

# The Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll

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## WHAT IS THE IOWA FARM AND RURAL LIFE POLL?

The Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll was established in 1982 to provide timely and relevant information on issues important to Iowa's agricultural and rural communities. Generally known simply as "The Farm Poll," it is an annual survey of Iowa farmers. It is a cooperative project between the Iowa State University Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station, ISU Extension Service and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. The annual survey is managed by ISU Extension Sociology. The overall objective of the Farm Poll is to understand how the ongoing changes in Iowa's agriculture and rural areas affect farmers and rural society as a whole.

## BENEFITS OF THE POLL

Information from the poll is made available to local, state, and elected officials, community leaders, farm organization leaders, policy makers, and many other groups and individuals who have a stake in the vitality of agriculture and rural society. Information from the Farm Poll is used to guide policy decisions and actions and as the basis for public policy seminars, Extension reports, radio and television broadcasts, and newspaper and journal articles.

## SUSTAINABILITY IN THE FARM POLL

Since its inception, the Farm Poll has examined issues related to sustainability in agriculture and rural communities. Over the years, the Farm Poll has tracked farmer perspectives on water quality, soil quality and health, pest and disease management, including pesticide use and resistance, rural-urban migration, and many sustainability-related issues.

### Iowa Farmers' Opinions About Water

Water quality, conservation and use are increasingly receiving national, state and local attention. Several popular articles in the past year have examined the importance of water and some of the tough policy decisions facing the nation. The information presented here reports the responses of about one out of every 60 farmers across the state in the 1993 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll. U.S. News and World Report, "Water: The Next Crisis in the 90's."

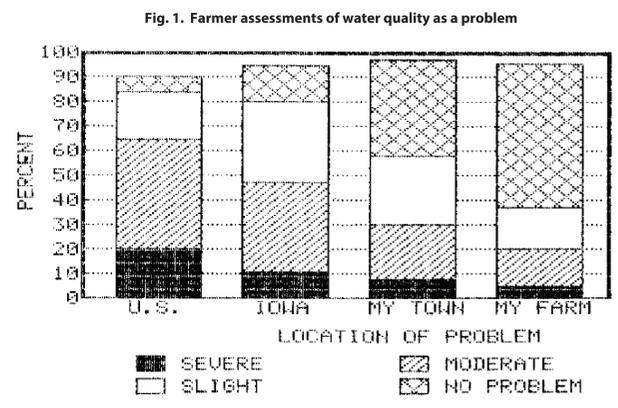
The press has covered numerous incidents of water pollution such as those in Basco and Love Canal—village residents of the town from aquatic health consequences of water pollution.

There have been several instances of water pollution reported in the state in the past year. The 1993 results across much of the state added to our awareness of our dependency on water. The Iowa legislature has asked the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship to submit a detailed water report to the governor. The report is being prepared by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

To better understand the water concerns among Iowa farmers and to assist policy makers, several water questions were included in the Fall 1993 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll.

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### 2007 Survey Report on Iowa Farmers' Views on the Bioeconomy

**Introduction**  
The past year has seen much discussion and coverage of the "bioeconomy." Ethical plant construction, conditions across the state, and government initiatives supporting biofuels development efforts such as the state's Renewable Fuel Standard, and the Iowa Power Fund have highlighted. With grants and agreements with private and public sector partners such as ConocoPhillips, DuPont, and the U.S. Department of Energy, Iowa State University is a major center of bioeconomy research. The Extension, in keeping with its mission to promote healthy people, communities, and economies, has been monitoring and addressing these developments.

In March and April 2007, ISU Extension held a series of meetings across the state that provided opportunities for farmers to voice their thoughts on current and future bioeconomy initiatives. The discussion groups, held in 50 counties and attended by nearly 1,000 people, were designed to collect information that will help Extension to serve its stakeholders' interests as it works to support development of bioeconomy initiatives that are socially, environmentally, and economically beneficial. The results of that effort are compiled in a report entitled *The Bioeconomy in Iowa: Local Conversations*.

**1. The Bioeconomy in Iowa: Local Conversations to evaluate and help promote bioeconomy initiatives. Publication of this poll as an extension extension office or through the Extension Extension Center on the Iowa State University campus.**

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### Rented Land in Iowa: Social and Environmental Dimensions

**Introduction**  
More than half of Iowa farmland is rented. Decisions regarding who has access to that land and how it is farmed can influence the social and environmental outcomes of family farming. Farmland owners ultimately are responsible for decisions about who farms their land and how they farm it. These decisions have a major influence on farm operators' ability to earn a living through farming, and whether the land is stewarded as explained.

Access to land, whether established through ownership or leasing arrangements, is critical to success in farming. In sections such as pasture farming, the new materials used in production practices can be sourced from across the globe, and different materials can be substituted for one another in times of relative scarcity. In agriculture, there is a finite amount of farmland available in a given area, if farmers do not have access to additional land within a certain distance of their homes, they cannot farm.

Therefore, access to more acreage through leasing or a living or at least contribute to household income in key to success in farming.

Ownership can play a major role in determining the environmental impacts of farming. Farmers have consistently been more likely to implement conservation practices—such as no-till and cover crops—on their own land and have longer-term benefits because such as erosion and ground water pollution. It is important that we develop a better understanding of how lease operations land stewardship might affect the environmental performance of agricultural activities on that land.

Given that a majority of Iowa farmland is rented, surprisingly little research has examined these issues.

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### Farmer Perspectives on Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy

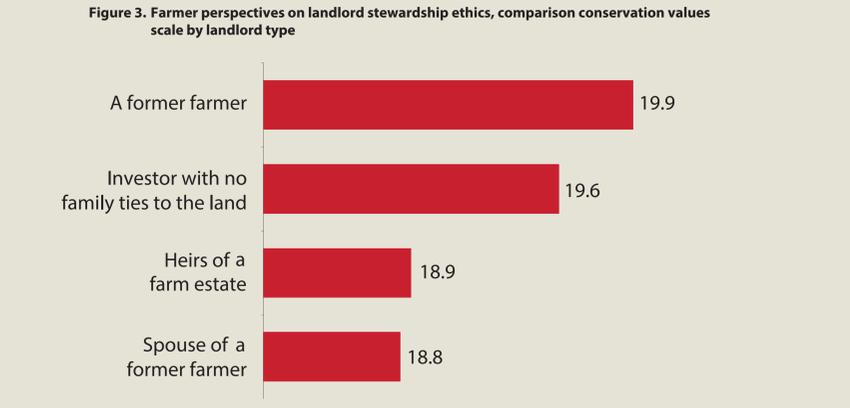
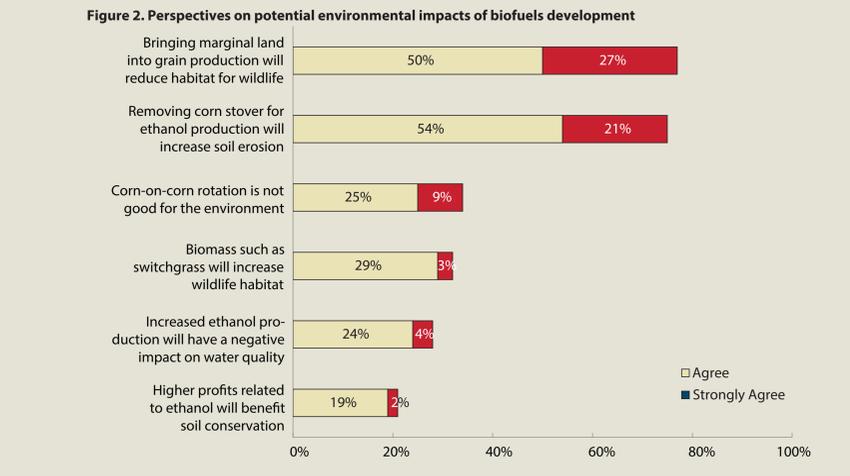
The water quality impacts of nutrients from agriculture are increasingly important to Iowans and Iowa agriculture. Corn and other crops are highly dependent on nitrogen and phosphorus. Much of the nutrients that are applied to or otherwise present in agricultural soils serve the purpose of increasing yields of crops, pasture, and other agricultural products. However, some are lost from fields into waterways, where they degrade water quality in Iowa streams, lakes, and other water bodies. Some of these nutrients eventually flow into the Mississippi River and on to the Gulf of Mexico, where they contribute to the formation of oxygen-depleted areas called hypoxic zones. In short, the loss of nitrogen and other nutrients from agricultural activities leads to economic and environmental costs in Iowa and beyond.

In 2013, the state of Iowa released the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (iowanutrientreductionstrategy.iowa.gov). The strategy is a series of recommendations that farmers and landowners are encouraged to implement designed to guide actions that reduce the loss of nutrients to surface water. It was developed through a collaborative process between Iowa State University, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), with support from the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS), and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The strategy was developed by the 2008 Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan, which called for Iowa and other states in the Mississippi River watershed to develop strategies to reduce nutrient loadings to the Gulf of Mexico. The Iowa strategy addresses both "point sources" (e.g., water treatment plants) and "nonpoint sources" (e.g., runoff from crop fields) of nutrients. The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy's goal for Iowa agriculture is a 45 percent reduction in nitrogen loss and a 25 percent reduction in phosphorus loss. The strategy document highlights many ways that farmers and agricultural landowners can take action to make progress toward these goals. It summarizes research on the effectiveness of "best management practices" for reducing nutrient loss from farmland. The strategy recommends that farmers and landowners, with support from agronomists, conservation groups, conservation agencies and organizations, and others, reduce their nutrient loadings by increasing their use of an appropriate, diverse mix of management strategies and conservation practices on the land they farm and/or own.

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	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
Landlords are often unwilling to spend money on conservation .....	1.6	12.1	30.4	46.4	9.6
Short-term pressure to make profit margins makes it difficult to invest in conservation practices whose benefits are mostly long-term .....	1.8	14.7	28.2	48.1	7.3
I have done all I can to reduce losses of nitrogen and/or phosphorus from my farm operation .....	1.4	20.6	37.8	32.2	8.0
Most of the benefits from farmer investments in practices to address water quality go to non-farmers .....	2.5	21.9	42.3	28.2	5.2
I can't afford to take land out of production and put it into conservation practices .....	6.0	30.4	33.0	26.1	4.4
The cost of further reduction of nutrient losses from my farm operation would be too high .....	4.2	24.7	54.6	14.4	2.0