



2009 CSREES National Water Conference; St. Louis, MO

Social Acceptability of BMPs: Results from the Eagle Creek CEAP Project

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Abstract:

Agricultural best management practices (BMPs) or conservation practices are designed to help mitigate the impact of potentially adverse effects of agricultural land management. However, BMPs are only effective if land managers find them acceptable and are willing to adopt them. There is a relatively large literature exploring factors that lead to a producer's voluntary adoption of BMPs. Generally, this literature has not examined specific attributes of BMPs that may affect adoption. To address these limitations, this study qualitatively analyzed in-depth interviews to determine which characteristics make six common BMPs more or less acceptable to agricultural producers. Forty-five interviews were conducted with producers in two watersheds in Indiana. The producers were asked about their use of conservation practices and the reasons behind their decisions. This study outlines the specific characteristics of each conservation practice that are most important in either facilitating or impeding adoption of those practices. Results indicate that high levels of relative advantage (e.g., reduce inputs, time savings, and on-farm and environmental benefits), compatibility (with farm system and needs of producer), and observability (observing practice's advantages) are most important in increasing adoption of conservation practices. Low levels of relative advantage and perceived incompatibility of practices were found to be most important in non adoption of conservation practices. Risk and complexity associated with specific practices were only infrequently found to be limit adoption. The only motivating factors for adoption of nutrient and pest management practices pertained to relative advantage of these practices, but reasons were more diverse for other practices. Trialability was important only for no-till and cover crops and suggests scope for financially supporting even small test plots on producers' land. Conservation promoters should generally focus on raising awareness of on-farm and financial benefits of conservation practices, the necessity of practices, and compatibility of practices. However promoters also need to be aware that motivations and limitations of adoption differ by type of practice and outreach and education efforts should vary accordingly.

Impact Statement:

This project has led to recommendations for conservation promoters. It has strengthened partnerships within the Eagle Creek Watershed in Indiana.

Category: CEAP

Type of Presentation: Poster Presentation