**IL NUTRIENT LOSS REDUCTION STRATEGY** “CONSERVATION CROPPING SYSTEMS” COMMUNICATIONS

**LONG-TERM COMMUNICATIONS GOALS**

* Landowners and operators understand how their actions affect local water quality.
* Landowners and operators understand how conservation strategies improve land health and productivity.
* Landowners and operators implement a set of practices that work together
* Elected officials and decision-makers understand how farming practices affect local water quality and take actions that support widespread adoption of conservation strategies.

**AUDIENCES**

* On-the-ground influencers (who then can influence landowners/operators and decision makers)
* Policy influencers (who then can influence decision makers)
* Decision makers (who then can take action)

**GENERAL MESSAGE (Geared toward owners and operators; audience-specific blurbs below)**American farmers have been able to feed the world for generations because of our fertile fields, hard work and common sense practices. We embrace technology when it makes sense and learn from each other. While we may be sentimental about our families and our legacies, we make practical business decisions for our land and operations.

Today, one of the most important decisions landowners and operators can make to increase land productivity and improve yields is to strategically manage our soil health. **Conservation farming is the process of applying smart sets of practices strategically on your fields to improve soil health.**

As long-time stewards of your land, you know better than anyone else how some acres behave differently than others. Some spots are wetter, some dryer. Some require more treatments, or fewer. You already have a system on your land that is tailor-made for your land. Likewise some soil health practices see the greatest results when paired with others. Conservation farming offers a system of practices that can [improve soil health, reduce nutrient loss, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, etc.]. You choose the right set of practices for you, for that field, for that acre.

And, as a result, your soil is healthier and better able to retain the nutrients that you so carefully apply during the growing season.

These practices keep nutrients available for your crops, preventing them from running off and polluting streams and rivers. According to USDA, 80% of nitrogen pollution in our rivers comes from nutrients that have been washed away from agricultural fields. All of these nutrients in our streams and rivers harm fish and threaten drinking water, damaging the water resources that are important parts of our communities and memories. [Insert language about cost of treating drinking water and benefits of water quality, environmental benefits]  
  
Nutrients belong on our land, not in our water. Here’s what you can do:

As a **landowner or operator**, review the ***CONSERVATION FARMING—What’s your strategy?*** guide to figure out what set of smart practices make sense for your field. Update your conservation plan with additional practices that do more than reduce erosion. Truly increasing yields by improving soil health requires a system of strategically chosen sets of practices.

As a decision maker, you have the ability to ensure that the state reaches the goals laid out in the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy by promoting policies and funds aimed at improving soil health. Conservation farming practices are proven to increase yields and reduce nutrient runoff, but farmers need access to resources and tools to learn about and implement these practices.

**KEY PHRASES TO USE TO TALK ABOUT THESE PRACTICES**

* Conservation Cropping Systems
* Best management practices
* Conservation Farming
* Conservation Farming—What’s your strategy?
* Reducing Your Nutrient Loss
* Voluntary adoption of best management practices
* Nutrient loss reduction strategy
* “This field uses cover crops and no-till to improve soil health. What’s *your* strategy?”
* Your conservation plan needs to be about more than just erosion.
* Apply smart systems of practices strategically on your fields to improve soil health

**ON-THE-GROUND INFLUENCERS**

**AUDIENCE DESCRIPTION:** Organizations and individuals who are trusted by land owners and operators; they have the ability to directly influence land owners and operators on decisions they make. Our goal is to convince these groups to “sell” conservation strategies to their constituents and convince landowners/operators in their spheres to adopt these practices. On-the-ground influencers can also persuade decision-makers to support policies that encourage conservation practice adoption.

**ON-THE-GROUND INFLUENCERS TO TARGET:** IL Corn Growers Association; IL Soybean Growers Association; IL Farm Bureau; Soil and Water Conservation Districts; Hook and Bullet Groups; Environmental nonprofit organizations; IL Nutrient Research and Education Council (NREC)

**AUDIENCE REPRESENTATIVES TO PRIORITIZE (and possible messengers)**

* IL Corn Growers board members (Caroline Wade, Rod W., Laura Gentry)
* IL Soybean Growers board members (Jared Hooker)
* IL Farm Bureau county presidents and board members (Lauren Lurkins; folks who went on IA water quality tour; AFT; Progressive IL Farmers)
* Steve with Association of IL SWCDs (Carol Hays/PRN; IL EPA; active SWCDs)
* Ducks Unlimited
* Smallmouth Alliance
* IL Federation of Outdoor Resources
* TNC—Jeff Walk
* Environmental Defense Fund—Katie Anderson
* Trees Forever—Debbie Fluegel
* NREC—Julie Armstrong

**AUDIENCE-SPECIFIC TALKING POINTS**

Data shows these practices increase yields and improve soil health. Pilot projects have shown success. By delaying implementation, we’re losing more nutrients—and money—than we need to.

Not all farms are the same and not all acres on a given property are the same. Some of these smart practices will work better in your situation than others. Think of CONSERVATION FARMING as choosing the right set of practices for the right acre. One practice alone is often not enough to truly improve soil health. These practices have the greatest benefit when paired with others in strategic sets.

As a bonus, these practices also improve water quality, which is essential for our local rivers and streams and create habitat for wildlife. Healthy rivers and streams are part of our community’s character, quality drinking water, family memories and good fishing and hunting spots.

**COMMUNICATIONS PATHWAYS**

* One-on-one meetings
* Field days and tours
* Trainings and workshops
* Established meetings (chapter meetings, meet ‘n’greets, events)

**COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS**

**Completed:**

* Talking points
* Presentation slides
* Generic practice fact sheet

**To be Added:**

* Fact sheet with water quality language
* Fact sheet with wildlife benefits
* Fact sheet with farmer success stories
* Recipe book of practices and how to choose
* Infographic

**POLICY INFLUENCERS**

**AUDIENCE DESCRIPTION:** Organizations and individuals who are trusted by policy makers and have access to policy makers. They have the ability to directly influence policy makers and their staff. Our goal is to convince these groups to urge policy makers to vote for policies (regulations/laws/funding) that encourage widespread adoption of these practices.

**POLICY INFLUENCERS TO TARGET:** NRCS; IL County Farm Bureaus; River Citizens/Constituents; Hook and Bullet Groups; Environmental nonprofit organizations

**AUDIENCE REPRESENTATIVES TO PRIORITIZE (and possible messengers)**

* IL County Farm Bureaus—Jonathon Manuel, Champaign County (Carol Hays; AFT)
* NRCS staff; Eric Gerth (ISA; NCRREC; AISWCD)
* TNC—Jeff Walk
* Environmental Defense Fund—Katie Anderson
* Trees Forever—Debbie Fluegel

**AUDIENCE-SPECIFIC TALKING POINTS**

Data shows these practices increase yields and improve soil health. Pilot projects have shown success. By delaying implementation, we’re losing more nutrients than we need to—which hurts farms and our rivers.

Illinois is now significantly behind neighboring states in embracing modern, smart and strategic practices. Even worse, because state programs that could be used to promote these programs have been unfunded since XX, we have literally lost access to federal dollars, pushing us further behind.

Illinois is an agricultural state. We are the number one producer of soybeans and number two producer of corn. This also means that we are one of the biggest contributors of nutrient pollution to our region’s rivers and streams. This is NOT the kind of reputation Illinois should have.

As a bonus, Conservation Farming practices also improve water quality, which is essential for our local rivers and streams. Healthy rivers and streams are part of our communities’ character, family memories and good fishing and hunting spots.

**COMMUNICATIONS PATHWAYS**

* One-on-one meetings
* Field days and tours
* State technical committee training
* Action alert emails and social media campaigns
* Lobby Days
* Established meetings (chapter meetings, meet ‘n’greets, events)

**COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS**

**Completed:**

* Talking points
* Presentation slides
* Generic practice fact sheet
* Social media posts
* Action alert emails

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**DECISION MAKERS**

**AUDIENCE DESCRIPTION:** Elected officials, agency staff, government administrators and staff members who have the ability to propose, speak for, vote for and approve policies, decisions and funds that would advance Strategic Farming practices at the local and state level, with a special focus on state senators and representatives.

**AUDIENCE REPRESENTATIVES TO PRIORITIZE**

* State Senate:
  + Scott Bennett (52nd)
  + Sam McCann (50th)
  + Andy Manar (48th)
  + David Koehler (46th)
  + David Luechtefeld (58th)
  + Neil Anderson (36th)
  + Sue Rezin (38th)
* State House
  + Sue Scherer (96th)
  + Brian Stewart (89th)
  + Avery Bourne (95th)
  + Donald Moffitt (74th)
  + Andy Skoog (76th)
  + Tom Demmer (90th)
  + Kate Cloonen (79th)
  + Jerry Costello (21st)
  + Charles Meier (108th)
  + Tim Butler (87th)
  + Patrick Verschoore (72nd)
  + Brandon Phelps (118th)
  + Norine Hammond (93rd)
  + Chad Hays (104th)
  + C.D. Davidsmeyer (100th)
  + Bill Mitchell (101st)

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