

Overview

The group's discussion for the month included presentations from the Rathbun Land and Water Alliance and the Iowa Soybean Association. Both organizations have worked extensively in developing watershed awareness and protection programs and were asked to share with the group key points they felt were important for successful VOLUNTARY participation. (Attached are both presentations.)

Summary of Discussion

After the presentations, the group was asked to discuss the key points they believed needed to be included in future statewide efforts for watershed protection. The following provides an overview of the points made from presentations AND discussion:

Characteristics of a Successful Watershed Program ...

- There must be local interest and/or leadership
- Generate buy-in from stakeholders throughout the watershed
 - Host a kick-off meeting (with local leader) to generate interest
 - Develop some kind of organizational structure (could be informal like a task force or formal like an Alliance/501 c3)
 - Conduct a watershed assessment – what is happening in the area to impact the water quality, flooding, soil, etc.
- Create a watershed management plan (allows the group to set goals, action steps, evaluate success)
- Get “experts”/field workers on the ground – out working with landowners/operators to understand the watershed needs and the best management practices available to them
 - This hands-on approach is best way to implement the plan
 - One-on-one allows for greater understanding of cost-share programs and helps leverage farmer investment
- Private/Public partnerships for implementation of BMPs and education
- Continually evaluating statistics and communicating to stakeholders and the communities and businesses within the watershed

Barriers to Voluntary Participation in Watershed Protection ...

- Not enough “boots on the ground” educating about the practices and the overall vision for a watershed plan
- Landowner age – nearing the end of “career” – not willing to make an investment if looking to get out of farming or to sell the land
- High costs of many of the practices
- Absentee land owners vs. land operators – have to work through the decision making process
- Landowners may not see the need – reason for establishing a vision or an urgency
- Cost-share – where does it come from – how do we continue to find funding sources for conservation/watershed protection practices

Ideas for Voluntary Participation ...

- Must have an inventory of what is happening
- Where can positive changes happen most easily – provide cost analysis for future investment
- Engage stakeholders
- Show how participation help their business
- Careful of word usage (preferred “improve” or “continuous improvement” over “protect”)
- Encourage voluntary over “looming regulations”

Field Advisors ...

The group spent some time defining the type of characteristics the “boots on the ground”/field advisor would need to possess. The skill sets discussed included:

- Strong people skills
- Self-starter – get out of the office type
- Love of the land – understanding of farming decisions/business of farming
- Technical knowledge about BMPs and implementation
- Understanding of funding sources

*There was discussion of Ag retailers potentially partnering or serving as the “boots on the ground” – more discussion about that at a later date

Other Discussion Points ...

- Impaired waters list
 - The group, as a whole, does not like the idea of impaired waters list – would like to see more definition
 - Only one piece of the puzzle
 - This is only one way to collect the data
 - There is a need for local input for individual water bodies

- Watershed Authorities
 - The DNR has received federal money to work within the state to develop Watershed Authorities – they would “own” the watershed planning for an area
 - Some discussion as to whether this needs to be a NEW authority if there are already working ones within an area – DNR reps said existing authorities could include watershed goals within existing structure to participate in the project.