

Bringing it together



MAY 2008

Photo by Stan Buman

Our Mission:

Agren, Inc. responds to agricultural and environmental challenges by providing comprehensive, integrated services to groups and individuals to positively impact our natural resources. The Agren team is dedicated to achieving client objectives through a commitment to quality and excellence.

Agren Works with State Partners to Incubate 'Conservation Assurance Program' for Landowners

Seldom have so many factors come together at one time to encourage maximum production from Iowa's farmland. Land prices are at record levels. CRP acres are coming out of retirement to active production. The biofuels industry requires millions of bushels of grain. Stover-based ethanol production is close to a reality.

Operators are paying all-time high rental rates for farmland. And the prices farmers get for their crops keep climbing.

This increased demand for maximum production has far-reaching implications for efforts to conserve Iowa's natural resources. Even when both the landowner and operator care about conservation, they have inherently different objectives. Reconciling

their disparate land-use priorities will take discussion and understanding between both parties.

Agren is taking a lead role in trying to make this happen.

In March, Agren facilitated an expert panel discussion involving both landowners and representatives of several conservation organizations. The meeting was funded by the North Central Regional Integrated Pest

Management Center through American Farmland Trust.

Included in the invited participants were about 14 absentee landowners – people who own Iowa farmland but do not operate their land. Organizations represented at the meeting included Iowa State University, Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Natural Resources Conservation Service

(NRCS), Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship (IDALS), Feed Energy Company, Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) and the Iowa Soybean Association.

Working over a three-day period, the group laid the groundwork for what is hoped to become a program allowing landowners to assure themselves that their land is being farmed and cared for as they wish.

Based on recent research

Making absentee landowners aware of their conservation options is an issue of growing importance to conservationists in Iowa and across the country. In Iowa alone, 47 percent of Iowa's landowners are not the operators of their land, and almost 20 percent live outside of the state. Nearly 60 percent of Iowa's land is farmed under landlord-tenant

How does a landowner know that his land will be cared for as he wishes, even if he lives many states away?

(continued on inside)

Agren Works with State Partners to Incubate 'Conservation Assurance Program' for Landowners (cont.)

agreements. And women own more than half of this land.

As members of the expert panel debated how best to help landowners assure their land is well cared for, they weighed data on absentee landowners and natural resources conservation from several sources.



Iowa landowners (from left) Roxanne Garrett, Erin Lenz, Chuck Johnson, Mike Johnston and Jeff Pudenz, prepare written comments to a proposal at a recent expert panel meeting on conservation assurance.

Research confirms that people who own farmland but don't operate it often have different priorities from those who actually farm the land for them. Based on a survey of 2,000 absentee landowners in the Great Lakes region conducted by Agren last year, less than 20 percent indicated that making a profit was their main priority for their land. The survey showed that conservation, wildlife, aesthetics and recreation were generally more important to absentee landowners than their land's profit potential.

Farmers and ranchers, however, must maximize the land's profitability in order to be successful. While they may also value conservation, wildlife and other factors, it is not unreasonable to assume that making money from the land ranks higher with them as a group than it does with absentee landowners.

Mike Duffy, director of the Iowa State University Beginning Farmer Center, presented results of a recent

land tenure study. Based on his research, Duffy surmised that there will continue to be more people who own land who do not live in Iowa. He expects the state to continue to move toward more dispersed land ownership, and that more farmers will own part of their land and rent the rest.

How conservation assurance works

As a final outcome of the meeting, participants outlined the framework for a pilot project to create a "conservation assurance" program. The ultimate goal is to meet the needs and natural resource objectives of Iowa's non-operator, or absentee, landowners. Ideally, the pilot project will be implemented in two or three Iowa watersheds.

Preliminary discussion centered on creation of a three-tier program:

1. A self-guided assessment completed by the landowner and tenant together. A workbook would serve as a guide to help them assess their farm and management practices as they relate to natural resources and conservation.

2. A land certification option that determines whether or not the farm meets certain standards for natural resources, such as soil and water quality, wildlife habitat and energy use. This determination would be made by a third-party, non-governmental agency.
3. A certification program for farm operators who attend formal training. Landowners would have access to a list of certified operators as they make decisions about who they want to farm their land.

Under the preliminary program guidelines, landowners would be allowed to choose to participate in any one component of the program, or any combination of the three. Third-party technical assistance would be available to help landowners and operators work through the process. Participation would be entirely voluntary.

While details of the conservation assurance program are far from finalized, interest generated during the initial expert panel meeting remains strong. Since the meeting adjourned, discussion has been ongoing between Agren and participating conservation agencies about how to make the concept a reality.

Solving Complex Problems with Expert Panels

The conservation assurance program currently being explored is a direct result of an expert panel meeting organized and led by Agren staff in March. Agren has employed this technique in several projects with great success.

Expert panels are created by bringing together a team of diverse individuals and engaging them in a series of organized, responsive dialogs. The objective is to both gather information and formulate a unified recommendation to efficiently solve a particular problem.

Agren has integrated this approach into many projects in order to draw on the knowledge and expertise of leaders in specific fields. Agren convened an expert panel to review specifications for incorporating LiDAR and GIS into conservation planning. The panel's recommendations were critical in developing the solicitation request to prospective software developers.

Agren also used the expert panel approach to assess the appropriateness and utility of The Grazing Manager (TGM) software, both scientifically and for its usefulness to grazing managers.

Agren Staff Brings Expertise To Agronomic Field Research

How well do seed treatments actually work on soybean leaf beetles and soybean aphids? Are new herbicides really more effective against woolly cupgrass in cornfields than existing products?

These are just a couple of the questions that Agren will help answer through several agronomic field research projects during the current growing season.

Since its inception 11 years ago, Agren has conducted numerous agronomic field research studies for seed and chemical companies. Among those studies are herbicide, fungicide and insecticide efficacy; corn fertility; herbicide resistance, and corn and soybean tillage trials. In addition, Agren has planted several demonstration plots, and has also been asked to analyze data for studies completed by other organizations.

Through the years, Agren has managed research plots ranging in size from half an acre to 40 acres. Specialized equipment is often required, particularly when completing

studies on small plots. Agren purchases and builds small, specialized equipment, such as four-row planters and two-row harvesters. It may take three to four hours to plant one acre, especially when seed needs to be changed every 30 feet.



Agren staff bring years of expertise to agronomic field research projects. Here research director Bob Buman harvests a field with a combine designed especially for plot research.

AGREN holds a Federal Supply Schedule for Environmental Services

Contact Agren for these services available under the SIN designations:

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& Documentations

Waste Management Services

Environmental Compliance
Services



For details, contact Agren at 712-792-6248.

Or visit www.agren-inc.com/gsa.php

Agren's spray equipment is also specially designed for research purposes. Agren applies herbicide, insecticide and fungicide with a sprayer equipped with 12 sprayer tanks ranging in size from two-liter pop bottles to five gallons each. Chemicals are measured with pipettes, graduated cylinders and scales with 1/100th gram accuracy.

Heading up Agren's field research is Bob Buman, PhD. With a background in agronomy and weed science, Bob is fully qualified to conduct agronomic field research. In the past 16 years, he's headed up research and demonstration projects for American Cyanamid, BASF Corp., Bayer Crop Science, DuPont, NOR-AM, Hoechst-AG, Aventis Crop Science, Rhone-Poulenc, Dow AgroScience, FMC Corp., Sandoz, Ciba-Geigy, Syngenta, CIC America, ISK Bioscience, Valent BioScience, Elf-Atochem and Monsanto.

Check it out . . . www.agren-inc.com

If you haven't visited Agren's website lately, we encourage you to check it out. Our new site, which went live in January, is designed to be colorful, informative and user-friendly. It can be accessed at either www.agren-inc.com or www.agreninc.com.

Here are some highlights to look for:

- ▶ **About** shares an overview of Agren...our history, goals and staff.
- ▶ The **Projects** tab showcases some of the diverse projects Agren works on.
- ▶ Agren is known for the **Services** we employ to find innovative solutions to environmental and agricultural challenges.
- ▶ Under **Resources**, you'll find published magazine and newspaper articles, a list of past and present Agren clients, and academic articles from our staff.



Check out Agren's recently re-designed website, where a new original photo is featured on each visit.

▶ Click on the **GSA** tab on the left-hand side of the home page to understand our Federal Supply Schedule contract.

▶ "Bringing it Together" newsletters are available on the **Newsletters** tab.

One highlight you'll enjoy are the professional photographs featured on each page, all taken by the two professional photographers on our staff, Stan and Bob Buman. A new photo is featured on the home page each time you visit.

As a little incentive to visit our new website, we're offering a company coffee mug to the first 10 people who e-mail us with the names of two clients Agren has worked with that are listed on our website. E-mail your answers to Agren at stan@agren-inc.com. Be sure to provide a phone number and mailing address, just in case you're among the first 10 respondents!

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