

Conservation and Soil Health

Research Study



The American Soybean Association (ASA), with support from the Walton Family Foundation, recently completed a research study to evaluate soybean farmers' attitudes and experiences with conservation programs and practices. The study consisted of four focus groups and a quantitative survey of ASA members in 13 states surrounding the Mississippi River basin. Data was gathered between December 2018 and July 2019.

Key Findings

Soybean farmers are active conservationists, with a desire to do more.

73% of farmers surveyed indicated they would implement more conservation measures if they thought these additional practices would be profitable.

On average, farmers have

14 long-standing conservation practices in place now and have added new ones recently. They also intend to implement more practices.

The average farmer pays for all conservation measures, even on rented land, with average expenditures of more than \$15,000 per year.



For those farmers with land designated as wetlands, or highly erodible ground, more than one-third receive financial help from their landlords to cover conservation expenses. **Average costs to implement these practices, among these growers, were \$22,352 in 2018.**

78% Most of the farmers surveyed (78%) manage rental land in the same way they manage land they own.

This means that the positive practices put in place by average farmers extend to all the land they farm.

Grower organizations and land grant universities were identified as the most trusted sources of information for farmers. This puts ASA in a unique position to lead and promote the implementation of more conservation practices.



A need identified by farmers was not better communications, but **better information**. They are each struggling on their own, and encountering many problems, from yield drag to new weeds and too much water.



Farmers trust other farmers the most. Sharing success stories is the most appealing way to spread information.



Growers would like a way to recognize and measure the amount of stewardship they do, so they can show others the care they take to protect the environment and our natural resources.

For more information, visit soygrowers.com. ASA appreciates the contribution of the Walton Family Foundation, which made it possible to conduct this Conservation and Soil Health Research Study.



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Plan



In 2020, ASA will build upon the work initiated in the past year and lessons learned from soybean farmers in the 2019 Conservation and Soil Health Study. This work will follow two tracks:



Cultivating leaders to share their conservation expertise, both through formal programs as well as within the ASA Board structure; and



Working with individual Mississippi River Basin states on additional conservation practice adoption.

A group of eight geographically diverse “Conservation Champions” came together in the summer of 2019 to share their conservation successes with each other and polish their communications skills. This work will continue in 2020, bringing additional networking and outreach opportunities to share information on the value of various conservation practices and programs with broader audiences.

ASA’s communications efforts around conservation, including the Conservation Champions as well as ASA’s long-standing Conservation Legacy Awards program, will take a higher profile in the association. We’ll encourage these conservation leaders to keep trying new things and leading the way, so that their knowledge can be shared with all farmers.

At the same time, ASA will partner with state associations and other partners to bring additional conservation practices to the land in Mississippi River Basin states. ASA will:

- **provide support** to states for existing projects in order to amplify the number of acres enrolled;
- with guidance from farmer leaders, **develop new** conservation projects and new partners to work together; and
- **provide assistance** to additional states to leverage resources, share project information, and identify local partners.

The Walton Family Foundation will continue to be a valuable partner to ASA in the implementation of this plan. ASA also appreciates the continued support of industry partners who sponsor the ASA Conservation Legacy Awards program, which shines a light on the most progressive farmers who have embraced innovative conservation practices on their farms. These industry partners include Bayer, BASF, Valent USA and the United Soybean Board and the soybean checkoff. More information on ASA’s Conservation and Soil Health Plan is available at soygrowers.com.

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