-based management means residents can understand and interpret science-based measures of water quality improvement (performance). Producers can reasonably work toward environmental stewardship goals when they have objective measures (such as the cornstalk nitrate test and the phosphorus index) to evaluate their progress, and incentive programs to reward participants. Performance on the watershed level is assessed by aggregating farm results and by chemical and benthic macroinvertebrate monitoring. Councils annually evaluate and refine their programs for improved environmental performance and cost effectiveness. The councils take local action to reduce future regulation. Incentive funds from the Iowa Farm Bureau and the Iowa Corn Growers managed in flexible, nontraditional ways were crucial to empowering the councils and establishing the voluntary incentive model. Locally-determined performance-based solutions depend on watershed residents having access to education on science-based assessments, facilitation services for council organization, technical assistance with index measures and partnerships for water monitoring. Extension has provided all of these services to the watersheds.

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