



North Raccoon Farm to River Partnership Project



The North Raccoon Farm to River Partnership: an Iowa Water Quality Initiative to implement in-field and edge-of-field practices that keep nitrogen and phosphorus out of Iowa waters.

Ag retailers work closely with project

A component of the Farm to River Partnership includes a partnership with ag retailers NEW Cooperative, Nutrien Ag Solutions and Landus Cooperative. Project coordinator Chance McDonald works in tandem with the agronomists at these co-ops, buttressing his goals of increased conservation farming practices with the agronomists and their goals of increased farmer productivity.

Jeff Schleisman, CCA, is an agronomy sales specialist with NEW Co-op who works with McDonald to help achieve the project's goals. He provides some ag retailer perspective in this Q&A.

Where is your territory?

I am based in Glidden and cover parts of Carroll, Calhoun and Greene counties.

How do you work with Chance and the Farm to River Partnership?

We work very well together. I bring up the project and its goals with my growers in the project area. I reach out and encourage them to touch base with Chance. I don't try to talk them into any specific program because Chance will provide them better direction and more options in regard to conservation practices. I try to be a point source for information to make my growers aware of what's going on and give them the resources to make decisions. I follow up with Chance when I've spoken with a grower and he does the same for me.

Have you two worked together?

We touch base at least once a week. He updates me regularly on the project. What I enjoy the most about working with Chance is I trust his judgment and opinions. With him having an ag retail background, he understands my need to prioritize my time and what's best for the grower and the company. I have a job to do, but by all means, I put in a good word for Chance and the project.

Have you worked with your customers on implementing conservation practices before?

As an agronomist, I am compelled to consider any and all practices for improving production and land quality. We have some pretty proactive

Spring 2020

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GOALS:

15
BIOREACTORS

15
SATURATED
BUFFERS

2
WETLANDS
DESIGN AND
CONSTRUCTION

11,500
COVER CROP
ACRES

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Conservation practice workshop a success

Nearly 25 farmers and landowners were on-hand to learn about conservation farming practices at a workshop held in Lake City on Jan. 21. The North Raccoon Farm to River Partnership hosted the workshop to inform those in the project area about the benefits of cover crops, bioreactors and saturated buffers.

“YOU CAN’T MAKE GOOD AGRONOMIC DECISIONS WITHOUT GOOD ECONOMIC DIRECTION”

Steve Killpack, Southwest Iowa farmer

John Potts, who farms near Lake City, came to hear about cover crops.

“We have livestock, so I’m looking to utilize the ground more with grazing, and to try and make the soil better,” Potts said.

Cover crops have several benefits beyond a supplemental feed source. They can reduce soil erosion and nitrate in waterbodies, improve soil organic matter, water infiltration and weed suppression. Steve Killpack, a southwest Iowa farmer and long-time cover crop user, shared with the group how he successfully uses cover crops in his corn-soybean farming operation.

“I think about cover crops as ‘another crop,’ rather than just an additional step in my farming operation,” Killpack said. “Looking at them in a different way created more opportunities for my farm.”



Killpack showed how the agronomics and economics of how cover crops have improved his farm and offered some words of wisdom for management. Soil sampling is vital to keep from creating a nutrient deficit for the crop, he said.

Landowner Kathy Murley, Sac City, was at the workshop to find information on bioreactors.

“I’ve got some pretty wet ground and it’s fairly flat. I want to know how bioreactors work and if they would be a good fit on my land,” she said. Murley works closely with her tenants on how they farm. They aren’t sold on using cover crops, but she was interested in learning more.

Chris Hay explained how edge-of-field practices such as bioreactors and saturated buffers function to remove nitrate from tile-drained water before it enters a river or stream. Hay is the Iowa Soybean Association senior manager of production systems innovation. He gave an overview of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy and how the edge-of-field practices contribute to the strategy goals.

Jeff Sporrer, Carroll County District Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), reviewed financial opportunities available for cover crops and edge-of-field practices. Chance McDonald, Farm to River Partnership conservation agronomist, hosted the workshop and updated the group on the project’s goals and how farmers and landowners can participate.



Steve Killpack (center) speaks with workshop attendees.

Keys to successful cover crop termination

By Chance McDonald, CCA

Cover crops have become a very popular practice throughout the Midwest. Whether they are used for the soil health benefits, livestock grazing or erosion control, cover crops can be an effective conservation farming practice. It is important to plan now to ensure successful spring termination of fall planted cover crops. Two important factors for success include appropriate termination timing and what method is used.

Termination methods

There are several ways to terminate cover crops including herbicides, mowing, tillage, rolling or crimping. Some cover crop species can be terminated by heavy grazing and some will winter kill. Knowing the end goal for using a cover crop will help determine what termination method works best.

For most cover crop growers, herbicides are the main method of termination. When considering a herbicide application, factors such as environmental temperature, plant height and plant type all need to be considered. There tends to be a lack of performance from herbicides like Roundup when applied in cooler temperatures. For best results, spray on calm, warm days with temperatures above 55 degrees. Using adequate herbicide rates for the cover crop type and height is also important to guarantee a successful kill.

If the cover crop is used as feed for livestock, mechanical termination are ideal choices. With these methods, it is imperative to know the plant growth stage to ensure a complete kill of the cover crop.



Termination timing

Timing of termination is probably the most important factor for cover crop success. When termination timing is mishandled, a beneficial cover crop could become a yield-robbing weed in a very short time. All cover crops should be terminated before seed set, unless the goal is to reseed that particular cover crop. Attempts to terminate the cover crop too early will lead to cover crop survival. If cover crops are terminated too late, viable seeds can be produced, which can become a problem in the following the cash crop.

As cover crops continue to gain popularity, it is vital to understand the complete process from planting to termination and how this process fits into the farm’s operation. Contact your local retail agronomist or me for advice to achieve success when using a cover crop.

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Continued from page 1: Jeff Schleisman

conservation growers around here, which is a good thing. While conservation isn’t always the first thing to come to mind for growers, nor myself, I’ve learned a lot more than I thought I would ever need to know about conservation. Chance and the Farm to River Partnership have been a big part of that process.

This partnership of a conservation specialist embedded with ag retailers is an innovative concept. Do you see this being something permanent in the ag retail arena?

From a company standpoint, our clients need to see how these practices help their profitability. Cover crops for example; we continue to talk with our growers about them because cover crops have had so much attention. But we need to do a better job of demonstrating the benefits, and in a lot of cases, the profit of using cover crops.

I think people like Chance have a place in the ag retail space, especially in our area, with the increase of growers using cover crops and other things. As an industry, we need to make conservation part of the routine. Once it becomes part of the routine, the questions about whether it’s worth doing go away. What we’re doing with this partnership is getting some traction. I think we’re headed in the right direction.



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Project progress

The North Raccoon Farm to River Partnership, launched in June 2018, offers funding for practices to improve water quality on rural lands in five sub-watersheds within the North Raccoon River basin.

The goal of 11,500 new acres with cover crops has recently been achieved, with more than 7,200 acres enrolled in 2019 alone. Although the acreage goal was met with a year remaining in the project, farmers who want to participate in adding cover crops can still do so. Funding for cover crops is at \$25 per acre.

A goal of 15 installed bioreactors is ongoing. Three bioreactors have been installed with several more in the planning stage. Other project goals include 15 saturated buffers and 2 targeted wetlands. Funding for each of these practices is 100 percent paid.

Other opportunities available include tile water monitoring, whole farm conservation assessments and replicated strip trials. If you are interested in any of these practices or opportunities, contact your local ag retailer or Chance McDonald: cmcdonald@iasoybeans.com.



ACWA is a non-profit organization of 11 ag retailers in the Des Moines and Raccoon River watersheds, that agree water quality is vital to the future of farming. By helping their farmer clients with management options, adopt conservation practices, ACWA members are making strides toward the alliance's goals of farmer profitability combined with improving water quality.

www.acwa-rrws.org

