



*Building a Culture of*  
**CONSERVATION**

*Iowa Learning Farms | 2016 Evaluation Report*

*Compiled and submitted by Jacqueline Comito, Nathan Stevenson, & Julie Whitson*





## Introduction

Iowa Learning Farms continues to build a Culture of Conservation as we bring together farmers, landowners, agribusiness, researchers and state and federal agency partners. 2016 was once again a record-setting year for the Iowa Learning Farms (and sister program Water Rocks!) with 248 total outreach events that reached 34,726 people. 2016 saw a 22% increase in number of events on top of two already record-breaking years in 2014 and 2015. Our staff, trailer fleet and partners across the state allowed us to reach 54% more people in 2016 and to double the number of people our program reached just two years ago.

Farmer field days and workshops remained an integral part of Iowa Learning Farms in 2016. Compared to the previous year, the number of these events increased by 13%, and 93% of participants reported that the overall quality of those events was good or excellent. We continue to attract a mix of both experienced conservation farmers as well as potential conservationists.

## Highlights

- **89% of field day/workshop attendees were farmers/operators and landowners.**
- Respondents who attended an ILF field day in 2016 planted **38,258 acres of cover crops**, 32% of which were new acres of cover crops.
- ILF continues to draw an audience that is both experienced with conservation practices as well as just starting to consider the idea. **An estimated 38% of ILF field day attendees have never planted cover crops** and 50% reported no current acres in strip-till or no-till.
- **More respondents reported using prairie strips** as a conservation practice than any other year – up from 9% in 2015 to 13% in 2016.
- **Farmers with six or more years of experience with cover crops reported significantly less concern over yield impacts** and the knowledge required to implement conservation practices compared to farmers just getting started with cover crops.





## ILF Approach to Evaluation

Evaluation of Iowa Learning Farms outreach events occurs in five stages:

- **Event Evaluations** for every event in which ILF team members participated. These forms, completed by ILF team members, help us to understand the audience's level of engagement, document the questions that were asked by participants and help us to improve future outreach activities.
- **Comment Cards** filled out by all participants at ILF-sponsored field days and workshops in order to gain a better understanding of who they are and why they are there.
- **Planning Cards** filled out by only farmers and landowners at ILF-sponsored field days and workshops in order to understand their intention to implement conservation practices. Planning cards were a new addition to our evaluation strategy in 2015 and continued in 2016.
- **Follow-up Evaluations** mailed to participants at ILF-sponsored field days and workshops that happened before November 8. These questionnaires were sent within three weeks following the event. The questions focused on the clarity and accessibility of the information received and inquired whether participants planned to make any changes in their land management as a result of the event. The individual field day evaluations are available in a separate report.
- **January Evaluations** mailed to only farmers/operators and landowners at all ILF-sponsored field days and workshops. These questionnaires were sent in January 2017 to see if the participants had made the changes they said they were going to make in earlier evaluations and on their planning cards.



## Event Evaluations

Event evaluation forms were completed by Iowa Learning Farms/Water Rocks! staff following all outreach events, including field days. For detailed information regarding a specific event, see the respective quarterly reports.

In 2016, the Iowa Learning Farms/Water Rocks! programs excelled once again with a record 248 total outreach events. This number represents a 22% increase in number of events from 2015; we increased all of our event categories. Events fall into three categories: community and youth outreach, farmer outreach and conferences and presentations. In 2016, farmer outreach events (field days and workshops) increased by 13% from 2015. The majority of events fell into the category of community and youth outreach, including school visits (classroom presentations and assemblies), youth outdoor classrooms, camps and state and county fairs.

The ILF/WR! team is near capacity for the number of events it can participate in with its current team of staff and interns. Our goal for 2017 will be to continue delivering our engaging outreach programs to a diverse audience through conferences, farmer events and community and youth outreach events.

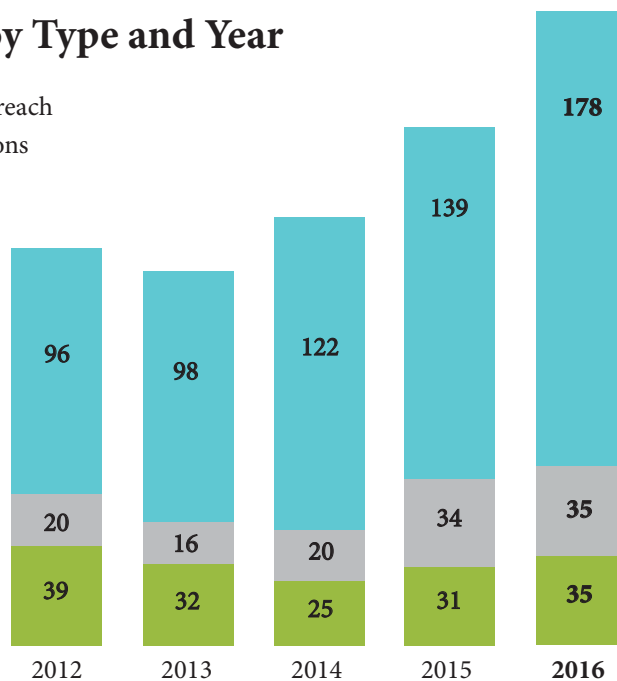
Month	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
January	7	3	5	3	12
February	4	1	8	13	8
March	8	8	11	14	16
April	15	15	13	18	27
May	21	14	15	24	29
June	21	24	26	25	26
July	34	27	28	40	41
August	19	13	15	20	20
September	9	9	16	13	18
October	14	12	18	19	27
November	2	17	12	13	18
December	1	3		2	6
<b>Total</b>	155	146	167	204	248

**248**

TOTAL EVENTS  
IN 2016

## Outreach Events by Type and Year

- Community and Youth Outreach
- Conferences and Presentations
- Farmer Outreach



THE OVERALL NUMBER  
OF EVENTS ARE UP

**22%**

FROM LAST YEAR

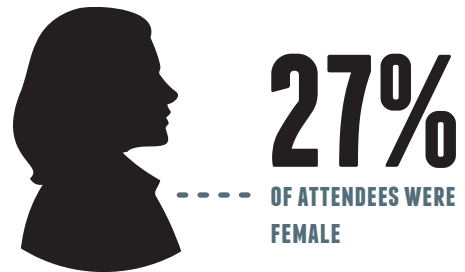
## Event Evaluations: Description of Audiences at Outreach Events

Based on event evaluation data, the ILF/WR! team is reaching a diverse cross section of people, both rural and urban, from across the state of Iowa.

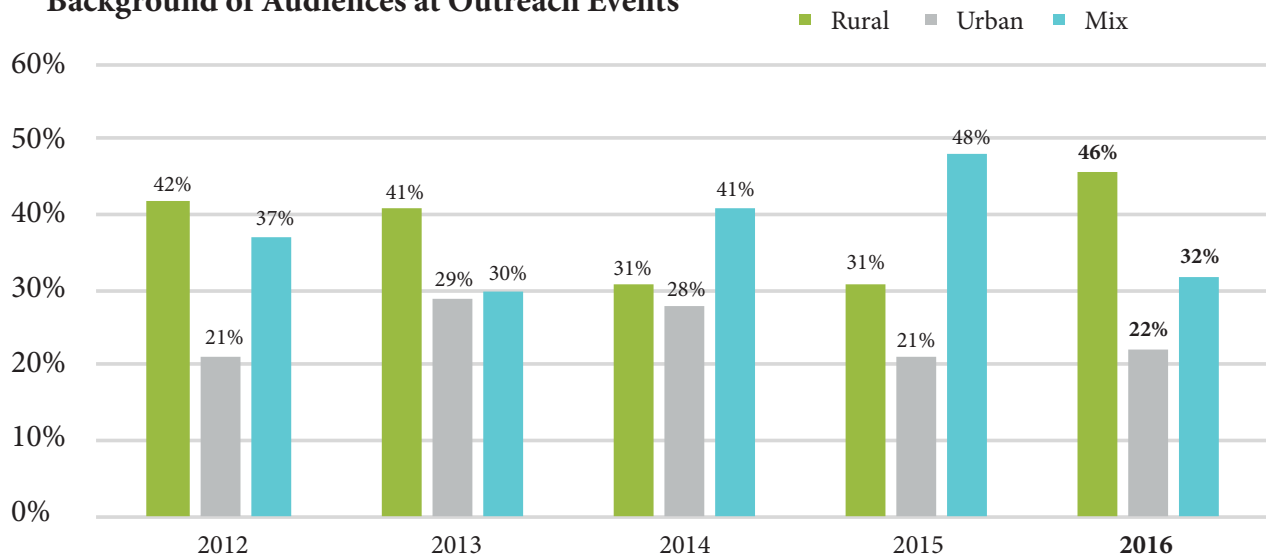
The Water Rocks! program is bursting at its seams. We substantially increased Water Rocks! community and youth outreach events in 2016 for the fourth year in a row. This increase propelled a rise in outreach events targeting a primarily youth audience. However, this increase has not been at the expense of farmer education and outreach.

Iowa Learning Farms has increased both the number of its farmer outreach events and conferences and presentations in 2016. Along with youth outreach events to rural communities, farmer outreach events drove an increase in audiences with a rural background in 2016.

For the first time in 2016, ILF tracked gender at its field days. Overall, 27% of attendees were female, while 73% were male. In 2017, ILF will seek new ways to increase female attendance at farmer and landowner outreach events.



### Background of Audiences at Outreach Events



### Level of Attendee Engagement

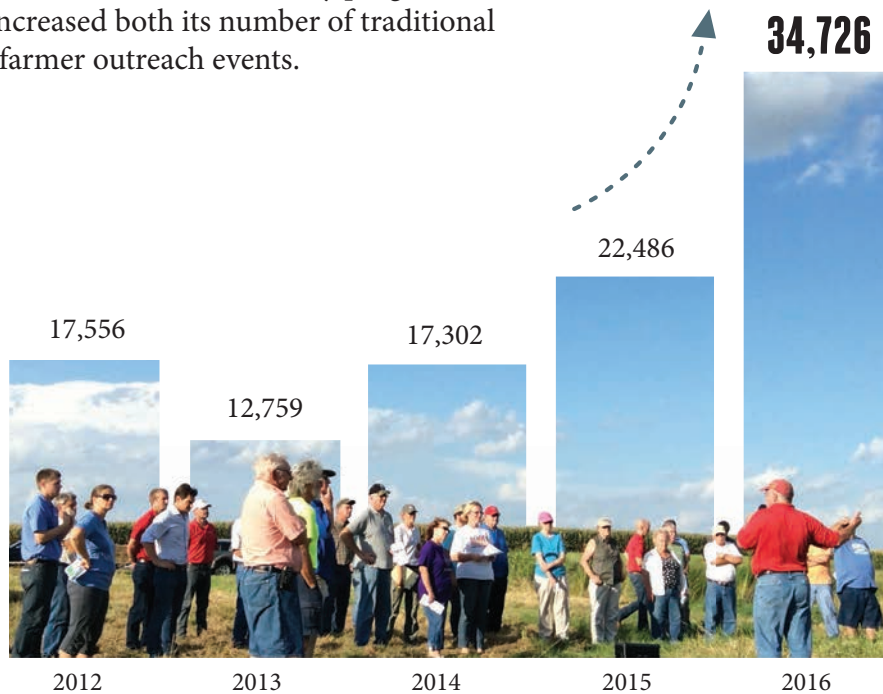
Staff members consider levels of audience engagement at each event. 2016 brought an increase in overall levels of engagement – 94% of all events had audience members who were highly interested and engaged in our message. This number is especially impressive because program attendance increased in 2016 by 54% to a record 34,726 people.





## Total Number of Attendees

In addition to substantial increases in the number of people reached, the overall number of ILF/WR! outreach events was up by 22% from 2015. Driving this increase was ILF's success at the Iowa State Fair this year with a record number of people who visited the Conservation Station (9,802 people over eleven days). In addition, Water Rocks! debuted its new School Assembly program, and the ILF/WR! team also increased both its number of traditional classroom visits and farmer outreach events.



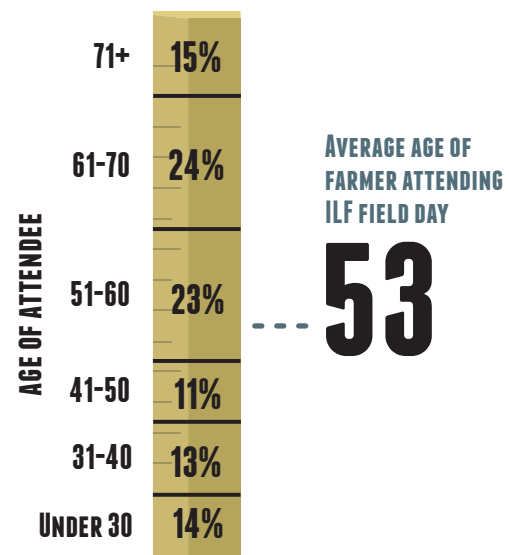
## Summary of Comment Cards (filled out by attendees at field days)

Comment cards were filled out by all participants who attended an ILF-sponsored field day or workshop. In total, 1,063 comment cards were received (n= 1,063).

Our field days remain primarily attended by farmers/operators, as 89% of respondents described themselves as either farmers/operators or landowners. The number of farmers/operators is slightly up from last year, from 56% to 60%. Nearly half (49%) of landowners attending ILF field days also described themselves as farmers/operators.

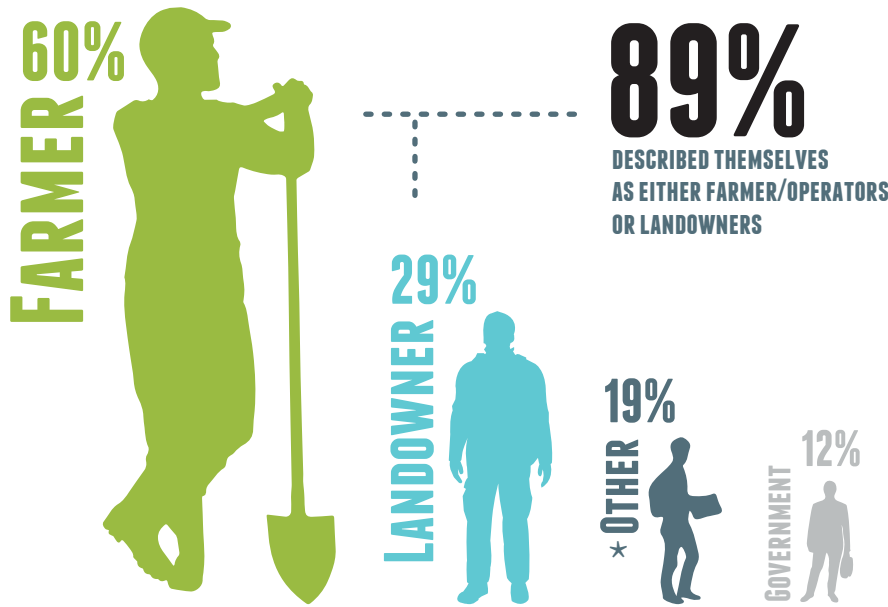
In 2016, 7% of the farmers/operators and landowners attended 2 or more ILF field days. Examining the past five years (2012-2016), just 20% of farmers/operators and landowners attended 2 or more ILF field days. As our field day success loop demonstrates, attending multiple conservation field days increases both conservation practice implementation and networking effectiveness. This finding indicates that we are reaching not just the early adopters and stresses the importance of conservation field days.

The average age of farmers/operators attending ILF field days was 53 years, slightly younger than the average age of a farmer in Iowa (57 years). This has been consistent in the four years that we have been tracking age information. The average age of landowners attending ILF field days was higher at 63 years.



# Description of Field Day Attendees

Individuals could choose more than one category.



\*Other includes media, students and agricultural industries.

Number of field days attended

	2015	2016
1	41%	50%
2	28%	24%
3	16%	12%
4+	15%	14%

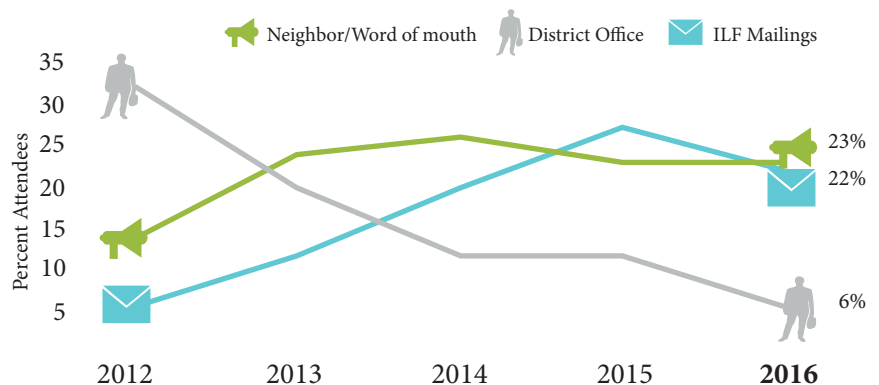
Word of mouth and mailing remain the most common ways that field day attendees find out about ILF field days. Word of mouth was slightly higher among farmers/operators (25%) when compared to all field day attendees (23%). The same is true with mailings, which notified 25% of farmers/operators attending the event, and 22% of all field day attendees.

Online communication is an emerging way to spread word about field days, with 23% of attendees to our final nine field days of the season finding out about the field day via either email (15%) or website (8%). Moving ahead in 2017, ILF will continue to promote field days through our E-News, website and blog.

# How Did Attendees Hear about the Field Day

Individuals could choose more than one category.

Neighbor/Word of Mouth	23%
Mailing	22%
Newspaper	18%
ISU Extension Staff	15%
Email**	15%
Website	8%
Other	7%
District Office	6%
Radio	2%



\*\*Email was included in the nine final field days of the season. Percentage reflects only respondents from 9 of 30 field days in 2016.

“District Office” as a method of hearing about the field day decreased by 50% from 2015 to 2016 (12% to 6%). It is possible that online communication (email and website) encompassed some of the promotion from District Offices. **A diversified communications approach remains critically important for maximizing the number of attendees at ILF field days and workshops!**

# Planning Cards

At each field day and workshop in 2016, Iowa Learning Farms asked farmers/operators and landowners to fill out planning cards and report their usage of certain conservation practices. Respondents were then asked to commit to implementing new conservation practices. One copy of the exercise was collected, and attendees kept the other copy to take home.

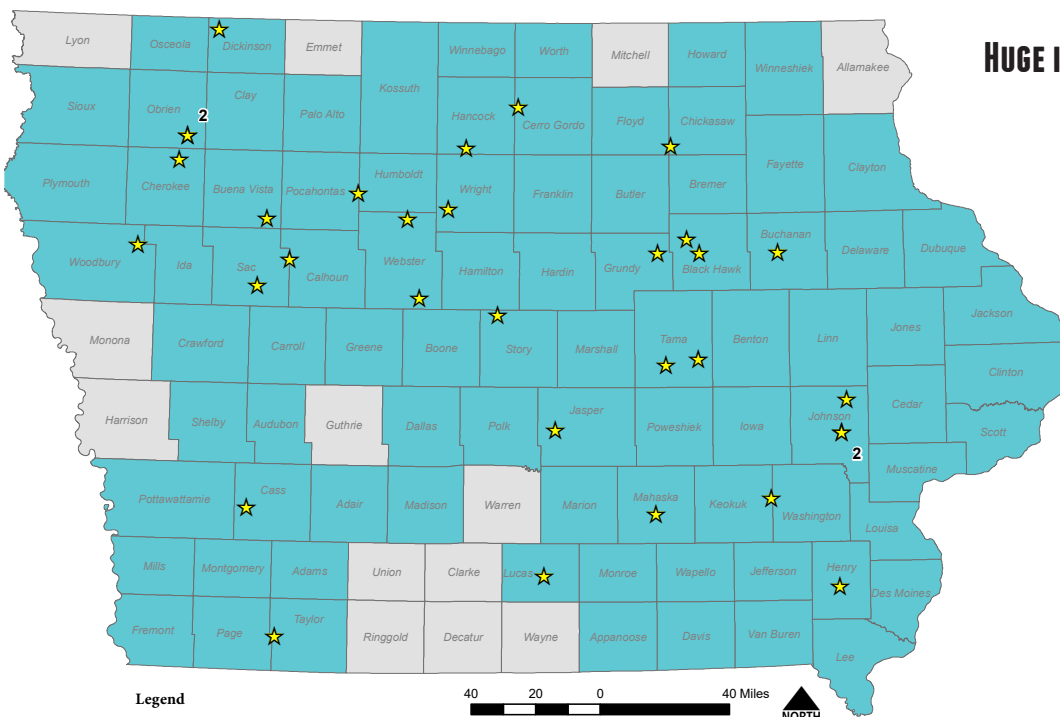
Number of Farmers and Landowners at 30 Field Days	Number of Planning Cards Received	Response rate
786	475	60%

*\*Farmers/operators and landowners who attended more than one ILF event and filled out more than one planning card in 2016 had only one planning card counted for the year*

We believe that planning cards make respondents more likely to change behavior if they make a public pledge towards increased conservation. Planning cards provide a way to validate our January evaluation data and assess what changes respondents intended to make. However, a little caution must be taken on interpreting the planning cards – reported data could be from two different growing seasons based on the date of the field day.

Planning cards were given out at all ILF field days and workshops that were evaluated in 2016 (30 total). In total, 475 different farmers/operators and landowners filled out planning cards for a 60% response rate. These respondents represented 86 of Iowa’s 99 counties. The map below shows the geographic range of those who completed planning cards in 2016. The 2016 planning card effort showed numerous positive improvements over 2015, which was our first year implementing this tool.

## 2016 Planning Card Participation by County



**Legend**  
 ★ 2016 Field Day Locations  
**Planning Card Participation**  
 □ No  
 □ Yes

**HUGE INCREASE OVER 2015 EFFORT:**

**475** ↑ **56%**  
 TOTAL CARDS

**86** ↑ **36%**  
 COUNTIES REPRESENTED

**60%** ↑ **16%**  
 RESPONSE RATE

**DID YOU KNOW...**

The average distance traveled for a field day was





## Cover Crops

Of those who completed planning cards, 48% reported existing acreage in cover crops. Those respondents reported an average of 234 acres per farmer in cover crops. From our January evaluation data, we found that 62% reported planting cover crops in 2016 with an average of 235 acres per respondent. ***This finding suggests that planning cards can make a lasting impression on the farmer to follow through with conservation practices they committed to earlier in the growing season.***

From the January evaluation responses, 66% of those who planted cover crops in 2016 added new acres of cover crops with an average of 101 acres per respondent. Of those adding acres, 21% were first-time cover crop planters who reported planting an average of 89 acres per respondent in cover crops. The number of reported first-timers (21% of respondents) was higher in the January evaluation data than the number of respondents from planning cards who reported that they intended to try cover crops for the first time (16% of respondents).



## No-Till/Strip Tillage

Planning card data show that 54% of respondents reported existing acreage in no-till/strip-till. Those respondents reported an average of 514 acres per respondent in no-till/strip-till. January evaluation data showed that 50% of respondents reported acres in the practice with an average of 564 acres per respondent.

Of those with reported acres in no-till/strip-till on the January evaluation, 36% stated that they added new acres of the practice with an average of 162 acres per respondent. Of those adding no-till/strip-till acres, 19% were first-timers with the practice. The number of reported first-timers for no-till/strip-till from the January evaluation (6% of respondents) was on par with the 7% of respondents from planning cards who reported they intended to try no-till/strip-till for the first time.





## Prairie Strips

Five percent of planning card respondents said that they intended to add prairie strips to their operation. In total, these respondents planned to add 241 acres, an average of 11 acres per respondent. In the January evaluation, 3% reported adding prairie strips for a total of 120 new acres and an average of 15 acres per respondent.



## Preaching Beyond the Choir

Approximately half of our respondents from planning cards (52%) and over one third of respondents (38%) to the January evaluation did not report acres in cover crops in 2016. For strip-till/no-till, approximately half of our respondents from planning cards (46%) and the January evaluation (50%) did not report acres in no-till/strip till in 2016. Although it is a goal of Iowa Learning Farms to get more conservation practices out on the land, ***this finding shows that we are reaching both experienced conservation farmers/landowners PLUS those who are still considering new ideas and whether conservation practices like cover crops and strip-till/no-till may be right for their operation.***



## Planning Card Takeaway

For the second year in a row, planning card data and January evaluation data showed similar results as we try to capture who is currently engaged in conservation practices in Iowa and to what extent. Consistent findings help to validate both sets of data. Planning cards serve as more reliable data on the conservation profile of the farmers and landowners who attend our field days because they are only filled out by attendees who are farmers or landowners. This tool helps us to reach those not yet engaged in conservation practices and see if we can play a role in moving people to make changes and add conservation farming practices to their operations. ***Iowa Learning Farms continues to draw an audience of farmers, operators and landowners who are both experienced with conservation farming practices and new to the ideas.***



## Summary of Follow-up Evaluations for Field Days

Follow-up evaluation questionnaires were mailed to participants at ILF-sponsored field days and workshops that occurred before November 8. The one-page questionnaires were mailed within three weeks of the event and focused on event feedback and whether participants intended to change any land management practices. A total of 859 evaluations were mailed; 353 surveys were returned to make for a 41% response rate (n=353).

	# Attendees	# Comment Cards	# Returned Surveys	# Planning Cards
February 23, Cover Crop Workshop, Ventura	47	35	15	15
February 24, Cover Crop Workshop, Sutherland	57	50	23	27
February 25, Cover Crop Workshop, Waterloo	65	53	24	25
March 1, Cover Crop Workshop, Iowa City	80	67	24	34
March 2, Cover Crop Workshop, Oskaloosa	43	35	19	24
March 3, Cover Crop Workshop, Lewis	58	44	20	35
April 12, Cover Crop Field Day, Larrabee	35	18	8	13
April 13, Cover Crop Field Day, Kanawha	60	41	17	14
April 14, Cover Crop/Grazing Field Day, Mount Pleasant	50	35	7	24
June 8, Cover Crop/Strip-Till Field Day, Gilmore City	53	38	18	16
June 15, Cover Crop Field Day, New Market	20	8	3	9
June 16, Cover Crop/Soil Health Field Day, Solon	62	40	10	20
June 21, Cover Crop/Grazing Field Day, Vining	67	28	15	15
July 12, Cover Crop Field Day, Correctionville	107	63	25	2
July 13, Cover Crop and Drainage Field Day, Sutherland	74	73	18	14
July 14, Cover Crop Field Day, Tama	31	25	7	19
July 19, Cover Crop/Soil Health Field Day, Colfax	40	32	8	13
July 28, Cover Crop/Strip-Till Field Day, Badger	44	30	10	8
August 10, Cover Crop/Soil Health Field Day, Lake Park	75	49	20	11
August 24, Cover Crop Field Day, Newell	32	19	7	12
August 25, Cover Crop/Soil Health Field Day, Eagle Grove	50	37	9	16
September 6, Cover Crop/STRIPS Field Day, Dike	34	21	13	17
September 7, Cover Crop/Soil Health Field Day, Keota	65	53	11	29
September 8, Biorenewables and STRIPS Field Day, Cedar Rapids	70	43	16	9
September 15, Cover Crop/Soil Health Field Day, Lake View	32	16	6	10
November 8, Cover Crop Field Day, Independence	19	11	Not sent	5
November 10, Cover Crop/Grazing Field Day, Lytton	34	25	Not sent	7
November 15, Cover Crop/Grazing Field Day, Dayton	41	26	Not sent	9
November 16, Cover Crop Field Day, Nashua	33	23	Not sent	14
November 17, Cover Crop Field Day, Cedar Falls	32	25	Not sent	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,510</b>	<b>1,063 (859 surveys mailed)</b>	<b>353*</b>	<b>475**</b>

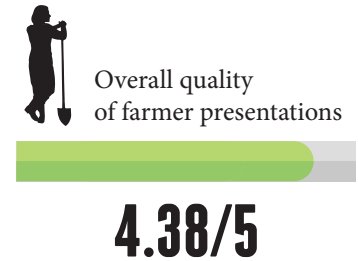
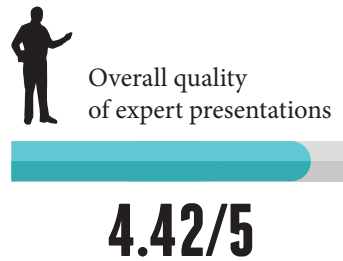
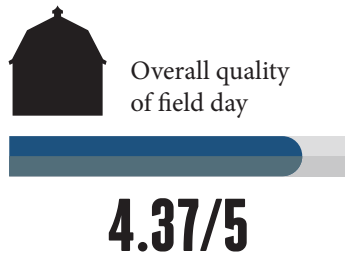
\*41% response rate

\*\*Planning cards are only filled out by farmers/operators and landowners at field days and workshops. 60% of all farmers/operators and landowners attending ILF field days or workshops filled out planning cards

All three categories that we use to evaluate the effectiveness of field days (overall quality of field day or workshop, effectiveness of expert presentation(s) and effectiveness of farmer presentation(s)) saw a modest increase over 2015 numbers. *The individual field day evaluations are available in a separate report.*

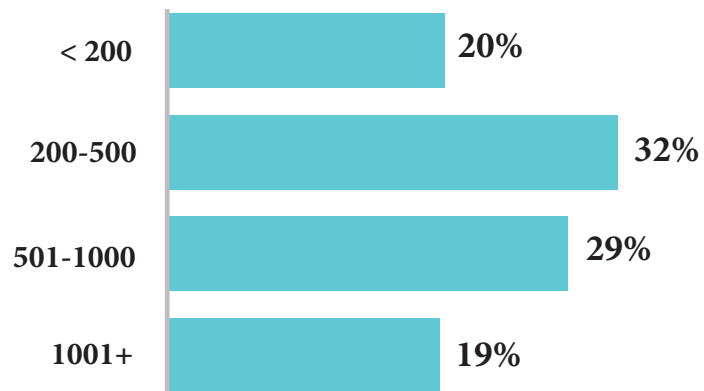
(n=353)

	Excellent (5)	Good (4)	Average (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)
Overall quality of field day or workshop	45%	48%	6%	1%	--
Effectiveness of expert presentations	50%	43%	6%	1%	--
Effectiveness of farmer presentations	52%	35%	11%	2%	--



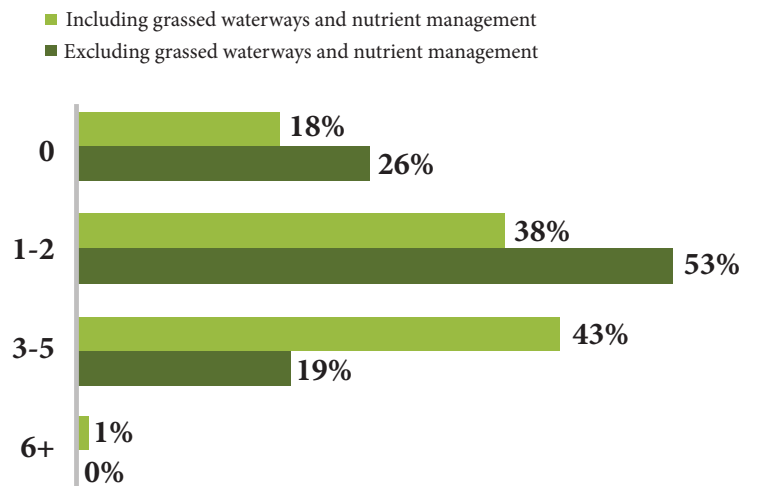
### Number of Acres Farmed (n=281)

According to the three-week follow-up evaluation data, **80% of respondents in our data set farmed 200 or more acres**, which is Iowa Learning Farms' target audience. Respondents reported an average of 759 acres farmed per farmer (median 500) with 79% of respondents reporting. These acreage numbers closely match our January evaluation numbers on acreage, further validating both data sets.



### Number of Conservation Practices (n=353)

Respondents were asked what types of conservation practices they currently utilize, and they were given a list of the following practices: grassed waterways, crop rotation, no-till/strip-till, cover crops, nutrient management, filter strips, prairie strips, rotational grazing and other. Forty-four percent of respondents answered that they utilize three or more conservation practices. The most common conservation practice reported was waterways with 69% of respondents already using that practice. Excluding waterways and nutrient management we observe a significant reduction in the number of practices implemented.





## Summary of January Evaluations for Field Days

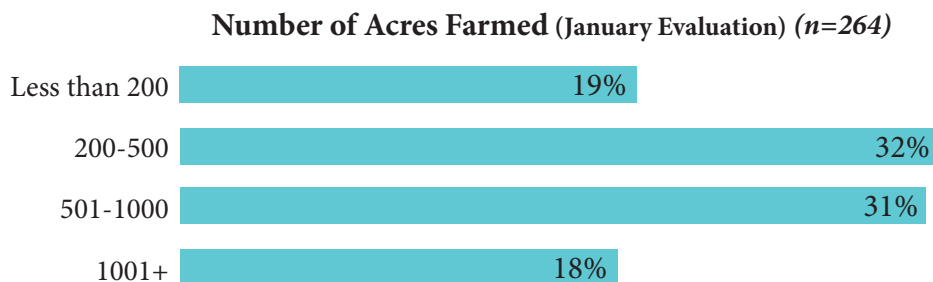
January evaluation questionnaires were mailed to only farmers/operators and landowners for all 30 ILF-sponsored field days and workshops of 2016. We mailed these surveys in January 2017 after the conclusion of the 2016 growing season. The goal of the January evaluation is to investigate whether respondents made changes to their farming practices, and whether those changes were similar to what they said they would do in earlier evaluations and on planning cards. In a one-month period, attendees returned 281 evaluations for a 40% response rate, which is quite good for a one-time mailing.

# Surveys Sent	# Surveys Returned	Response Rate
706	281	40%

*Please describe the ways you have integrated what you learned from this field day or workshop into your farming operation.*

	Field Day Season 2014 n=174	Field Day Season 2015 n=242	Field Day Season 2016 n=281
Increased use of surface residue management (no-till or strip-till) on some of my acres	44%	41%	36%
Total acres of no-till/strip-till implemented by ILF field day attendees	24,120	54,425 (7,949 new acres)	79,546 (7,758 new acres)
Average # of acres per respondent who said they were putting more acres into no-till or strip-till	395	169	162
I fall seeded cover crops on some of my acres in fall 2016	63% (16,979 new acres)	70% (14,050 new acres)	62% (12,203 new acres)
Total acres of cover crops planted by ILF field day attendees	Not asked	40,257	38,258
Average # of acres per respondent who said they were putting acres into cover crops	170	255	235
I discussed +/- of using no-till/strip-till/cover crops with my landowners/tenants	73%	71%	69%
I networked conservation ideas with other farmers or my farmer clients	67%	71%	65%
If yes, how successful were you? (Number of people you influenced)	One other: 48% Two or more: 32% No others: 20%	One other: 24% Two or more: 46% No others: 30%	One other: 37% Two or more: 34% No others: 29%
I did not make any changes	11%	11%	13%

ILF is reaching a variety of producers. Our target audience of those who farm 200 or more acres made up 81% of our January evaluation respondents. Respondents reported farming an average of 743 acres and collectively operated on 191,813 total crop acres in Iowa.



## Cover Crops

Thirty-two percent of cover crops reported in the January evaluation were new acres. This is a 3% decline in new cover crop acres over last year's estimate. If we project this ratio of new and existing cover crop acres to Iowa as a whole, we are estimating that there were no more than 623,000 total acres of cover crops planted statewide in 2016, compared to 472,500 in 2015. If this holds true, our sample of ILF field day and workshop attendees represents 6% of the overall cover crop acres in Iowa. We realize that other organizations are suggesting that there were possibly up to 750,000 acres of cover crops planted in 2016. Nothing in our extensive evaluation efforts would support the idea of that kind of growth. Rather, cover crop use remained steady.



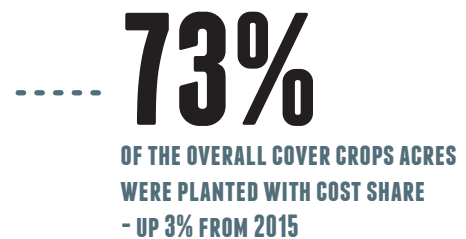
The majority of respondents (69%) started seeding cover crops at least three years ago, with an average of five years of use. If we look at respondent's percentage of row crop acres seeded to cover crops, there is a steady increase corresponding with the number of years that a respondent reported seeding cover crops.

**Number of years with cover crops?**  
n=171

	2014	2015	2016
1	30%	19%	21%
2	23%	18%	10%
3-5	34%	47%	36%
6+	13%	16%	33%

On average, those respondents with cover crops reported an average of 40% of their total row crop acres in cover crops. Respondents who planted cover crops for the first time in 2016 planted an average of 89 acres.

The overall percentage of farmers who are using cost share to seed cover crop acres remained constant over the past three years. However, 73% of the overall cover crops acres were planted with cost share, while 86% of those new acres were planted with cost share. Cost share was used to plant 82% of the acres for farmers who reported cover crop usage for three years (up from 78% last year).



For those respondents who listed the specific cover crop species they use, the most common cover crops reported were the grasses.

**2016 Cover Crop Planting by Type (Could choose more than one)**  
n=154

Species Type	Percent Planted
Grasses	76%
Brassicas	51%
Legumes	19%

**Did farmer use cost share?**  
% of farmers  
n=168

	2014	2015	2016
Yes	58%	60%	61%
No	42%	40%	39%





Radishes/turnips appear to be decreasing in popularity over the past several years, while “other” species of cover crops—especially rapeseed, clover and peas—are on the increase. Similar to findings in 2015, respondents with larger total cover crop acreage tended to plant more mixtures than single species. Those respondents with 130 or more acres of cover crops were also likely to use cereal rye on at least some of their acres.

*Species of cover crops used? (could list more than one)*  
*n=154*





\*Other includes hairy vetch, clover, winter pea, rapeseed, triticale and annual rye.

	 <130 acres with cover crops	 130+ acres with cover crops
Cereal rye	72%	96%
Radishes/Turnips	21%	28%
Oats	21%	26%
Other	17%	26%
Wheat	10%	13%

----- **96%**  
**USED CEREAL RYE ON AT LEAST SOME OF THEIR ACRES**

*Single Species or Mix Planted?*

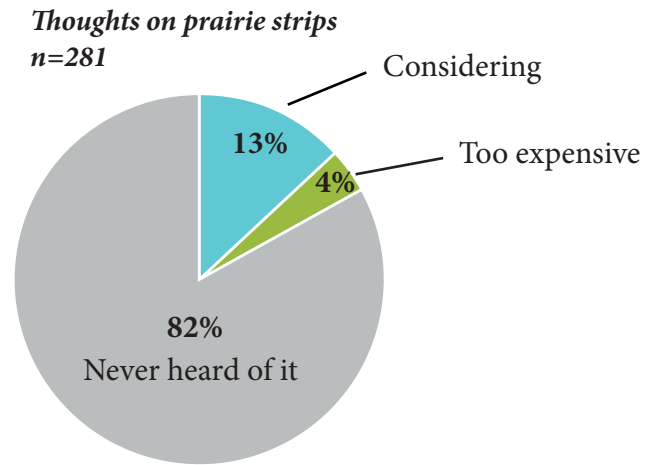
	2014	2015	2016
Single species	55%	60%	59%
Mix	45%	40%	41%

	 Less than 130 acres with cover crops	 130+ acres with cover crops
Single species	71%	48%
Mix	29%	52%

## Prairie Strips

*Thirteen percent of farmers/operators and landowners who attended ILF field days in 2016 reported using prairie strips on their land. This number is up from 9% in 2015.* Respondents who reported acres in prairie strips accounted for a total of 513 prairie strip acres in Iowa (120 new acres in 2016).

The vast majority of respondents who answered this question (82%) continue to report that they are not familiar with prairie strips. Thirteen percent report that they are considering installing prairie strips as a conservation practice on their land this year compared to 16% of respondents last year.

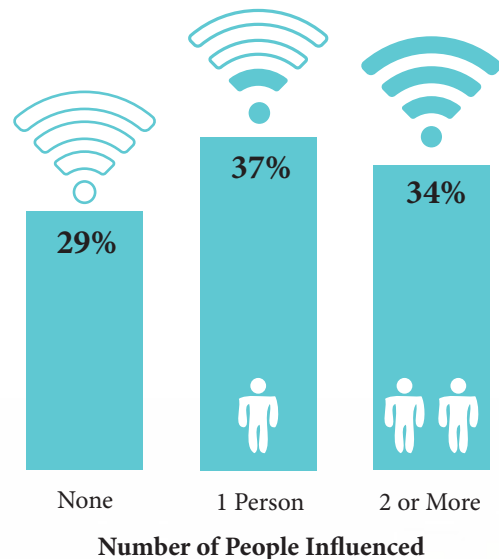


## Networking

Networking by field day attendees remains an important outreach method for Iowa Learning Farms as we host farmer outreach events and provide valuable information to farmers, landowners, agricultural professionals and others. In 2016, networking by field day attendees continued, with 65% of respondents reporting that they networked with others about conservation ideas in 2016.

Of those attendees who networked, 71% reported that they were successful, influencing at least one other person. Given this, these farmers are extending ILF's influence to 48% more farmers than attended ILF events in 2016. That's a \$1.48 value for every dollar invested in ILF. This is down from last year.

How Successful Were You in Networking?  
n=129

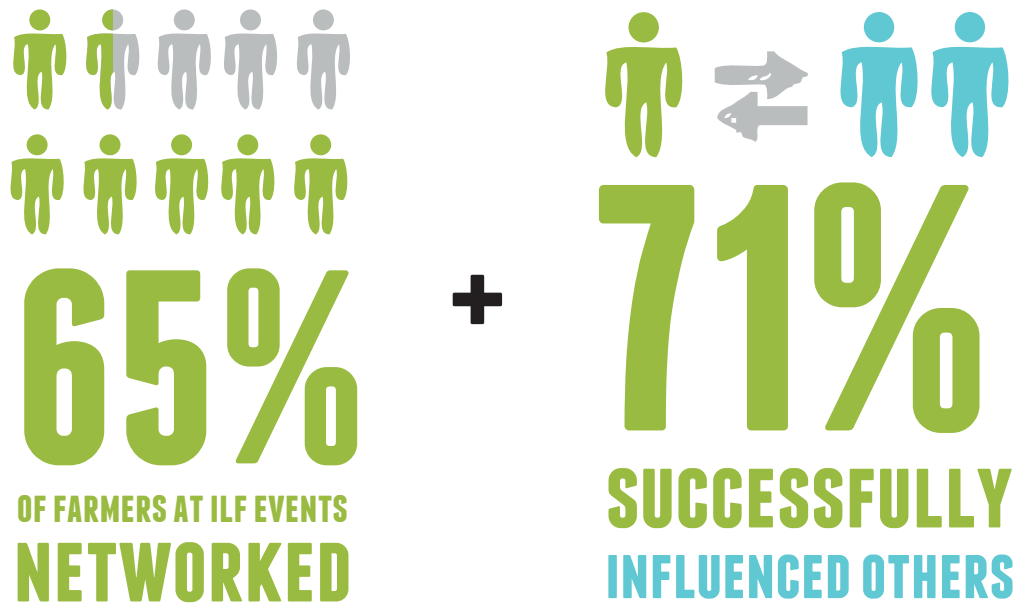


Certain factors make respondents more likely to connect with others and network about conservation ideas. Those who farm a larger number of total acres, those who attend more field days per year and those who have more years of experience with cover crops are more likely to report networking conservation ideas.

In 2016, we saw a large increase of respondents who reported that they attended only one field day. We know that respondents are more likely to report networking when they attend more field days—even attending two field days in a year can significantly increase their likelihood to network and share conservation ideas with others. For respondents who attended two or more field days, 75% reported networking, and they successfully influenced 60% more farmers than who attended the field days.

ILF continues to provide a quality experience at farmer field days and workshops, and we hope that this experience encourages attendees to come back to more than one event in a season. *Field days continue to matter in terms of nurturing a voluntary approach to conservation.*

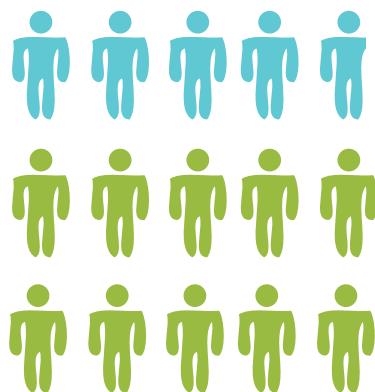
### Multiplier Effect



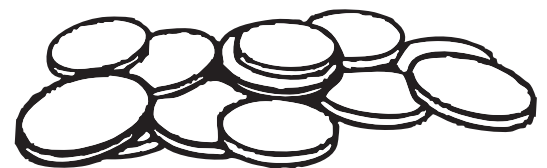
ILF FARMERS ARE EXTENDING  
ILF'S INFLUENCE TO

48%

MORE FARMERS  
THAN ATTENDED THE EVENT



That's a \$1.48 return for every dollar  
spent on an ILF event.





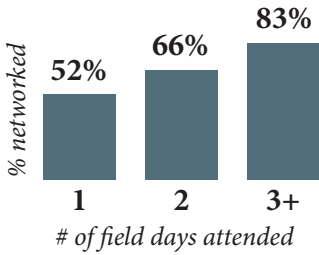
# Field Day Success Loop

**30%** 

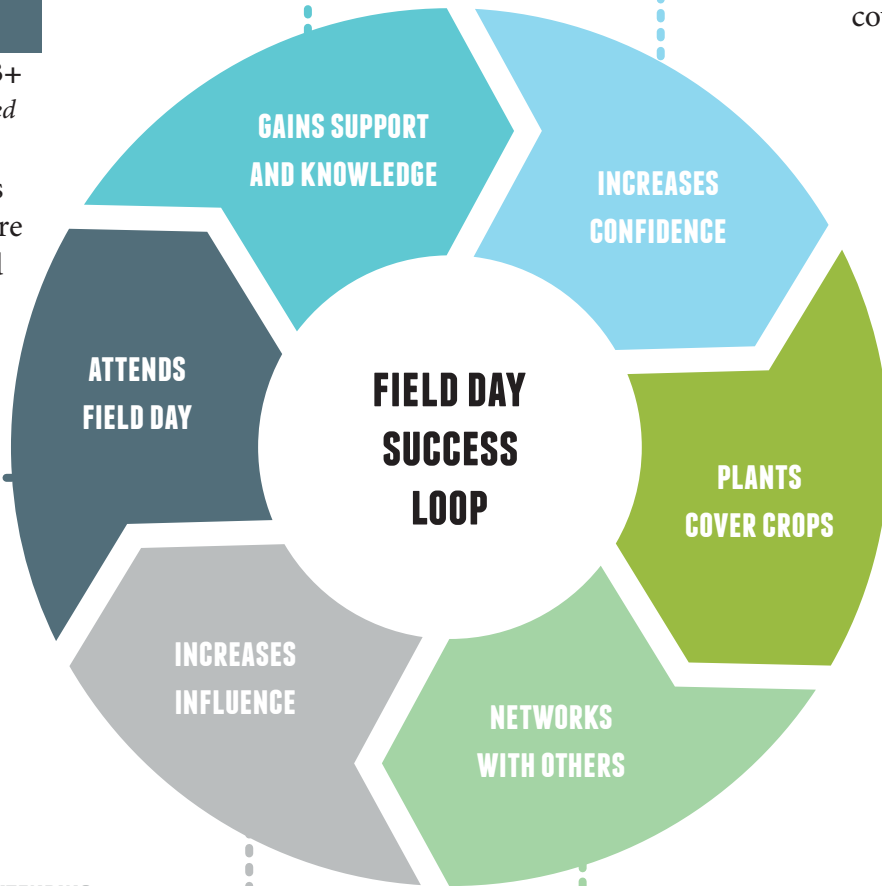
of farmers reported knowledge as a barrier to implementing additional conservation practices.



The more field days one attends the more likely they are to plant cover crops.



The more field days one attends the more likely they reported networking and influencing others.



**32%**

of cover crops were new acres.

FARMERS ARE EXTENDING ILF'S INFLUENCE TO

**48%**

MORE FARMERS THAN ATTENDED THE EVENT

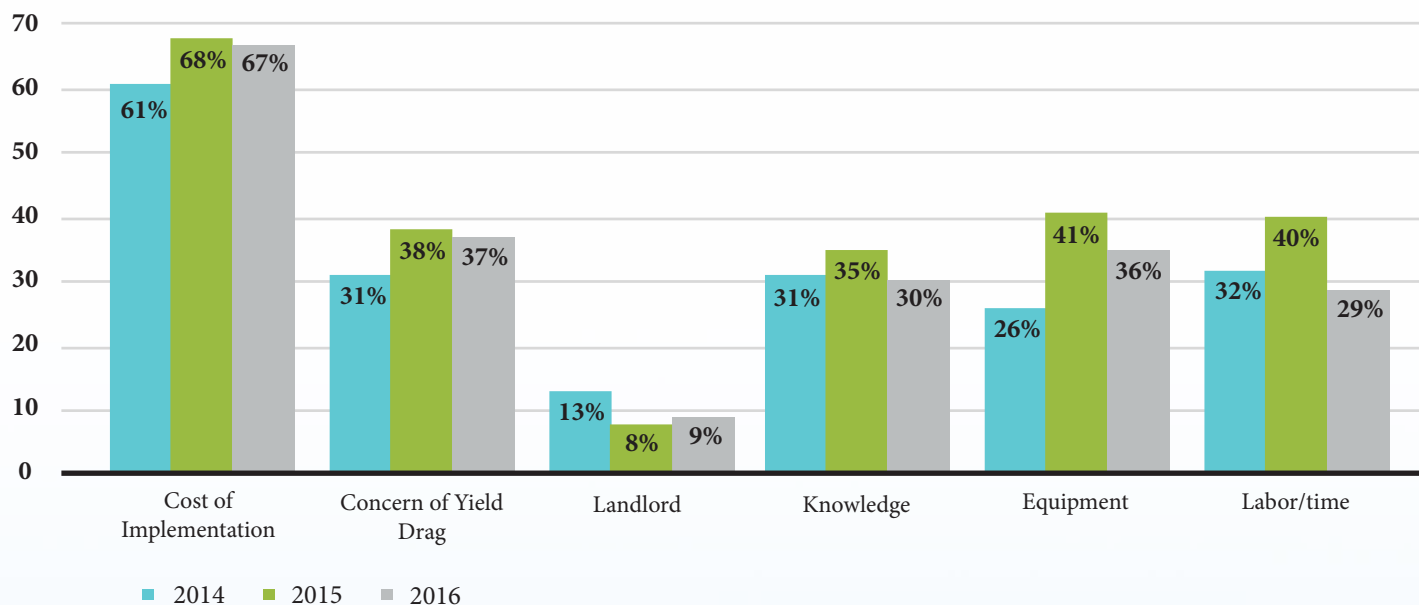
**65%**

OF FARMERS AT ILF EVENTS NETWORKED

## Barriers

Respondents cited cost of implementation as the biggest barrier to applying conservation practices on their land for the third year in a row.

*What are the biggest barriers to implementing additional conservation practices? (Could list more than one)*



If we compare respondents' opinions based on two broad categories – total acres farmed and number of years with cover crops – additional themes emerge. Respondents who farm a larger amount of acres have more concerns about yield impact and labor/time. Concerns about knowledge and equipment are less with those who farm more acres.

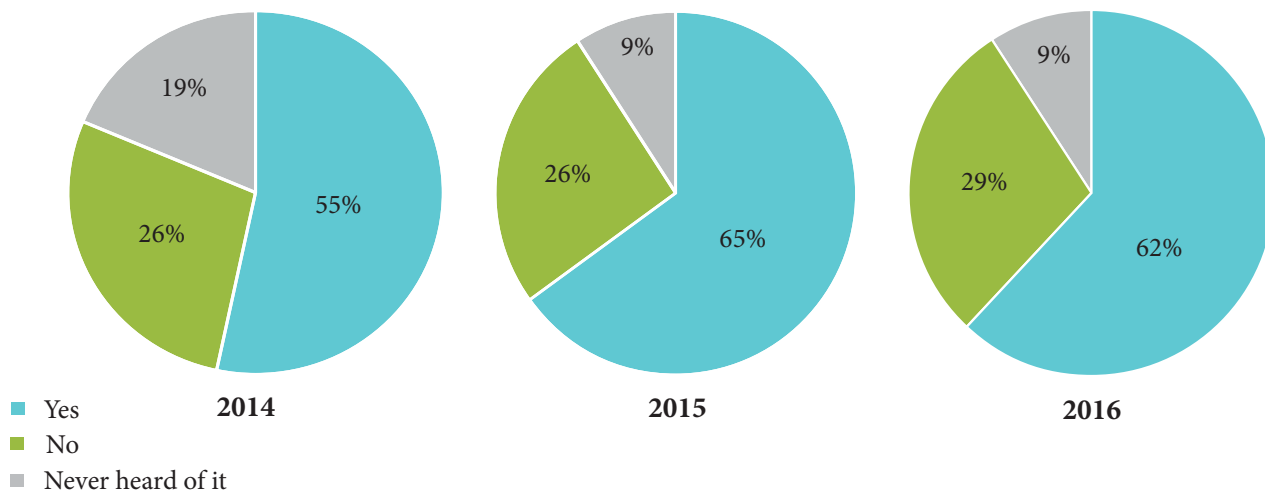
As respondents gain more experience with cover crops, they reported far fewer concerns about the categories of yield impacts and knowledge required to implement conservation practices. Once they got established with cover crops, respondents also reported fewer concerns about landlords.



## Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy

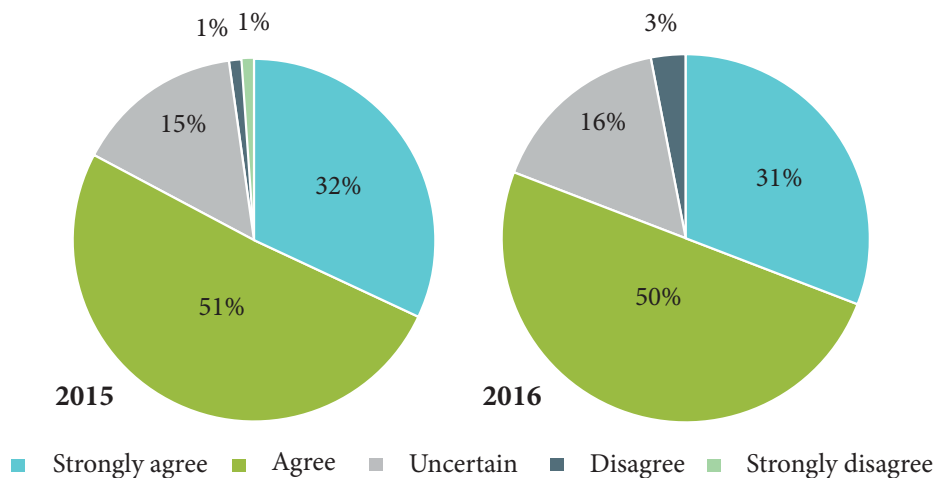
Farmers/operators and landowners who attended ILF field days in 2016 were asked about the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS) as part of the January evaluation. From 2015 to 2016, the percentage of those who had never heard of the NRS remained constant at 9%. The percentage of those who thought the NRS was achievable decreased from 65% to 62%, while those who did not believe the NRS was achievable increased from 26% to 29%.

*The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy calls for reductions in nonpoint source loads: 41% for nitrogen and 29% for phosphorus. Based on your knowledge of the local area, is this achievable?*



When investigating the question of whether the NRS is achievable, we found that respondents who answered “yes” had higher implementation rates of cover crop seeding, but an almost equal likelihood to report existing acres in no-till/strip-till. Respondents who stated that they strongly agreed that helping to meet the NRS’s goals was a high priority for them attended an average of three field days in 2016; the average across all respondents was two field days.

*Helping to meet the Nutrient Reduction Strategy’s goals is a high priority for me.*



Partners of Iowa Learning Farms are the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service and Iowa Department of Natural Resources (USEPA section 319), Conservation Districts of Iowa, Iowa Farm Bureau, Iowa Water Center and Practical Farmers of Iowa.