

AGRIBUSINESS INTEGRATED CROP MANAGEMENT PROJECT

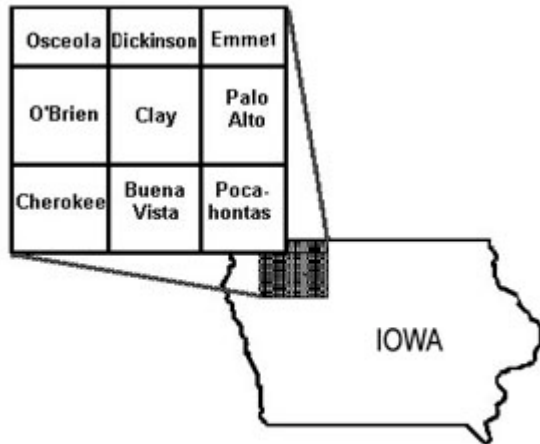
IOWA

Project Summary

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Project Partners

- * US Department of Agriculture Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (USDA CSREES) funded 1992, 1994-99
- * USDA CSREES Integrated Pest Management Special Project funded 1994-96
- * USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) funded 1992, 1995-1999
- * US EPA 319 Nonpoint Source Program through Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) funded 1996-2000
- * US EPA Pollution Prevention Program, through Region VII EPA, funded 1995
- * Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
- * Agribusiness Association of Iowa
- * Iowa State University Extension (ISUE)
- * Cooperating businesses

Background and Rationale

Dialog on the project began between NW Iowa dealers and leaders of state agency water quality programs during 1992. USDA CSREES and NRCS provided the first funding support. Over \$650,000 was allocated to ISUE through CSREES, the US EPA, and IDNR. NRCS also employed a field coordinator for the project. Extension provides agronomy specialists, assessment research and contract business consultants.

Crop consulting services have been called "pollution prevention services" by the Environmental Working Group, because of the potential for management refinements to reduce the environmental loading of agricultural pollutants such as pesticides and fertilizers. Fee-based crop consulting services are still rare in Iowa, and free services offered by dealers are limited in scope. State-supported water quality projects have documented that a refined, systems-oriented crop management approach increases profits of both producers and service providers, while also reducing potential pollutants. This project was a public-private partnership designed to demonstrate how dealers can market and deliver ICM services, and how Extension and other public entities can help facilitate high quality, economically successful service programs.

Project Impacts

- A public-private partnership was established to support development of ICM services. Eleven dealers worked with the project, and five, whose outlets cover most of the project area, completed business plans for ICM services. Three have implemented services.
- Effective business models and education programs have been developed which can be accessed by all agronomists interested in ICM service opportunities. The experience of cooperators helped refine recommendations Extension is able to make for future business development.
- ICM management programs have attracted top producers and businesses as the approach by which they can profit from the high-technology tools of precision agriculture.

“Practicality is critical to a good ICM program, but you must also be aggressive enough to try to cause change.”

**Kay Connelly, ISU ICM
Consultant**

“Through a quality ICM service you become your client’s partner and trusted advisor.”

**Dan Frieberg, ISU Agribusiness
Consultant**

Publications

Integrated Crop Management Services, a business planning handbook, was developed for short courses available through the ISUE Agribusiness Education Program.

Surveys of practicing consultants and producers who hire them contribute decision tools for educators and ag business managers. Reports on these studies by ISU Sociology are available on the ISU Agronomy Department’s water quality web site at:
<http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/waterquality/>

Education Programs

A Short Course, "Selling Integrated Crop Management Services for a Profit", was developed for the ISU Agribusiness Education Program. Thirty-one dealer agronomists and owners attended the three sessions held in 1998-1999. In exit surveys all rated the course as well worth the \$125 fee. One participant wrote, "(The fee) can be recovered through improvements in our program.

Workshops at the Field Extension Education Laboratory provide training for service managers and their employees on subjects such as field scouting and computerized, record keeping.

One-on-one assistance was provided by Extension Field Specialists to agronomists of cooperating dealers in technical and record-keeping aspects of ICM soil, plant and pest management planning.

Audience

Dealers- Any dealer operating in a nine-county area of northwest Iowa could cooperate with the project and thereby access individualized, confidential assistance for planning and implementing an fee-based ICM service. Technology transfer from the project will eventually make similar assistance available to dealers statewide. As practical guidance is generalized from cooperators’ experience, it is incorporated into programming of the ISUE Agribusiness Education Program.

Agencies - Extension leadership and specialists were another audience for the project, which demonstrated a new relationship with the private sector and the meeting of new information needs. All of the agency partners have gained insight from the project into the challenges faced by businesses hoping to implement fee-based integrated crop management services.

Community Improvements

Education- For private sector agronomists, the project clarified the concept of ICM as a profitable service program that involves comprehensive planning based on field-specific records rather than individual elements such as a scouting program or fertilizer recommendation. The project has resulted in a different level of interaction between dealer agronomists and Extension Field Specialists, with more emphasis on planning and timeliness.

Business opportunity - Iowa dealers’ confidence in the business potential of ICM services has greatly increased, based on the level of interest in project-sponsored discussions and workshops. Professionals from adjoining states are seeking out information made available by this groundbreaking project.

Refined cropping practices- Producers in the project area can now access services to refine their soil and water conservation management, something they may not have had the time or management resources to do on their own before. Reduced and more effective use of inputs resulting from ICM typically returns 2-5 times more profit than the cost of services.