



Iowa Learning Farm Event Evaluations January through December 2009

Compiled and Submitted by Jacqueline Comito

From January to December 2009, the Iowa Learning Farm sponsored 13 field days/clinics. In addition, the Iowa Learning Farm team participated at 34 other events that were attended by approximately 9,700 people. The following is a summary of the ILF main event evaluations for the year.

Evaluation occurs on three levels:

- **Comment Cards** filled out by all participants at an ILF sponsored event in order to gain a better understanding of who they are and why they are there.
- **Event Evaluations** of any event that ILF team members participate. These forms (completed by ILF team members) help to understand the audience's level of engagement and help us to improve future outreach activities.
- **Mailed Evaluation Questionnaires** of participants in any sponsored "field" event as a part of the ILF program. These questionnaires were sent within three weeks of the event and focus on the clarity and accessibility of the information received and inquires into whether participants planned to make any changes in their land management as a result of the event.

In February, we sent a follow-up questionnaire to see if the participants had made the changes they said they were going to make in the earlier evaluation.

Event Evaluations

Iowa Learning Farm staff filled out event evaluation forms for all major presentations, including all field days. For detailed information of a specific event, see the quarterly report. Each form includes questions that presenters were asked by audience members, strengths of the events and suggestions for improving each event.



ILF Evaluation (2009 Events)

Month	# of events		
	2007	2008	2009
January			5
February			8
March			5
April	1	2	2
May	2	6	3
June	8	7	8
July	14	17	9
August	9	4	6
September	8	8	5
October	1	3	3
November			1
December			3
Total	42	46	58

Event objectives			
	2007	2008	2009
Community Event	9%	11%	14%
Youth Event	12%	27%	10%
Agency/Organization Event	16%	15%	15%
Farmers Event	19%	24%	35%
Conference/Clinic	9%	2%	14%
Fair/expo	35%	22%	12%

Description of Audiences	2007	2008	2009
Number of events	43	46	58
Total numbers for events	3,373	3,945	9,700
Age groups			
<i>Primarily youth</i>	14%	26%	10%
<i>All ages</i>	42%	35%	21%
<i>Primarily adults</i>	44%	44%	69%
Background			
<i>Rural</i>	56%	54%	47%
<i>Urban</i>	7%	11%	2%
<i>Rural/urban</i>	37%	35%	52%
Level of engagement			
<i>High</i>	77%	83%	81%
<i>Average</i>	18%	13%	14%
<i>Low</i>	5%	4%	5%



ILF Evaluation (2009 Events)

ILF Team Participation	2007	2008	2009
Average # of ILF Staff	2.5	2	3
Staff	# of events	# of events	# of events
Brown	7	4	7
Comito	5	9	23
Dietzel	n/a	n/a	1
Helmerts' student staff	25	34	20
Herringshaw	n/a	1	2
Holmes	n/a	n/a	8
Lundvall	26	18	26
Staudt	n/a	n/a	4
Van Waus	n/a	5	17
Zhou	n/a	2	2
Associated Staff			
Benning	5	3	12
Olson	n/a	n/a	5
Faculty Advisors			
Al-Kaisi	4	3	2
DeWitt	6	1	7
Duffy	1	0	1
Hanna	1	5	10
Helmerts	11	12	19
Lasley	1	1	1
Morton	n/a	n/a	6



Field Day Evaluations

We have asked participants to share their experience in three ways:

- **comment cards** (filled out at the event, one per household)
- **evaluation questionnaires** (sent via mail two weeks after the field day to all those who filled out a comment card) and
- **follow-up evaluation questionnaires** (sent via mail, February 2010 to all those who filled out a comment card at the field days).

2009 ILF Field Day/Clinic Audience Participation in Evaluation

	#Attendees	#Comment Cards	#Returned Evaluations	#Returned Follow-up Evaluations
Iowa Lakes CC Planter Clinic	85	78	25	None sent
Kirkwood CC Planter Clinic	51	30	None sent	None sent
Cover Crop/ Woodbury Co	52	30	13	9
Hunter Field Day	80	62	28	27
Clay County Growers Field Day	115	79	35	35
Schmidt Field Day	40	21	10	9
Abels Field Day	50	27	13	11
Juchems Field Day	45	14	10	7
Ronsiek Field Day	85	59	28	19
Neal Smith Field Day	48	19	6	3
Whiterock Field Day	35	22	14	10
Iowa Lakes CC Strip-Till Field Day	48	31	9	None sent
Cherokee Clinic	24	18	5	None sent
Total	734	490	196*	130+

*This is a 43% response rate to mailed questionnaire: a good rate of response for only one mailing.

+This is a 39% response rate to mailed questionnaire.



**Summary of Comment Cards
(filled out by attendees at the field day)**

<i>Which statement best describes you?</i>	
Farmer	66%
Landowner	27%
Government employee	10%
Other	22%
These do not add up to 100% because individuals chose more than one category.	

<i>How did you hear about the field day?</i>	
Neighbor	13%
ISU Extension Staff	22%
DNR/NRCS Staff	19%
Website	2%
Radio	14%
Newspaper	16%
Other*	25%

*Most of these marked several different means of hearing about field day. All of them heard both through word of mouth and local media.

<i>Write in your reason for attending (summary of comments)</i>	
Looking for specific information being presented	43%
Learn about new directions	7%
CCA Credits	3%
Other (involved in program or family or sponsor)	6%
Class	8%



**Summary of Follow-up Evaluation Questionnaires
(sent by mail in February 2010 to all those who filled out
comment cards)**

Please describe at least one way you will integrate what you learned at this meeting into your farming:

	Feb 2010 Follow-up n=130	Feb 2009 Follow-up n=69
Increased use of surface residue management (no-till or strip-till) on some of my acres	30%	32%
List # of acres	12,558	10,546*
Average # of acres per respondent who said they were putting more acres into no-till or strip-till	370	586
Sought additional information via web, state agencies or ISU employees	36%	42%
I discussed +/- of using no-till or strip-till with my landowners	33%	39%
I discussed conservation ideas with other farmers in my area	72%	70%
I am working cooperatively with neighboring farmers and landowners to make best use of conservation structures within our local watershed	28%~	Not asked
I purchased strip-till equipment, made a joint purchase of strip-till equipment with my neighbors, or leased equipment from a local ag supplier or co-op	Not asked	14%
I modified my existing planter, or purchased a new planter, to facilitate no-till management	26%++	Not asked
Using fall seeded rye or other cover crops	23%+	Not asked
Planted no-till soybeans into undisturbed cornstalks, fall 2010	57%++ (5,065 new acres)	Not asked
Installed waterways, buffers and/or terraces	44%~	Not asked
I did not make any changes	18%	18%

*This is doubled over the 2008 number. ~These questions were asked only on two field days that directly addressed these issues. +This question was asked only of the three cover crop field days. ++Asked only of two field days.



The final three questions were only asked on the follow-up questionnaire:

In general, plowing, mixing and tilling soil contributes to an overall decrease in soil quality?

78% I AGREE (2010) 77% I AGREE (2009)

22% I AGREE (2010) 23% I DISAGREE

Do you think, in general, we are moving toward increased or decreased implementation of soil conservation practices (check best answer)?

87% INCREASED (2010) 88% INCREASED (2009)

13% DECREASED (2010) 12% DECREASED (2009)

Are greater conservation practices needed in your area (check best answer)?

91% YES (2010) 95% YES (2009)

9% NO (2010) 5% NO (2009)

Although we did not ask for further comments, 25% of the respondents sent us additional ideas from following field days:

Paul Hunter, June 17, 2009

- I have been no-tilling for app. 15 years, related to increased/decreased conservation practices: unknown because more corn on corn, some farmers need big time help!
- Slow increase here in Allamakee Co. There is still a dependence on structures such as terraces while they still used conventional tillage. Hopefully we trend forward treating soil structure and quality not just surface run-off by structures, conservation tillage practices.
- Paul Hunter is not one of my favorite people, last year we started with vertical tillage and we like how it works.
- Already no-till, already use all no-till
- Always room for improvement
- Definitely yea to need for greater conservation practices
- I rented a no-till drill and no-tilled alfalfa into oat stubble, worked well; in general conservation minded farmers are doing better some farmers are going other ways



ILF Evaluation (2009 Events)

- Currently 100% no-till; [decrease in soil quality] it depends on possible needed corrections at time or misfortunes

Clay County Growers, July 7, 2009

- I will have less no-till soybeans due to very heavy corn stalks following high yields
- Need to concentrate on effectively removing residue off of row area. Last year there was a big difference in plant development where not enough corn stalks were removed.
- Have been 100% no-till beans and 100% strip-till corn acres since 2004, farmers are making less trips across the field, but average residue levels are staying around 30% but not increasing. Soil conservation takes a back seat to yield, mainly increase in no-till would do the most good to reduce run-off
- Bought first no-till 15in row planter in 2004, traded for new in 2009
- One of the ideas mentioned was used of pre-plant herbicides which I will incorporate into my operation in 2010
- I am a long time continuous no-till operator who was heartened by the turnout at the field day. I think its success was determined to a larger degree by the fact of the cooperators were some of the larger operations in Clay County. It becomes practical if the 'big boys' do it! It's unpalatable to me, but it's also a 'fact of life'. When landowners become more aware of the value of no-till and decide to rent only to no-tillers the momentum will build and those who continue to till will decline because they can't complete environmentally or economically. Those ILF demonstrations about tillage are the absolute best way to spend the dollars set aside for the ILF. Now if we can get a few cooperators on the I-20 corridor where tillage is still king!
- Our son-in-law farms our ground and no-tills everything. The part of the July 7 field day was no-till corn on corn was our field.
- I have ridge tilled since 1983
- My son and I farmed more of my acres rather than cash rent to neighbor; I am the landowner but I did not talk about it to my tenants; I've tried to explain [the positives and negatives of no-till] to an individual; planter was already modified prior to 2009



Nate Ronsiek, August 27, 2009

- I use 100% no-till, I planned to rent a drill from NRCS by the wet fall weather prevented seeding a cover crop this year
- In reference to contributing to a decrease in soil quality: depends on circumstance
- I agree that no-till farming helps greatly in steeper slopes. I rotate oats and alfalfa and corn and soybeans. There is not a lot of erosion where I rotate oats and alfalfa. I am more aware of compaction after the field day. Pat Puhl 712-441-1317 cell, 712-562-6456 home
- In response to implementation of conservation practices: larger farmers farming with less contour, I am a CCA

Rick Juchems, August 5, 2009

- I am not a farmer, Jay Culter Charles City. Because George Cummins knew I was an IOWATER volunteer he invited me to the field day. I have known George since we work for brothers during the summers of our high school. I learned that when Ag Research is done in Iowa that involves water quality I believe you could ask for help from IOWATER volunteers. This would be a good way to further cooperate between environmentalist and the farming community. IOWATER volunteers could serve farming in the same way as crop scouts.

Fred Abels, June 29, 2009

- In response to soil quality: a lot of the carbon from the corn stalks on no-till is going up into the atmosphere instead of down into the soil where the soil microbes can sequester the carbon and build humus in the soil.
- All farm is no-till; crop was haled out, we did seed some cover crop on 100% haled beans
- I am a no-tiller for last 29 years. As a result of field days I am considering fall seeded cover crop!

Cover Crop, June 11, 2009

- 100% no-till already, 25 acres on standing soybean, 20 after combine corn (rye), attended National No-Till Conference,



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attended Cover Crop @ ISU on March 3; part of my job as District Conservationist

- I no-till both corn and soybeans now; in response to the soil conservation implementation: because of all the terraces that are being removed, no-till helps but not on the heavy hard rains
- Jacqueline, This really doesn't apply to me. I rented my farm out in 2009 – I did have a number of restrictions and conditions in my lease (the use of cover crops was not one of them) but I have been using cover crops for 10-15 years. The value of cover crops is probably much higher for an owner-operator than for a renter. I am very aware of the benefits of cover crops – I could probably sell them to an Eskimo – provided he owned his farm. Cover crops should be sold on the basis of long term soil quality gains not on short term financial gains. If you ever need a really long list of these benefits of cover crops give me a call.

Sincerely, Jim Bram 712-827-4155, 712-253-0466

Whiterock Conservancy, October 2, 2009

- I planned to but weather prevented the seeding of a cover crop; bought basic on cover crops; I am looking for a grain drill – may be able to use a F&WCD drill

Neal Smith, September 2, 2009

- I am encouraging neighboring farmers to consider more sustainable, small farm, agriculture such as 'perma-culture'; in response to practice implementation: could be other, depends on Fed programs for conservation, would economy cellulosic energy