



2008 USDA-CSREES National Water Conference
Sparks, NV

Farmer Conservation Practices: The Promise & Challenge of the Citizen Effect

Lois Wright Morton and Chih Yuan Weng

Abstract Text:

Agriculture is a major cause of non-point source water pollution in the Mid-West. Excessive nitrate, phosphorous, and sediment levels degrade the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico. In this research we ask, to what extent can citizen involvement help solve the problem of non-point source pollution? Does connecting farmers to farmers and to other community members make a difference in moving beyond the status quo? To answer these questions we examine the satisfaction level of Iowa farmers and landowners with their current conservation measures as a proxy for willingness to change. A survey of 360 conservation minded farmers obtained from a random sample of 75 HUC 12 Iowa watersheds reveals that 27 percent of the variance among farmers is explained by a combination of beliefs about the seriousness of water pollution, personal, civic, and expert connections. Significantly, the more farmers talk with other farmers the more likely they are satisfied with their conservation efforts. However, the more frequently farmers talk to friends and neighbors that don't farm they are significantly likely to not be satisfied with their conservation efforts. Further, significantly the more social organizations farmers belong to-e.g. more non-farmers they interact with in a group setting-the more likely they are to be dissatisfied with their level of effort being adequate to protect local water bodies. These findings suggest the personal and civic connections among farmers and communities are important in explaining perceptions of how adequate conservation measures are. These perceptions have implications for farmers' willingness to go beyond current actions and more actively engage in solving local watershed problems...and explain why they may not currently be engaged in additional actions.

Impact Statement:

These findings suggest the personal and civic connections among farmers and communities are important in explaining perceptions of how adequate conservation measures are. These perceptions have implications for farmers' willingness to go beyond current actions and more actively engage in solving local watershed problems...and explain why they may not currently be engaged in additional actions.