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The Hewitt Creek Model: Longitudinal study of the attitudes and behaviors of northeast Iowa farmers as they developed a performance-based environmental management model

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Abstract:

The 2002 Iowa DNR Section 305(b) water quality assessment report identified the lower 4.4 miles of Hickory Creek (within the Hewitt Creek Watershed) as 'partially supporting' of aquatic life and listed it on Iowa's EPA Section 303(d) impaired waters list. Local farmers were angry and anxious to find ways to keep the DNR off our back and help improve our water quality. In 2004 Iowa State University received funding from the USDA National Integrated Water Quality Program to undertake an experimental citizen-farmer intervention. ISU Extension agriculturalists invited Hewitt Creek farmers to pilot test the project, Educational Program to Increase Citizens' Responsibility for Management of Agricultural Watersheds. The partnership resulted in the development of the Performance-based Environmental Management Model. Farmer and staff interviews in 2005 as the project got under way and four years later in 2008 reveal changes in attitudes and management practices that have altered the way Hewitt Creek farmers talk about their environment and make management decisions. As citizen-farmers they have taken leadership in learning about their watershed, setting priorities and developing collective strategies. Participants share their thoughts and experiences with the project including: the monetary rewards for improving environmental performance; economic and production benefits to their farming operations; use of the Soil Conditioning Index (SCI), corn nitrate cornstalk test, and the Iowa Phosphorous Index (P-Index); relationships with other watershed residents that were affected; the impact of using methods that measured outcomes and evaluating results; and their overall assessment of their personal success and the project success in general.

Impact Statement:

The passion and energy Hewitt Creek farmers have invested in their watershed over the past four years has not only made this project a success, but what they have learned has spilled over into neighboring watersheds. As a result, new citizen-farmer watershed groups are forming using the model piloted by the Hewitt Creek group.

Category: Human Dimensions

Type of Presentation: Poster Presentation