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Preparing for Outreach and Engagement of Women Non-Operating Landowners and their Operators in the Great Lakes



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Overview

This white paper was completed as part of a 2015 planning grant to American Farmland Trust from the Great Lakes Protection Fund (Grant #1095) entitled *Targeting Women Absentee Farmland Owners to Test Sustainable Agricultural Leases*. Building the framework for a successful project that involves non-operating farmland owners and leased farmland requires a significant amount of background research and this white paper summarizes this research.

The planning grant team included Ann Sorensen, Jennifer Filipiak, David Haight, Jeff Ten Eyck, Ben Kurtzman, Heidi Blythe and Brian Brandt from American Farmland Trust; Peggy Petrzelka from Utah State University; Tom Green, Jill Carlson, Caitlyn Henning and Mark Adelsperger, The IPM Institute; Jaime Ridgely, Agren, Inc.; Ed Cox, Osborn, Milani, Mitchell & Goedken, LLP; Bridget Holcomb and Jean Eells, Women, Food and Agriculture Network; Joan Petzen, Cornell Cooperative Extension (Wyoming County, NY) and Beth Landers, Portage River Watershed Coordinator, Woods Soil and Water Conservation District, Ohio.

In the following pages we first summarize the previous research and literature on women non-operating owners of agricultural land. We follow this with a review of sustainable agricultural leases, a review of outreach methodologies used with non-operating landowners by various project team members and a business case for inclusion of ag retailers in water quality projects that focus on farmers.

We then turn our focus more specifically to our project area. We first provide state and local regulations as they relate to lease provisions in Ohio and New York. We then discuss the process of how we selected the watersheds we plan to target in our proposed project. We provide a summary of data analyses conducted on survey data collected on non-operating farmland owners in 2007 in various Great Lakes counties, including one of those in our New York watershed. Finally, we discuss the major findings from the focus groups of women landowners and operators along with outreach to women landowners conducted in 2016 in our research sites.

We hope what we have detailed here can provide insights to others focused on improving water quality, in the Great Lakes Basin and elsewhere. Please direct any questions about the white paper to Dr. Peggy Petrzelka, Professor of Sociology at Utah State University (peggy.petrzelka@usu.edu) and Dr. Ann Sorensen, Director of Research at American Farmland Trust (asorensen@frontier.com).

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Women Non-Operating Landowners (WNOLs): A Review of the Literature

Peggy Petrzelka and Ann Sorensen

Introduction

Nearly 40 percent of U.S. farmland is rented or leased from agricultural landowners, according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture. Eighty-seven percent of these landowners are non-operator landowners (NOLs) who, in 2014, rented out 283 million acres, constituting 31 percent of acres used for agriculture and 80 percent of acres rented for farming (USDA NASS 2015). While a significantly large amount of U.S. agricultural land is under NOL ownership, information on this group of landowners is extremely limited.

Our interest is in women non-operator landowners (WNOLs)—women who own farmland by themselves, or co-own it with a husband, siblings or other relatives. According to American Farmland Trust's Farmland Information Center, in 2014 women principal landlords owned 87,269,480 acres, which represent nearly 10 percent of the 911 million acres used for agriculture in 2014, 25 percent of the 354 million acres rented out for farming, 31 percent of the 283 million acres rented out by non-operator landlords and 46 percent of the 191 million acres rented out by non-operator principal landlords (data taken from the 2014 USDA Tenure, Ownership and Transition of Agricultural Land Survey).

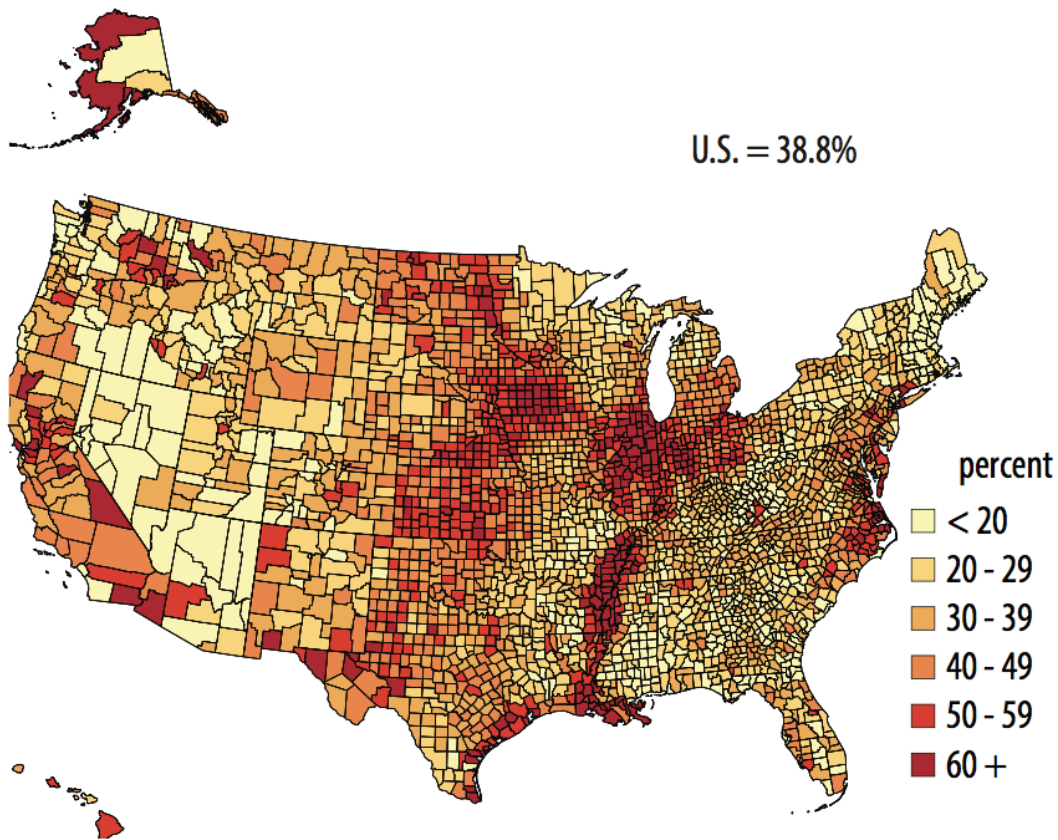
While there is a glaring gap in information on both male and female NOLs, the limited research that exists indicates that WNOLs face more gendered barriers than male NOLs to managing their land for long-term sustainability (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011), including renters who dismiss their conservation goals (Carolan 2005) and infrequent interaction with resource management agencies (Eells 2008). At the same time, women tend to be deeply committed to healthy farmland, farm families and farm communities, potentially making them ideal partners in conservation if these gendered barriers can be overcome (Bregendahl and Hoffman 2010).

In the following section, we review the relevant research on NOLs in general and WNOLs more specifically.

Understanding Non-Operating Landowners (NOLs)

Figure 1 shows the proportion of U.S. farmland rented or leased by county. Several concentrated areas have a majority of farmland that was operated by someone other than the owner in 2014. Yet, data on NOLs who lease their land is much more limited than information about owner-operators of farmland. The Census of Agriculture focuses on farms and farm operators, and only captures land tenure information from owner-operators (full- and part-owners). An alternative source of national data on agricultural landowners in the United States is provided by the Agricultural Economic Land Ownership Survey (AELOS), which collected information from both landowners and their operators. AELOS surveys were conducted in 1988 and 1999 as follow-ups to the periodic Census of Agriculture (in 1987 and 1997, respectively). AELOS findings in 1999, although dated, show more than half of U.S. landlords were over 65, and three-fourths were over 55. Those 65 and older provided 50 percent of all leased farmland in the United States and female landlords were more likely than male landlords to lease out a larger fraction of the land they own (Jackson-Smith and Petrzelka 2014).

Fig. 1
Percent of U.S. Farmland Rented or Leased, by County, 2012



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

In August 2016, USDA’s Economic Research Service released its second report summarizing the data collected in the 2014 USDA Tenure, Ownership and Transition of Agricultural Land Survey on farmland ownership, tenure and transfer (Bigelow et al. 2016). They found that 39 percent of the 911 million acres of farmland in the contiguous 48 states is rented and that more than half of the cropland is rented, compared to just over 25 percent of pastureland. While smaller farms tend to own all of the land they operate, mid-sized and larger family farm operations typically farm a mix of rented and owned farmland. Non-operating landowners own 80 percent of rented farmland (283 million acres, 30 percent of all farmland). With 69 percent of land owned by people over 65, non-operator landlords tend to be older than both owner-operators and operator landlords. The survey also found that most operators rent land from multiple landlords and 57 percent of rented acres (accounting for 70 percent of lease agreements) are renewed annually.

The Iowa Land Ownership Survey has collected panel data from a representative statewide sample of land parcels and landowners in Iowa since 1949 (Duffy and Johanns 2012). While national trends suggest that the total proportion of farmland that is owner-operated land has hovered near 60 percent since World War II, the Iowa study shows a pronounced decline in the

proportion of land under owner operator status (dropping from 55 percent in 1982 to 40 percent in 2012). This is partly because of the aging of the farmland owner population in Iowa, where individuals more than 75 years of age owned 30 percent of Iowa farmland in 2012, and individuals over 65 years of age owned 56 percent of the farmland. This change in owner operator status is also due to the increased ownership of agricultural land by female landowners in the state. In 2012, 49 percent of the agricultural landowners in Iowa were WNOLs (Duffy and Johanns 2012). They owned 47 percent of Iowa's farmland and leased 52 percent of all acres. Comparable detailed information on NOLs over time in other states does not exist, a critical gap in the data on agricultural landowners.

Landlords and Conservation Decision Making

With the large amount of farmland rented, the non-operating landlord-operator relationship clearly plays a significant role in U.S. agriculture. Understanding land tenure and the different ways people have rights to the land (Gilbert and Harris 1984) has social, economic and environmental implications. Carolan (2005) and Eells (2008) argue women may feel uncomfortable talking to family members or their renters about making changes in farm management practices. Women often "inherit" an operator along with farmland. This farmer may be a neighbor, friend or family member, who goes to church with the landowner and is part of her community. Thus, there may be tremendous social pressure to forego questions or problems that arise related to farm management and express or imply criticism of the operator (Women Caring for the Land 2013).

Harris (1974) and Mooney (1983) argued that on leased agricultural land, landlords exert substantial control over the renters, and have the decision making power. Harvey (1982) and Neocosmos (1986) disagreed, and argued that there is frequently total separation of the landlord from control over the land, with the landlord removed from a position of power. Gilbert and Beckley (1993) studied decision-making authority (their proxy for power), by interviewing farmland owners and their operators in two Wisconsin townships. They found landlords and operators overwhelmingly agreed that the latter were primary decision makers for conservation decisions on the farm such as application of particular soil conservation practices. Constance, Rikoon and Ma (1996), in their Missouri study of landlords' involvement in decision-making on rented agricultural land, found landlords were most likely to be involved in conservation program participation decisions, least likely to be involved in pesticide decisions (75 percent of both NOLs living on and off their farmland gave this decision-making control to the operator); and overall, less involved in all of the agricultural decision-making practices. They also found landlords who had a share lease with their renter versus a cash lease were significantly more involved in decision-making. This finding mirrors work by Rogers and Vandeman (1993) who, using the 1988 AELOS data, found those landlords who were more involved in decision-making had past farming experience, lived closer to the land and rented on a crop-share basis rather than a cash rent basis. The above research findings that show the operator as the primary decision maker on the leased land are consistent with the nationwide 1999 AELOS finding (AELOS 1999).

Gender and Conservation Decision-Making

Effland et al. (1993), using the 1988 AELOS data, looked specifically at gender and conservation decision-making. They examined differences in involvement in farm management decisions and found that female landlords were less likely to make farm management decisions than male landlords. Rogers and Vandeman (1993) found younger landlords, both male and female, more involved in on-farm management decisions and female landlords less likely than male landlords to participate in choices of fertilizer and chemical practices on leased land. Gilbert and Beckley (1993) argued that this may be the result of a dominant renter-subordinate

landlord relationship. More explicitly, they suggested those being dominated include “retired farmers, small landowners and widows” (Gilbert and Beckley 1993, p. 578) and argued for more attention to be given to this perspective, both conceptually and empirically.

Recent research has more directly examined gender in on-farm conservation decision-making. For example, in his Iowa study of WNOLs, Carolan (2005) found that female landlords would self-censor and were reluctant to discuss implementation of sustainable agricultural practices with their renters, fearing they would “scare away good tenants” (p. 396). Carolan (2005, p. 402) stated, “all of the female landlords described inequitable power relations between themselves and their male tenants. Specifically, they expressed feelings of exclusion [and] alienation [from the farm decision-making].” In her study of Iowa women farmland owners, Eells (2008) found deception of female landlords occurring by some operators, particularly in terms of potential soil conservation measures, which would be presented to the female landlord by the male renter most often in “an authoritative way as not being very practical or effective” (p. 67). Eells also found that conservation and stewardship values of the women can be silenced when the renters are relatives, and environmental concerns are subdued in order to maintain “peace within the family,” suggesting, “... it may be possible that women with non-kin tenants could exert more influence [over their tenant] when asking for conservation practices” (p. 68).

A quantitative study of the role of gender in conservation decision-making in four Great Lakes counties found WNOLs less likely to be involved in conservation decision-making on their land if they were older, retired, inherited the land, co-owned the land with a sibling or rented to a farmer not related to them. By contrast, for male landlords, involvement in conservation decision-making on the land was reduced only when a non-relative farmed the land (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011), indicating a much more complicated situation for WNOLs involvement in conservation decision-making than for male NOLs.

The 2014 TOTAL national survey found that WNOLs represent 37 percent of the non-operator principle landlords but own more acres to rent out than their male counterparts (Bigelow et al. 2016). Fifty-two percent report to have never farmed (not statistically different from the 41 percent of male non-operators who have no prior farming experience). Seventy-six percent of the land with a female non-operator landlord is controlled by someone over the age of 65. The TOTAL survey provides yet more evidence that decisions on land owned by female landlords are more likely to be made by the renter. For non-operators, as a share of rented acres, male landlords tend to be more involved than female landlords in decisions regarding cultivation and permanent conservation practices.

WNOLs and Conservation Outreach

Research by members of our project team and others has found NOLs are less likely to have personal contact with local extension and natural resource agency staff, leading to lower levels of resource management knowledge about local environmental conditions (e.g. Redmon et al. 2004; Petrzelka, Buman, and Ridgely 2009). In a study of NOLs in the Sandusky River Watershed in Ohio, Green and Petzoldt (2014) found that only 18 percent of non-operators used NRCS resources for land management decisions. Primary sources of information were Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) (66 percent and 53 percent, respectively).

This lack of contact is even more pronounced among WNOLs (Eells 2008; Petrzelka 2012). This is problematic given the percentages of elderly women owning land are expected to rise over

the next decade as more women inherit farmland from spouses and parents (Women Caring for the Land 2013).

Although WNOLs in the Midwest have consistently indicated strong conservation values in surveys, they report a lack of information and confidence in implementing conservation practices, often reporting that they feel intimidated or ignored when they ask renters or agency staff questions about land management or conservation (Eells 2012). In 2007, women over the age of 65 owned over one-fourth of Iowa's farmland and women 75 years or older owned 10 percent of Iowa's farmland (Duffy and Smith 2008). Eells (2008) found that conservation materials used by Iowa conservation outreach agencies and organizations do not appeal effectively to this demographic; for example, none of the photos in the brochures are of older women and the language tends to be technical and full of unfamiliar terms and acronyms. Thus there are gendered barriers to participation in conservation outreach—and female landowners provide unique challenges to those promoting land conservation goals.

The Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN¹) has developed and used participatory, women-only learning circles in the Midwest to deliver information that informs WNOLs about conservation concepts and options and empowers WNOLs to take conservation action. Research in adult education shows that adult learners of both genders are most likely to take action when information is offered in this setting, and when they feel comfortable asking questions and sharing information with one another, as opposed to traditional classroom presentation-style methods of information delivery. Of 45 WNOLs who participated in the WFAN pilot project in Iowa in 2009, 50 percent took at least one conservation action within the following year. In the following years, WFAN completed 15 learning circles with 118 women in Iowa, Nebraska and Wisconsin with 52 percent of the women making at least one change in farm management to improve soil and water conservation within six to 12 months (Adcock 2012).

WNOLs are a critical group of agricultural landowners whose decisions will be important to determining the future of America's farmland, and USDA needs better information to develop appropriate land management recommendations and materials for this audience. As Parsons et al. (2010) note, 70 percent of the nation's private farm and rangeland will change hands in the next 20 years, with women, absentee and non-farming landlords increasing in numbers. These landownership changes will have a profound impact on farm viability and land stewardship. At the same time, information from multi-year evaluative work in Iowa indicates that WNOLs can have a significant impact on the economic, social and environmental sustainability of agriculture and their communities when they are engaged and empowered. An interagency collaboration between FSA, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Iowa State University Extension and others reached out in 2010 to over 300 WNOLs in Iowa with surveys and listening sessions and found that: 1) social support was fundamental to social risk management strategies that women use to act in the best interests of themselves, their families, their communities and their land; 2) empowering women financially, socially and politically was important to conserving Iowa's land and water; and 3) growing leadership capacity of women in agriculture benefits the communities in which they live (Bregendahl and Hoffman 2010).

The opportunity to conduct conservation outreach with this group of women is anticipated to reach a high point over the next decade, as the demographics of farmland ownership change; with male farmers passing away, and women in their 60s, 70s and 80s inheriting farmland. By

¹ A nationwide group whose mission is to link and empower women to build food systems and communities that are healthy, just, sustainable, and that promote environmental integrity (wfan.org).

one estimate, older women will own about 75 percent of transferred farmland in the next two decades (Kohl 1999). In addition, WNOLs have been shown to have a strong interest in learning more about (1) their rights as landowners, (2) best management practices, (3) communicating effectively with their renters, and (4) state and federal conservation programs available to help them. Given these interests and the changing farmland ownership demographics, working with WNOLs and their lessees on improving the land's productivity and reducing nutrient and sediment run-off through the adoption of sustainable leases or other approaches is both highly relevant and timely.

Review of Sustainable Agricultural Leases

Ed Cox

Background Information

A sustainable farm lease is one which incorporates specific provisions that address sustainable issues and farm practices. It may also have provisions that incentivize farm operators to adopt sustainable practices through tenure security, rent reductions or cost sharing, and minimizing or sharing risk. Thus, a sustainable farm lease may look very different from one landlord-operator relationship to another.

While protective provisions addressing conservation have long existed in farm leases, until the last 50 years or so, lease arrangements have primarily been crop-share arrangements in which the landlord shared in the management, cost and risk of the farm operation. This situation provided built-in mechanisms by which the landlord both incentivized good stewardship and provided oversight of the operator's farming practices. Because the landlord also shared a stake in the production from the farm, crop-share arrangements often saw a focus of lease provisions on maximization of production rather than conservation of long-term assets.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges identified in relation to sustainable farm leases is moving from lease provisions that were useful in the context of crop-share arrangements, which had inherent checks and balances for production and conservation, to predominantly cash-rent arrangements that are more hands-off for the landlord and place all of the cost and risk of the farm operation on the lessee.

Another significant challenge is the social context of the farm lease. Landowners often identify the desire and need for sustainable farm leases in the general sense, but often rely on their lessees to provide the terms of the lease arrangement as well as information on conservation practices. There may be a sense that leased farmland poses conservation and sustainability challenges but landlords often remain very loyal to their operators. Even those landlords who do express a desire to incorporate sustainable provisions in their farm lease often remain hesitant to do so for fear of offending their operator or even of alienation within the community. Landlords and their operators are often related or long-time family friends and live and socialize in the same communities. This can decrease the chances for adopting sustainable provisions within a lease.

Thus, outreach efforts regarding sustainable farm leases often garner a great deal of interest from landowners but the leases may not be implemented.

The Lessee's Perspective

It is important to note that lessees often express an interest in sustainable farm leases. However, they also identify the need for adjustments in rent arrangements in order to implement sustainable practices. Bringing this up with a landlord, particularly when there is a great deal of competition for leased land, can be intimidating for operators. In general, operators have little motivation, or perhaps little ability, to adopt practices that improve the long-term sustainability of the operation. The terms of many leases combine with economic conditions to discourage or even prohibit operators from adopting long-term practices that can improve the sustainability of the operation. Short farm lease terms give renters little security that they'll receive the benefits of long-term investments. In a recent Iowa State Extension survey 80 percent of the farm leases

in Iowa were year-to-year leases, and, of the remaining 20 percent, the majority were for less than two years. Nationally, 70 percent of leases are renewed annually (Bigelow et al. 2016). Meanwhile, the benefits of many sustainable practices, such as crop rotations, take years to accrue. The combination of the time required to recognize benefits from sustainable practices and short lease terms contributes to the inability of renters to adopt long-term sustainable practices.

The most obvious, and probably most effective, means for overcoming this obstacle is to increase the length or term of the lease. For those unwilling or unable to enter a long-term lease, other approaches include sharing the risk of production, sharing the costs of production or relying on specific conservation provisions.

In addition to more time, many sustainable practices require skills and equipment that are not required for more conventional agricultural practices. In addition, renters are motivated to use their equipment on as much land as possible to get the most out of their investments. Operators, on average, have three landlords, and some have as many as 20, and they don't want to purchase different equipment for each piece of property.

Recognition of this limitation can spark the development of creative solutions. Such solutions can include simply finding alternative methods of accomplishing sustainable goals within the renter's ability, sharing the costs of hiring specialized labor through custom farming or leasing the needed equipment and/or purchasing specialized equipment to be shared or leased to the farmer. It should be noted that this situation might also create opportunities for farm operators and/or ag retailers to specialize in providing sustainable farming practices to landowners.

Increasing rental rates and input costs can also affect a farmer's ability to adopt sustainable practices. These factors force the lessee to focus on short-term productivity in order to stay profitable and compete for additional land to farm. Rental rates are governed in large part by land values and the price of commodities. Land prices rose dramatically in recent years, driven in part by land speculation, demand for open land for development and recreation, and biofuels production. Commodity prices reached record highs in 2013 but have now steeply declined for three consecutive years. They remain unsteady and unpredictable. Although cash rents move in the same direction as land values, they tend to lag behind in relation with farm revenue. Producers can be caught in a bind, hesitant to give up rented land for fear they may never get it back. Some are even willing to subsidize rented land with cash reserves. Thus, even for farmers interested in adopting sustainable practices on leased land, there may be economic as well as social challenges that prevent adoption. This makes it important to keep in mind that sustainable leases should not only focus on provisions that mandate specific sustainable practices, but should also address costs and risks for the sustainable practices.

Benefits for Landowners and Renters

The benefits for landowners are largely dependent on their priorities. If taking a strictly economic perspective, sustainable farm leases protect the long-term assets of the landowners, primarily the soil. There are a number of other benefits that may accrue if the landowner has particular interest in wildlife habitat, water quality or other conservation issues that may be addressed in a sustainable farm lease. The benefits for operators also largely depend on the priorities of the landowner and the lessee's ability to communicate their efforts to achieve sustainability and to translate that into benefits that accrue to them in the farm lease. This can include longer lease terms, improvements in soil health that increase the productivity of the leased land, cost-sharing and risk-sharing.

Current Practices in Sustainable Farm Leases

The following list provides examples of provisions commonly found in farm leases that address conservation in some manner. This list is primarily from commercial row crop operations. There are other provisions tailored specifically to very long term (99 years) ground leases for production of specialty crops, but their relevance is limited and, therefore, not provided here.

- The renter will farm in a good and farmer-like manner and shall farm faithfully and in a timely, thorough and businesslike manner.
- To keep the lease premises neat and orderly.
- To prevent noxious weeds from going to seed on said premises and to destroy the same and keep the weeds and grass cut.
- To prevent all unnecessary waste, loss and/or damage to the property of the landlord.
- To keep the buildings, fences and other improvements in good repair and condition as they are when the renter takes possession or in as good repair and condition as they may be put by the Landlord during the term of the lease – ordinary wear, loss by fire or unavoidable destruction excepted.
- To comply with pollution control and environmental protection requirements as required by local, state and federal agencies.
- To implement water conservation and soil erosion control practices to comply with the soil loss standards mandated by local, state and federal agencies.
- To generally follow Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency recommendations and to maintain all other requirements necessary to qualify current and future farm operators to participate in federal farm programs.
- To haul and spread manure on appropriate fields at times and in quantities consistent with environmental protection requirements.
- To take proper care of all trees, vines and shrubs, and to prevent injury to the same.
- Not to plow permanent pasture or meadowland.
- Not to remove cornstalks, straw or other crop residues grown upon the farm.

In addition, many leases will have a provision that requires alternating crops or even establishes a specific crop rotation. The latter are particularly common in crop-share leases in which the landlord is more involved in the management of the farm. Below is an example:

Crop Rotations

Renter shall plant crops in accordance with the following table:

<i>Field</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Year 1</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Year 2</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Year 3</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Year 4</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Year 5</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Year 6</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Another common provision simply incorporates a Conservation Plan developed by USDA NRCS. The effectiveness of such provisions depends on the Conservation Plan itself and whether it simply ensures conservation compliance for participation in USDA programs or if additional conservation concerns are addressed.

Length of Sustainable Farm Leases

Potentially, sustainable farm leases could range from one year to 99 years. Granting greater tenure security to lessees incentivizes them to protect the long-term assets of the rented land. In

relation to typical row crop production, a lease of five to 10 years would be considered a long-term lease. If landowners are unwilling to enter into long-term leases, they can use one year leases and protect the lessee's long-term investments in sustainability in other ways. For example, they can provide reimbursement for improvements, including conservation practices and improvements in soil health and, in return, require regular soil testing and reporting as part of the lease agreement. Or they can choose to share the costs for conservation practices.

Usage Trends and Gender

As discussed earlier, implementation of sustainable agriculture leases remains a challenge. There is a substantial amount of interest in gaining knowledge about sustainable farm leases, but landowners remain reluctant to adopt provisions necessary to form a sustainable farm lease. We don't know if women landowners are more or less susceptible to the challenges around implementation, including the notion that "my farmer takes good care of the place," as well as social pressure in the community to not rock the boat.

Methods Used to Encourage Use

A number of organizations have promoted sustainable farm leases, including farm management companies, University Extension, non-profits and other service providers. Most of the efforts have focused on increasing the knowledge of landowners in relation to sustainable farm leases. This includes addressing specific conservation practices that can be required in a lease contract, incentives that can be included, as well as the role of the landowner as the ultimate steward of the land that is in control of what is contained in the lease contract. The Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) has been particularly active in conducting workshops for women landowners interested in incorporating conservation into their farm leases. The Allamakee County SWCD in Iowa and the Drake University Agricultural Law Center conducted outreach and education on sustainable farm leases and tried to recruit landowners willing to adopt conservation provisions into their lease contracts. Again, while there was significant interest in the educational component, no landowners were willing to implement the sustainable farm lease on their property.

Time Commitment and Resources Needed for Transitioning to Sustainable Ag Leases

Sustainable farm leases do take serious effort and commitment. Landowners must first be knowledgeable about conservation practices in order to negotiate a sustainable farm lease. One of the challenges with implementation is that landowners often rely heavily on their operators for information on conservation practices. In order to effectively negotiate the terms of a sustainable farm lease, the landowner must be able to communicate knowledgeably about the matter at hand. They must also spend time evaluating their own priorities. This involves not just taking stock of their conservation concerns but evaluating these concerns in the context of their economic as well as social interests. Finally, time is required for negotiation with the other key player in the sustainable farm lease, the lessee. Operator characteristics and abilities are almost as varied as landowners and after the landowner goes through the process of developing their own priorities they must mesh these with those of their operator(s). Perhaps the most needed tool or characteristic is altering the social environment around farm leases to empower landowners to recognize the control and duty they have to implement a sustainable farm lease.

Review of Potential Outreach Methodologies

Peggy Petrzelka

Research by members of our project team and others has found non-operating landowners (NOLs) are less likely to have personal contact with local extension and natural resource agency staff, leading to lower levels of resource management knowledge about local environmental conditions (e.g. Redmon et al. 2004; Petrzelka, Buman, and Ridgely 2009). This lack of contact is even more pronounced among women non-operating landowners (WNOLs)(Eells 2008; Petrzelka 2012). This summary provides an overview of outreach which has occurred with NOLs. It is based primarily on materials from organizations that members of our project team are affiliated with, including the Women, Food and Agriculture Network² (WFAN), Agren, Inc.³ and the IPM Institute⁴.

We reviewed and synthesized outreach materials and discussions regarding outreach to agricultural landowners from these organizations for this report. Presented below are outreach strategies that have been used and deemed successful by these organizations in their evaluations of the methods used. We focus in particular on (1) Information about effective outreach approaches for WNOLs and (2) Best ways to secure addresses and contact information of landowners.

Effective outreach approaches

WFAN Learning Circle Model

Research in adult education shows that adult learners of both genders are most likely to take action when information is offered in the setting of a learning circle, and when they feel comfortable asking questions and sharing information with one another, as opposed to traditional classroom presentation-style methods of information delivery (Eells 2008). The Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) has developed and used participatory, women-only learning circles in the Midwest to deliver information that informs WNOLs about conservation concepts and options and empowers WNOLs to take conservation action. WNOLs in the Midwest report a lack of information and confidence in implementing conservation practices, often reporting that they feel intimidated or ignored when they ask agency staff questions about land management or conservation (Eells 2012). Eells (2008) found that conservation materials used by Iowa conservation outreach agencies and organizations do not appeal effectively to older women landowners; for example, none of the photos in the brochures are of older women and the language tends to be technical and full of unfamiliar terms and acronyms.

WFAN developed its Women Caring for the LandSM program to meet the needs of WNOLs for information, as well as for increased confidence as decision-makers⁵. The methodology is based on a "learning circles" model—bringing together groups of women landowners from two to four contiguous counties for women-only, informal, facilitated discussions. Female conservation professionals are on hand to participate in the discussion and inform the women of best practices and available resources in soil and water conservation.

² wfan.org

³ <http://www.agrentools.com>

⁴ <https://ipminstitute.org/mission-and-vision/>

⁵ The full Women Caring for the Land Curriculum can be found here: <http://womencaringfortheland.org>

Of 45 WNOLs who participated in the WFAN pilot project in Iowa in 2009, 50 percent took at least one conservation action within the following year. In a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) funded program that ran from 2010 to 2012, WFAN held 15 women landowner meetings in three states (Iowa, Nebraska and Wisconsin) over the two years of the project. One hundred and eighteen women landowners attended, who owned a total of 24,300 acres in the region. Follow-up surveys show that 52 percent of the women who responded had made at least one change in farm management to improve soil and water conservation on their land within six to 12 months of attending a meeting. Actions ranged from installing grassed waterways and buffer strips to meeting with NRCS personnel to create a whole-farm conservation plan (Adcock 2012).

Seventy-two percent of the respondents listed intentions for future changes to their land for conservation. These changes are particularly important to note, as for many of the survey respondents, a full year had not passed since they attended a meeting and WFAN finds that many times it takes up to a year to facilitate changes on the land, particularly when working with a lessee. The intentions to make change were very substantive overall, ranging from talking to neighbor women about conservation and researching land trusts and other ways to protect land, to planting CRP acres and installing grassed waterways because of newly observed ephemeral gullies.

Overall satisfaction with meetings was very high and WFAN reports women responded with surprise at how enjoyable the meetings were and expressed interest in coming to another meeting. Responses to follow-up surveys (mailed six to 12 months after meeting attendance) showed outcomes that take time to develop but consistently WFAN has found that a majority of women who respond have taken at least one action to improve conservation on their land. Their annual survey shows that 50 percent to 70 percent of attendees implement a new conservation step because of the meeting within six months. For some, their gains in confidence are significant. As one WNOLs notes, “As a result of the meeting I was more assertive in asking my tenant to take the cows off the pasture to protect the grasses sooner because of the drought.” Others made significant improvements to their land by installing buffers or grassed waterways, or enrolling acres in CRP. Still others arranged to meet later with conservation staffers whom they had met at meetings, and many picked up written resource materials they did not know existed.

As WFAN states in their materials, “We think it’s crucial to point out that among our target segment of landowners—non-operator females 65 and older, many of them new inheritors—providing them with the confidence to make decisions about conservation and land management is as important as providing them with information on best practices, if not more so. Most of these women have not made land management decisions in the past, in spite of expressing strong conservation and legacy values in meetings and surveys. It is gratifying to see them begin to take ownership of their decision-making power as they learn about other women who are leading the way in land management, and meet the resource people who can help them achieve their goals.”

Agren Learning Conference Model⁶

Agren has also used a learning type setting, which has involved both male and female landowners, at times accompanied by their operators. They conducted a learning conference to provide support to landowners in preserving the long-term value and productivity of farmland.

⁶ Reports from which this and the following material is taken are available upon request.

Landowners came from across Iowa, and as far away as California to learn about preserving the long-term value and productivity of their farmland. A morning session allowed landowners to listen to a variety of speakers, including farm operators, farm managers and natural resources professionals, all aiming to help them preserve the long-term value and productivity of their farmland. Individual sessions covered improving communication between landowners and farm operators, sustainable farm leases, nutrient management, record retention and soil erosion.

Landowners learned of free services from Iowa Conservation Connect and saw both good and bad examples of land care on a bus tour guided by local NRCS District Conservationist. The afternoon concluded with more than an hour of small group discussion between landowners and area Certified Conservation Farmers on more than a half dozen resource topics including areas like enhancing wildlife habitat, reduced tillage options and cover crops. The wide range of discussion topics and proximity of landowners to the meeting location resulted in a successful event.

Land Report Card

In Raccoon River watershed in Iowa, Agren used the idea of a “land report card” to demonstrate conservation need. Landowners were mailed a newsletter showing clues of things to look for on their land that might indicate they had a conservation need. Report card assessments were then offered through the newsletter and phone calls to help landowners identify potential issues and a landowner adviser offered to walk or drive with the landowner over the land to review the report. When possible, a meeting with the farm operators was also conducted.

Those who requested an assessment received a report card on soil quality, soil erosion, water quality and wildlife habitat. Agren notes “The “Your Land Report Card” turned out to be the most valuable product of the outreach campaign ... served as a tangible piece of information landowners could share with their tenants to start a conservation conversation ...” Many success stories were documented of landowners implementing or improving structural practices, changing management practices or not removing established practices based on the report card recommendations.

Coffee shop meetings and then some

In Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, a two-phased outreach campaign was planned to help landowners become aware of their conservation choices and ideally install some type of conservation. Phase I included a combination of direct mail, personal phone calls and individual meetings in local coffee shops. An NRCS agent agreed to schedule half-hour meetings one morning a week with landowners at coffee shops in neighboring communities near landowners’ land. This location was important both due to proximity to landowners and the coffee shop being a neutral location. A multi-step approach was used to entice landowners to meet with the NRCS agent one-on-one:

- All landowners on the mailing list received a four-page color newsletter that introduced the concept of conservation buffers, explained CREP⁷ and told them about the upcoming coffee shop meetings.

⁷ Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, federally funded conservation program.

- Personal invitations were mailed to landowners asking them to call or return a postcard to reserve a half-hour coffee shop meeting with the NRCS agent. Everyone who met with the agent received a \$25 gift certificate to a popular local restaurant.
- All landowners with available phone numbers were called by a telemarketing company asking them to schedule a meeting time. With this call, information was also gathered such as land use, interests and other pertinent information.
- Postcards confirming meeting times and places were mailed to everyone who scheduled a meeting, and they received a phone call reminder from the NRCS agent the day before their meeting.
- The Manitowoc page on the Agren for Absentee Landowners website was updated and promoted for all internet users—www.manitowocconservationconnect.org. The website explains conservation programs that are available to landowners in the county and offers a simple step-by-step decision guide to determine which are most appropriate for their land and interests.

Success of this process exceeded all expectations. When the first four mornings of coffee shop meetings filled up, three more days were added, giving the NRCS agent the opportunity to meet with several dozen individual landowners over a seven-week period.

Prior to beginning the second phase of outreach efforts, all absentee landowners on the contact list were surveyed to gauge their satisfaction with the first educational campaign. A significant majority reported the mailings, coffee shop meetings and phone calls increased their understanding of conservation buffers and CREP, but far fewer were motivated to actually install buffers or use CREP. The primary lesson learned from the surveys was that the first phase of outreach did a good job of raising awareness and interest in conservation, but had little success in actually moving landowners to action.

Outreach campaigns were successful in making landowners aware of and interested in natural resource conservation. But it proved much more difficult to move them to implement conservation practices. For landowners who had prior knowledge of conservation, the project served to reinforce their interest and encourage them to be sure they were using all appropriate measures. In the case of landowners who were new to the concept of conservation, however, it's necessary to make repeated, consistent contacts to raise awareness and eventually motivate the landowners to action. Installing conservation is a major land-use decision, one that in most cases won't be made lightly and without considerable effort on the part of the local conservation office. Local offices will likely struggle with finding the extra time and resources needed for successful outreach to absentee landowners. In spite of the difficulties of working with absentee landowners, much progress was made through the Manitowoc County project. The outreach campaign ran over an eight-month period. At the end of this time, measurable results included:

- Fully 96 percent of the landowners on the original contact list received mailings and phone calls to start them thinking about natural resources conservation.
- 40 percent of those landowners were interested enough to call or return a postcard requesting a phone call or more information by mail.
- 36 landowners discussed their land with the district conservationist at individual coffee shop meetings.
- From the original list, 16 percent actually had some form of in-person contact with the district conservationist.

- One landowner proceeded with CREP sign-up. Outreach efforts in Manitowoc County also confirmed the importance of the involvement and full support of local agencies. Matt, the district conservationist, was fully engaged in the absentee landowner project, meeting people one-on-one and making countless phone calls. Without his involvement, much less would have been accomplished. “Many of the landowners now have a place to start looking when they have questions (about conservation), and they feel confident to do so,” Matt said.

Landowner Advocate

In Tuscola and Arenac counties in Michigan, a “landowner advocate” was hired to work one-on-one with landowners inexperienced in conservation as part of a pilot outreach project to absentee landowners. The advocate’s job was to build relationships and trust, and assist landowners who were not equipped to overcome the barriers they could encounter as they began to work with professional conservationists in local conservation offices. Unfamiliar terminology, long wait times for technical assistance, unfamiliarity with government conservation programs and eligibility rules, landowner requirements for participating in conservation programs, confusion among multiple conservation programs and farm operator objections are among a number of barriers that may face absentee landowners who want to do what’s right for their land.

Absentee landowners were offered the opportunity to meet with a landowner advocate in a one-on-one setting, rather than a small group meeting.

A multistep direct marketing campaign was initiated to invite more than 700 landowners in Arenac and Tuscola counties to begin taking advantage of the new landowner advocate. Following the first campaign, absentee landowners were divided into AIDA⁸ stages according to their level of engagement. Outreach pieces were developed for landowners at different stages rather than a “one size fits all” campaign.⁹ The result was a personalized CREP map and estimate sent via Priority Mail to all landowners at the “desire” level. Mailings were followed by personal phone calls from the CREP technicians inviting the landowners to a one-on-one meeting. Newsletters, telephone calls and endorsement letters from local landowners were then used to invite all landowners to a coffee shop meeting to discuss conservation options on their land, and the financial and technical help available to them.

Landowners who attended the coffee shop meetings were asked to rate how helpful the encounter was to them. On a scale of one to six, with six being very useful, they rated the meeting as a 5.3. Only five had worked with the landowner advocate or other local conservationists in the past. Their intentions after the meeting, though, indicated that would change. Asked for their plans as a result of the meeting, six would schedule a follow-up meeting with the advocate; seven would pursue a CREP signup to install conservation filter strips; 15 would pursue a WHIP signup to improve wildlife habitat; eight would explore other conservation practices appropriate for their land; and one would look into the commercial forest act and conservancy option.

⁸ AIDA stands for attention, interest, desire, and action. It is an acronym used in marketing and advertising, which helps marketing managers develop effective communication strategies and communicate with customers in a way that better responds to their needs and desires.

⁹ This targeted campaign approach is *strongly encouraged in the literature*, as increasingly seeing recognition of the diversity of landowners, thus need for different marketing strategies.

Outreach efforts seemed to be successful in raising both awareness and interest among landowners for natural resources care. While response numbers were promising, and anecdotal comments from partners and landowners have been very encouraging, expectations for CREP signup and installation of other conservation practices were not met. Agren attributes the lag in conservation action to several key barriers:

- These landowners are a very new audience. Most people reported never working with a local conservation agency in the past. This outreach was likely the first time many of them had heard of or considered conservation on their land. Making a decision with such long-term implications requires a level of knowledge and trust that can't be developed quickly.
- Building to action takes time. Landowners, especially those landowners unfamiliar with conservation programs, need time to consider and commit. To an audience so new to Farm Bill programs, the 10- and 15-year easements required for CREP filter strips or wetlands are serious commitments.
- Local partners in Arenac and Tuscola counties were unable to provide a mailing list sorted to landowners who own agricultural land along a stream or waterway. So mailings could not be targeted to potential CREP candidates. Many of the landowners who responded positively to direct marketing pieces later found out they were ineligible for CREP.
- "Lead nurturing" is EXTREMELY important. Agren found this group of landowners takes a great amount of follow-up and "lead nurturing," i.e. building relationships, credibility and trust with these landowners will be extremely important in converting their interest to conservation action, a level of interaction field offices often do not have the resources to do.

Orleans County, New York

Agren was also involved in outreach in Orleans County, New York, a small part of which is located in the Genesee watershed (one of the two watersheds we will be working in). When Orleans County landowners were asked in a 2006 survey how they preferred to receive information about their land, 71 percent said direct mail was their first preference, followed by 57 percent preferring one-on-one consultations. Based on these responses, an outreach campaign was designed to encourage one-on-one meetings through a blitz of direct mailings. Thirty-nine percent of Orleans County absentee landowners also indicated a willingness to use computers and the Internet, so an email option was included. Prior to the mail blitz, landowners were phoned alerting them to the upcoming mailings, asking if they're included in the mailing list, verifying address information, and obtaining email addresses. About 150 absentee landowners received conservation information in their mailbox every two weeks for nearly three months. Each mailing encouraged landowners to respond by returning an enclosed postcard or calling Agren's toll-free hotline.

As a result of this blitz campaign, 12 landowners (7 percent) mailed back postcards asking for more detailed information about conservation. From the phone call, 36 landowners (22 percent) requested information by mail, and 13 landowners (8 percent) requested a call. Depending on their interests, they were either referred to the local conservation office, were mailed a packet of CREP information or were mailed a booklet listing general conservation contacts.

To increase response rate it was decided to supplement direct-mail efforts with a series of conference phone calls on the benefits of filter strips in Orleans County. About a month after a

second newsletter was mailed, landowners again heard from Agren. This mailing invited them to participate in a series of four conference calls—billed as “conservation conversations”—promoting the benefits of filter strips. Each call was in the form of an interview between a representative of Agren and a local conservation official. Landowners were invited to participate in the calls in one of two ways. They could dial into the call at the scheduled time. Or, they were contacted through a “blast dial” feature that dialed every landowner’s phone, giving them a chance to hang up or join the call. Postcards were mailed a week before each call with information about how to access the calls and the topic for the upcoming interview.

Each conference call was recorded and posted on the Orleans Conservation Connect page of the CAL website (www.orleansconservationconnect.org). This gave landowners a chance to listen to the conversations at their convenience, and also made the calls available to anyone else who accesses the website. During the four-call series, nine landowners participated in the calls for all or part of the conversation. Another seven listened to recordings after the live calls.

The final contact with landowners was a letter signed by the district manager of the Orleans Soil & Water Conservation District. In his letter, he encouraged landowners to contact him for individual conversations about their land, and also promoted the “conservation conversations” recordings on the website. The final letter generated five hits to the Orleans Conservation Connect web page.

Personal phone calls were a critical component of the Orleans outreach campaign, and became more important as it became apparent that direct mail alone was not achieving the desired results. As landowners requested more information or a one-on-one meeting, they were referred to the local conservation office. However, local officials indicated they wanted respondents pre-screened so they spent time talking only with landowners who had high potential for CREP eligibility.

In addition to these calls, a professional telemarketing firm was hired to phone landowners on three separate occasions. Each round of calls from the telemarketing firm had a different specific goal:

1. The first calls were made prior to the direct-mail campaign. They simply alerted landowners to watch their mailbox for upcoming mailings from the Agren.
2. The second round of calls was made immediately after the mail blitz. The goal was to confirm receipt of the mailings and to profile landowners so planners could better understand the group they were marketing to. Callers engaged landowners in conversation to determine how the land was currently used (crop, pasture, forest/timber, recreational), and what their primary natural resource interests were (soil, water, wildlife).
3. Late in the project, targeted, in-depth calls were made to gauge where landowners were in the decision-making process of installing conservation, and to determine the effectiveness of specific marketing techniques used in the county. Eleven Orleans County landowners participated in the lengthy telephone interviews. Overall, the landowners remembered the mailings and commented that they got their attention and contained good information. Phone calls were not recalled as easily.

Overall, Orleans landowners did not understand how the information related to them and their land and did not feel compelled to act on the information. Several significant lessons were learned from the landowner outreach efforts in Orleans County:

1. Direct-mail alone does not lead this group of non-traditional landowners to make a decision regarding natural resources. Change in behavior only occurs when supplemented by other educational efforts to move landowners to make a significant change in land use.
2. Make a stronger and more specific offer and call to action to motivate landowners to go into the local conservation office. Through each mailing and phone call, landowners were encouraged to “request more information” by returning a postcard or calling the Agren hotline. But if the ultimate goal was to get them into a one-on-one meeting, that should have been stated more directly and repeatedly.
3. Confirm the full commitment of the local natural resource experts before embarking on outreach to absentee landowners. Providing good information isn’t enough if it’s not supported by a personal contact, either by phone or face-to-face meeting. It’s also imperative that follow-up be done timely, especially when follow-up is requested by the landowner. If the message is effective in catching the landowner’s interest, it is imperative that this momentum be kept up to move to the next step of the process.

2010 Mail Campaign in Sandusky Watershed

In 2010, a project by the IPM Institute worked on conservation with NOLs through several mail campaigns. The first mailing went to 4,502 non-operator landowners with ≥ 20 cropland acres in the Sandusky River Watershed. An initial survey generated 191 responses, which were used to guide the content of the remaining mail pieces. Subsequent mailings directed landowners to NRCS EQIP programs addressing these tactics, and promoted the benefits of cover crops. The second survey generated 144 responses. When asked what actions they took as a result of the mailings, 42 percent of respondents reported having a conversation with their renter regarding nutrient and conservation practices, 26 percent visited online resources referenced in the mailings for more information, 15 percent applied for financial and technical assistance to improve nutrient management, 7 percent attended a watershed group meeting, and four respondents revised the terms of their lease to protect water quality.

Lessons learned from conducting outreach with absentee landowners.

1. Define and analyze your target audience. Defining and selecting your audience is the single most important step in planning an outreach effort. Knowing your audience allows you to personalize your message, increase your impact and reduce your costs. Fifty percent of the time spent on your total outreach effort should be directed towards selecting only the most likely prospects for your target audience.
2. Identify desired actions and create a plan. When working to educate landowners and move them toward a desired action, you need to be prepared to meet them where they are at. Consider including secondary goals that invite your audience to perform an action other than the primary one you would like them to take. Secondary goals offer another path or “baby step” for landowners who are not ready to commit to the primary goal. A primary goal might be the installation of waterways, while the secondary goals could include a free informational piece to learn about the benefits of waterways, or a free assessment to see if the landowner has a need for a waterway. Having incremental actions motivates your audience to continue to engage with you until they are ready to commit to the primary goal.
3. Tailor the message to your audience. Develop your message based on the outreach objectives and segment of the audience you’ve identified. Your message should be clear, specific, and relevant, and tied directly to something the target audience values. Create a hook

that engages the landowner, makes the message personal and prompts them to respond. Make it clear to the reader what is being offered and directly state the benefit to the landowner.

4. Acknowledge and overcome barriers. Numerous barriers prevent landowners from conserving the natural resources on their property. Some may be as simple as a lack of awareness, but others are more difficult to overcome such as lack of trust, distance from land or reluctance to change. Many landowners do not understand their role in management changes and refer decision making back to the operator. Before you can expect a landowner to respond to your offers for conservation assistance, you must first uncover, and then overcome, the barriers perceived by the landowner. The landowner must be convinced that the benefit outweighs the cost of participation. Barriers perceived by an absentee landowner may be very different than those perceived by an owner-operator. For example, a landowner who has never worked with a government agency may be leery of a contract that most owner-operators readily sign. Or, a non-operator landowner who works full-time may be unavailable to talk with local conservationists during regular business hours. WFAN holds meetings on weekdays to accommodate older women, who own the highest percentage of land as sole females. However, this may preclude attendance by women who are working off-farm jobs (Adcock 2012). Barriers must be minimized or removed so that the benefit outweighs the cost or effort of the action.

5. Keep language simple. Words like “conservation,” “watershed,” “technical assistance,” “stewardship,” “biodiversity,” or “best management practice” aren’t used on a daily basis by most people. Even though these words aren’t necessarily technical, they carry different meanings for different people. When jargon or technical terms are used, a landowner may feel embarrassed or overwhelmed and be afraid to ask questions. Avoiding jargon and technical terms may be especially difficult in conversation. If jargon or technical terms must be used, include specific examples or supplemental explanations to help your audience understand your meaning.

6. Build from awareness to action. Determine milestones for each level and consider tracking each landowner’s progress. Remember people are at different levels and need to build trust. This process takes time. Changing behavior doesn’t happen overnight. It may take months, or even years, before you’re able to engage your audience in taking action.

7. Repeat your message many times with multiple media. Expect your outreach campaign to require multiple contacts. Marketing research shows that only 20 percent of sales are made with less than five contacts. Expect these contacts to be most effective if offered through a variety of media—direct mail, phone calls, conference calls, email, websites, press releases, field tours, small group meetings, etc. Different forms of media are more appropriate for different messages and audiences. As well, not all people prefer the same type of media. You can only determine what works best to engage your audience by testing different media.

8. Establish yourself as a trusted expert. Landowners must trust in you and your organization for them to respond to your message and offer. They need to feel comfortable that your recommendations for land management have their best interests in mind. In the short term, establish your credibility in simple ways. For example, include your contact information on every piece of correspondence. Also, place your photo with contact information on your website. Another great way to establish credibility and build trust is to seek out testimonials from various landowners whom you have helped or other trusted local sources. These can be promoted through newsletters, endorsed letters from another landowner, or prominently displayed on your website or in brochures.

9. Nurture relationships through excellent customer service. Following up with interested landowners is integral to the success of outreach efforts. It was challenging for field offices to provide the necessary time and resources needed to nurture this new audience. In some cases, failure to follow up in a timely manner caused a loss of momentum and excitement that was initially present. It is important that all leads be nurtured, if the goal of program sign-up is expected to be met. Lead nurturing and follow up must be maintained as a priority to obtain the maximum success from your efforts.

Engaging landowner interest by getting them the right message at the right time, and then compelling them to respond, can be quite a task. But even when you accomplish this, the job isn't done. Building relationships is absolutely critical to engaging landowners in conservation action. The nurturing process involves contacting landowners on an ongoing basis (even if they haven't requested you to do so) until they are deemed "sales ready." It is necessary to work with a landowner over time to gain commitment and change behaviors. This is especially true of non-operator landowners, who may be completely new to natural resource conservation opportunities. We, unfortunately, have no strong evidence that we know how to succeed with outreach to non-operating landowners, and lots of evidence regarding what does not work. Finally, according to Jamie Ridgely, when thinking about the various outreach methods Agren has tried, she concludes "I think the most significant similarity among all the work Agren has done is that the outreach has all been accomplished, or at least initiated, via a direct marketing campaign. I think this is as (or possibly more?) important than the higher-level action we requested of landowners; i.e. coming to a conference, coffee shop meetings, meeting with landowner adviser, etc. Our objective has always been to try to efficiently get information to a large group, and direct mail is the obvious choice for NOLs, as they are dispersed. Some might say the Internet/Social Media is an alternative, but we've had very little success with this to date. I believe this is an important distinction when comparing to something like learning circles, because learning circles [may] only work for woman who live near to the community where their land is (or at least a community of female landowners)."

Best way to secure addresses and contact information¹⁰

There are a number of potentially successful ways to secure addresses and contact information for identified landowners. No method has been deemed the "best" way to secure addresses and contact information, each have their own strengths and weaknesses. Below are various ways those who contributed to this report have produced lists of non-operating landowners to contact.

1. Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) often have landowner contact information and know area landowners personally. Often SWCD staff even own land in the area themselves and therefore are powerful allies to reach out to fellow landowners. In candidate watersheds for this project, officials at two SWCDs (Seneca County and Wood County) have assured us that area SWCDs—including their own offices—could provide contact information for landowners.
2. Target specific women in agricultural programs that most often originate out of cooperative extension agencies or academic institutions. Cornell Extension and Ohio State University Extension have both engaged women in agriculture in formal project capacities. Although these women in ag programs do not solely involve women landowners, they could serve as a good starting point to identify and reach out to select women landowner participants. Examples include the East Ohio Women in Ag program with Ohio State University or the larger OSU

¹⁰ It is important to note that while these are ways that have been used to secure information for landowners, we will also be holding focus groups with operators, so we need to ensure we are aware of ways to secure addresses and contact information for operators as well.

Extension Ohio Women in Ag Network. Annie's Project could also serve as a conduit for contact information specific to female landowners.

3. Watershed organizations that have already undertaken landowner outreach could serve as ways to secure address and contact information. Area organizations and land trusts such as the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Sandusky River Watershed Coalition or Partners for Clean Streams have already conducted landowner outreach projects and would have contact information available for candidate watersheds.

4. Lists can sometimes be obtained from the local USDA office or requested through the FOIA Act. Lists can also be purchased through paid services, such as Core Logic, that compile property tax record lists from across the country. Care should be taken to make sure the ownership information and addresses are up to date.

There are pros and cons to each of the approaches above. For instance, agency mailing lists can be outdated, and as noted in the WFAN SARE report, "Recruiting women to attend meetings is sometimes challenging for several reasons. Mailing lists the agencies use to send invitations via direct mail are so outdated that some letters go to women who have sold their land, are deceased, or are no longer handling their own affairs" (Adcock 2012). At times, lists such as those from the Farm Service Agency (FSA) have been found to be outdated and only include those landowners who have participated in previous government programs. With the low enrollment of women landowners in government programs, while using FSA lists can still be used as a recruitment tool, as is encouraged by WFAN, there are cautions to doing so. County tax rolls provide names of landowners by county, which is not the same geographic boundary as a watershed. County tax rolls at times also only include the name of one landowner, therefore while women are also owners, their name may be omitted from the list.

Business Case for Including Ag Retailers

Ann Sorensen and Tom Green

Ag retailers are the primary influencer of corn/soybean/wheat farmer practices. Many if not most of their customers are leasing some land. Unlike conservation professionals, Extension and independent crop consultants, because farmers need ag retailers for inputs, retailers have relationships with all farmers, and good awareness of practices and conditions on each farm and field. If a farmer has a question about what to do, they are most likely to contact their ag retailer first. This has been confirmed over and over again by project staff as they work with farmers. Thus, it stands to reason that farmers who are asked to change practices on leased ground by the landowner are likely to seek advice from their ag retailer on the value/impacts/how to implement the change.

Ag retailers need to be in the loop on what changes landowners are likely to ask for, and be ready to support farmer clients to effectively make the changes. Otherwise, we risk more resistance from farmers if they are discouraged or not supported by their ag retailer suppliers, and a greater frequency of implementation failures, leading to rejection of the change. For example, with cover crops, if the retailer is not competent in recommending an appropriate seed mix, providing seed at the right time, providing effective custom planting and termination services or recommending those practices, monitoring for pests including slugs, etc., the farmer is more likely to have a poor experience, not get the value from the cover crops, not get the stand required to protect soil and nutrient resources over winter, have a poor experience getting his/her cash crop planted, etc., and be a lot more resistant to suggestions from his/her landowner to implement/maintain the practice. Alternatively, if his/her retailer is competent and enthusiastic, the operator is much more likely to be successful in maximizing the benefits and expanding the practice.

Many improvements represent profit opportunities for ag retailers, e.g., soil testing, cover crops, variable rate P application, custom tillage, custom incorporation of P, or cost avoidance, e.g., repairing drain tile blowouts, gullies that can slow ag retailer operations in the field and damage ag retailer equipment. If it is a profit opportunity, ag retailers can be motivated partners helping to promote practices landowners may be requesting.

In addition, ag retailers face intense competition especially for larger farmers, who represent the majority of their business, and who often do business with more than one retailer including price shopping between the ag retailers they buy from. The larger the farm, the more likely it is to lease some of the land that is farmed (midsize rent 62 percent, large rent 65 percent, very large rent 54 percent). Because of this competition, they want to be seen as providing the best overall value/services to their customers, including being knowledgeable about new practices. They don't want to be surprised and appear uninformed about questions/requests farmers bring to them as a result of landowner requests. So they will very much appreciate being well-informed in advance, including on practices they are not focused on currently, e.g., "building soil health" which is not common terminology or context for many ag retailers for marketing products and services.

Most operators rent land from multiple landlords and 70 percent of lease agreements are renewed annually. Competition among farmers for leased land is intense. Anything ag retailers can do to support their farmer customers' compete effectively for land, e.g., seamlessly meeting requests for best practices from landowners, builds their value, strengthens the relationship and

increases potential for additional sales. A farmer who can proactively promote the ability to implement and maintain best practices will have an advantage with landowners concerned about environmental impacts and building the long-term value of land. The advantage may create more opportunity for longer-term leases, desirable to farmers because it takes that land out of competition, saves time renegotiating, etc. Regulatory pressure is also likely to increase to reduce nutrient run-off and one of the services ag retailers can offer is help with satisfying regulatory requirements. For leased land, this may mean more practices that improve soil health and edge-of-field practices that reduce nutrient runoff.

Finally, ag retailers can be conveners, recruiting large customers who can impact large acreages, to participate in meetings to learn about new practices and programs. As mentioned previously, they are very motivated to appear informed, sell more products and services and add value to their customer relationships. They don't want to be surprised by events or appear uninformed about what's going on in the industry or in their local area. They also do not want to add costs by having to scramble to learn/react to new things, or increase the time their staff spend doing things other than selling. They will greatly appreciate being in the loop, having an opportunity to provide input on what will work well/not work well, being prepared so they can act most efficiently, participating in efforts that reduce impacts voluntarily without regulation, and being able to talk credibly to regulators and the community about what they are doing to improve natural resources.

Provisions for Leases to Conform to State and Local Regulations in Ohio and New York

Ben Kurtzman

There are several state provisions in Ohio and New York that relate to farm leases.

Ohio Laws Relating to Farm Leases

Statute of Frauds (ORC § 1335.04; ORC § 1335.05:

Under the common law, the statute of frauds refers to requirements mandating that certain types of contracts be committed to writing and signed. Ohio has codified much of the common law statute of frauds under ORC § 1335.05. Ohio's statute of frauds requires that leases (and other interests in land) or agreements with a duration extending beyond one year, be memorialized in a signed, written document. Accordingly, because farm leases pertain to interests in land and because they potentially can last for more than a year, they may fall under the statute of frauds and ORC 1335.05.

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/1335.04v1>

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/1335.05v1>

Acknowledgement (ORC § 5301.01; ORC § 5301.4; ORC § 5301.08:

Under Ohio law requires certain procedures to be followed when an interest in real property, such as a lease, is conveyed. Under Ohio law the party conveying the property (the person leasing the land) must sign a written instrument to execute the lease. The signature must be acknowledged and certified by a judge or clerk of a court of record, or a county auditor, county engineer, mayor or notary public. ORC § 5301.04 requires signature acknowledgement as described above if the spouses jointly own the land subject to lease. Leases extending over a term of more than three years must be notarized.

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/5301.01>

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/5301.04v1>

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/5301.08v1>

Recording (ORC § 5301.25):

Leases must be recorded in the county where the subject land is located. A lease that is not recorded in this manner will not be enforceable against subsequent purchasers of the property. This requirement ensures that others have notice of the farmer's lease interest in the land.

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/5301.25v1>

Memorandum of Lease (ORC § 5301.251):

Parties to agricultural leases may be reluctant to record leases because they do not want sensitive details (such as rent amounts) to be available to the public. Ohio law addresses this by permitting the lease parties to record a "Memorandum of Lease," which is a reduced form of the agreement between the parties. The Memorandum of Lease provides notice to the public, including potential land buyers, the property is under lease. The Memorandum of Lease must include the names and addresses of the parties, a legal description of the land, the period of the lease and descriptions of any rights of renewal or extension. Requirements for acknowledgment and recording also pertain to the Memorandum of Lease.

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/5301.251v1>

Cancellation, release, and assignment of leases (ORC § 5301.33):

Leases that have been recorded in Ohio may be cancelled, released or assigned with a signed statement on the recorded instrument. It need not be acknowledged under ORC § 5301.01;

ORC § 5301.4 but it must be attested to by the county recorder. Leases may also be cancelled using a separate instrument of cancellation.

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/5301.33v1>

Realty for School Farms (ORC § 721.24; ORC § 721.25):

Municipalities are permitted to lease property for school farms to any board of education. Boards of Education may lease property either within or outside of their individual school districts.

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/721.24v1>

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/721.25v1>

Leasing County Home Farms:

After a county home has been closed as provided by Ohio Law, the board of county commissioners may sell or lease any part of the county home farm, and all receipts from such sales or leases shall be paid to the county treasurer and credited to the general county fund.

<http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/5155.33v1>

New York Laws Relating to Farm Leases

Statute of Frauds (N.Y. Gen. Oblig. §§ 5-701-05):

The statute of frauds refers to requirements mandating that certain types of contracts be committed to writing and signed. New York has codified much of the common law statute of frauds under N.Y. Gen. Oblig. §§ 5-701-05. New York's Statute of Frauds requires leases exceeding a duration of one year be recorded in a signed, written agreement.

<http://law.justia.com/codes/new-york/2010/gob/article-5/title-7>

Void Provisions (N.Y. Gen. Oblig. § 5-321; N.Y. Real Prop. § 259-c):

New York law does not allow certain provisions in agricultural leases as a matter of public policy. Leases that exempt landowners from liability for injuries to persons or property arising from the negligence of the landowner or his/her employees are void. Terms that waive an operator's right to jury trial in the case of a lease dispute are unenforceable.

<http://law.justia.com/codes/new-york/2014/gob/article-5/title-3/5-321>

<http://law.justia.com/codes/new-york/2013/rpp/article-8/259-c>

Recording (N.Y. Real Prop. § 291-c):

Under New York law, a farm lease can extend for as long as the parties wish. However, lease terms for a period extending beyond three years must be recorded at the local property records office. The following information must be recorded: names and addresses of the lessor and lessee; date of execution of the lease; description of the property under leases, the term (including date of commencement and termination); any rights of extension or renewal, the maximum period for which the lease may be extended or renewed and the dates where rights of extension or renewal must be exercised by.

<http://law.justia.com/codes/new-york/2014/rpp/article-9/291-c>

Ag Districts and Agricultural assessment (N.Y. Agric. & Mkts § 300-310):

In order to receive the benefits and protections farms receive under New York's agricultural districts law, rented land must be deemed to be "in agricultural production." Rented properties meeting state agricultural assessment eligibility requirements qualify. Land rented for agricultural purposes may receive an agricultural assessment. If the rented land satisfies the basic eligibility requirements, it is eligible for agricultural assessment. In addition, if the rented land does not satisfy the average gross sales value requirement, but does satisfy the other

requirements, it may still be eligible if it is farmed, under a written rental agreement of at least five years, with the other farmland that satisfies all eligibility requirements. The applicant must substantiate the existence of the term of the rental agreement by providing evidence to the local assessor. A start-up farm operation may include rented land.

<http://law.justia.com/codes/new-york/2013/agm/article-25-aa>

Form of Mortgage (N.Y. Real Prop. §273):

This law publishes the allowable form of instrument for mortgages on leases of farm properties.

<http://law.justia.com/codes/new-york/2010/rpp/article-8/273>

Tonawanda Nation (N.Y. Indian § 83):

Any member of the Tonawanda Nation residing on the tribal reservation may, with council approval, lease agricultural land to any person for a term of less than one year. Any lease entered into without council approval is considered void and unenforceable. Any person who enters or occupies land under a void lease may be removed from tribal lands and all crops raised may be harvested and sold for the benefit of the Tonawanda Nation. Any rents received under a void lease become tribal property. This statute also grants the Tonawanda Nation Council the right to lease commonly owned reservation land for periods of less than one year.

<http://law.justia.com/codes/new-york/2013/ind/article-6/83/>

Terminating Agricultural Leases for Military Service (N.Y. Mil. § 310):

Agricultural leases executed by or on behalf of an individual who subsequently enters the military after occupying the leased premise may be terminated by the lessee. The lessee must provide formal notice to the lessor at any time following the start of military service. Termination is effective 30 days after the first date on which the next rental payment is due. The lessee must cover any unpaid rent owed up to the termination date and the lessor must refund any rent payments made in advance. Any person that knowingly holds or takes the personal property of an individual or his/her spouse that terminates a lease under this law is subject to one year of imprisonment, a thousand dollar fine or both.

<http://law.justia.com/codes/new-york/2014/mil/article-13/310>

Agricultural Fair Leases Taken for Military Use (N.Y. Agric. & Mkts. §286-a):

This law applies to agricultural societies that held agricultural fairs between 1942 and 1944. During this period, agricultural societies could not be considered in breach of leases for failing to hold a fair because the subject land was need for military purposes. Despite the fact that this law only pertains to leases created during the World War II era, it remains on the books in New York.

<http://law.justia.com/codes/new-york/2013/agm/article-24/286-a>

Watershed Selection

Jill Carlson and Ann Sorensen

Choosing Watersheds to Work In

The IPM Institute and AFT looked for watersheds in Ohio and New York with a high percentage of leased farmland, nutrient and sediment run-off problems, concerned local groups who have the capability to help in outreach efforts and a combination of a strong SWCD and strong regional USDA NRCS presence (increasing the likelihood of building a long-term infrastructure to sustain the effort). We were encouraged by GLPF to include a New York state watershed. Ultimately, in Ohio, we vetted the Portage River Basin, the Toussaint River Basin, the Sandusky River Basin, the Huron River Basin and the Vermillion River Basin. For New York, we considered sub-areas of the Genesee River.

For each candidate watershed, we considered size and shape, number of farms, land use, water quality challenges, water quality monitoring, runoff concerns, recommended agricultural practices and local organizations and their capacities. We prioritized watersheds that had the potential for high ecosystem impact (derived from agricultural runoff issues and amount of rented land) along with strong local organizations and female leadership who were willing to participate in the project. We assigned replicability and existing water quality monitoring a lower priority. The IPM Institute felt that replicability would be somewhat limited since so much hinges on established networks and eager partners and it would be difficult to find very many watersheds with the same profile. However, if we gain experience and demonstrate success, it will be easier to go on to work with less willing and able local partners.

OHIO

We ultimately selected the Portage and Toussaint River basins.

Portage River Basin: (585 sq. mi) is located in Northwest Ohio. The watershed is dominated by corn and soybean agriculture. The largest contributing 'county' (by area) in Portage River Basin is Wood County which has high rates of nutrient and sediment impairment and a very high rental rate. The Portage River Basin is a part of the Great Black Swamp and has some of the richest agricultural lands in the state. Because of this, there is a lot of emphasis on preservation and conservation in the area and many local groups support this mission. Across the basin, there are wide differences in water quality. For example, some portions of the Portage system have good water quality. The Lower Portage and Upper Portage watersheds are the most impaired. Water quality monitoring is happening at many levels (Agricultural Research Service (ARS) edge-of-field (EOF) site, Ohio EPA (OEPA) sampling, and USGS National Center for Water Quality Research (NCWQR) site).

Toussaint River Basin (143 sq. mi) is a small, slender basin that lies north of Portage and is included in the Maumee Area of Concern. No standardized EOF monitoring or USGS monitoring sites are known in this area, however, a local organization completed water quality testing before and after a landowner incentives program to evaluate impacts. Toussaint is dominated by row crop agriculture. Some resources have indicated that land use for cropping has declined in the area since 1980s. No drivers are known for this, but there may be competing suburban, rural development happening in this area. A handful of organizations are working in this area. Regarding strength of local organizations, Partners for Clean Streams worked on a project in the Toussaint River Basin where they targeted landowners in the area and offered financial incentives to install filter strips, set aside flood plains and use conservation tillage. This project and local organization could serve as a channel into this watershed and resource for NOL

information. Numerous protected areas such as the Toussaint Creek Wildlife Area (managed by ODNR) and the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge managed by US Fish and Wildlife Service extend to the mouth of the Toussaint River.

Other watersheds that were considered:

Sandusky River Basin is the largest basin of the Ohio watersheds listed here (1,828 sq. mi). Water quality monitoring is happening at all levels (ARS EOF site, OEPA site, USGS NCWQR site). Only one known non-profit organization is known in the area (Sandusky River Watershed Coalition) and from past experience they have limited resources. The Seneca County SWCD is very strong and active. Soybeans and corn are dominant crops in the area, but there are also smaller livestock operations. There is a high rental rate in this basin's counties.

Huron River Basin is located between Toledo and Cleveland on the south shore of Lake Erie. Corn and soybean agriculture dominates the Huron River Basin. Even though conservation tillage practices have increased, the Huron River remains highly impaired by sediment. Erosion is a huge concern. There is no known EOF or instream water quality monitoring happening currently. The OEPA will conduct the next biological survey in 2017.

Vermilion River Basin is located in Northern Ohio, west of Cleveland. The Vermilion River Basin is very small. Once again, erosion concerns farmers in this area. There is active water quality monitoring at many different levels (OEPA, Heidelberg NCWQR), though no EOF monitoring is happening currently. On an acre-by-acre basis, the Vermilion produces smaller nutrient loads of dissolved P and N, but comparable loads of total phosphorus. On an acre-by-acre basis, it has a disproportionately larger load of sediment compared to Sandusky, Maumee and Cuyahoga Rivers.

NEW YORK

Genesee River is the largest basin of the selected watershed here, located in western New York and that drains into Lake Ontario. The watershed is diverse in land use and specifically agricultural operations. The southern portion is dominated by dairy operations, steep slopes and forested land. The northern portion is some of the most agriculturally rich lands and is home to corn and soybean agriculture (amongst other smaller, specialty crop operations). There is an abundance of public, academic and nonprofit entities that are invested in the Basin. The Basin is large enough such that we would arguably pick a couple sub-watersheds to focus on and most of the farmer-based ag work comes out of sub-watershed groups (such as Oatka and Black Creek) or the SWCDs which are relatively strong. In contrast with the Ohio watersheds, the rental rate is lower, conservation/BMP topics tend to be 'behind' in New York and operations tend to be smaller. There is water quality monitoring happening at many different levels (instream USGS and EOF sites).

There are strong SWCD and NRC staff within the whole Genesee River Watershed who are willing to help and AFT's New York office has been working on soil health projects in the area and can also help. We decided to focus on Wyoming County but will most likely draw participants from surrounding counties as well.

Wyoming County (565 sq. mi) Ecological impact will be more significant since the areas of more intensive agriculture (particularly dairy) have a greater impact on water quality in the Great Lakes. Wyoming SWCD is a capable local partner (downside is that they have a heavy workload). If we do multicounty, any pairing with Wyoming should work such as Genesee/Wyoming or Wyoming/Livingston.

Other watersheds that were considered:

Black and/or Oatka Creek sub-watersheds are the recommendations if we focus instead on sub-watersheds. Oatka Creek flows from southern Wyoming County through Genesee, Livingston and Monroe counties (= 215 sq. mi). Again, intensive agriculture, more of an ecosystem impact. Black Creek runs north out of Wyoming County and eventually joins the Genesee River in Monroe County (= 202 sq. mi). Black Creek will have more of an urban/suburban influence than Oatka.

Analysis of 2007 Great Lakes Survey Data

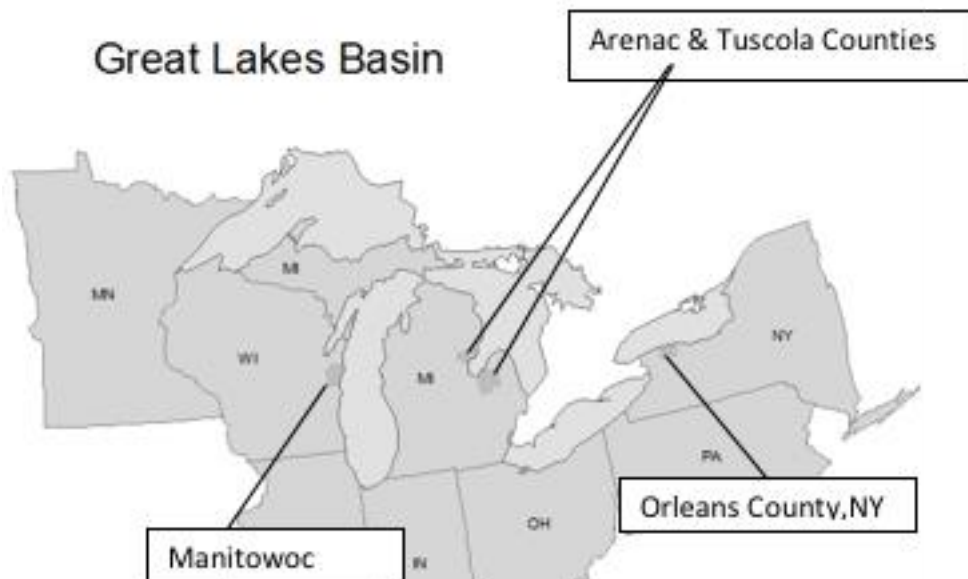
Peggy Petrzelka

Introduction and Background

In 2007, mail surveys of absentee landowners of agricultural land in four counties in the Great Lakes Basin were conducted by Agren, Inc., for a project funded by the Great Lakes Protection Fund. This report summarizes data from that survey as it relates to our current project in the Great Lakes¹¹.

In stakeholder meetings held with absentee landowners of agricultural land and NRCS field practitioners in the Great Lakes Basin, both groups independently identified a need for specialized outreach to absentee landowners, particularly in four Great Lakes Basin counties (Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, Tuscola and Arenac Counties in Michigan, and Orleans County, New York) (Figure 2). Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, lies on the western shore of Lake Michigan and has an active dairy cattle industry resulting in aggressive tillage and manure applications. Tuscola and Arenac Counties in Michigan are part of the Saginaw Bay Watershed, which lies on the southwest shore of Lake Huron. The Saginaw watershed is listed on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Areas of Concern List for the Great Lakes. Tuscola County is made up largely of agricultural land, whereas Arenac County has more land owned for recreational purposes (Agren 2008). Orleans County, New York, is on the southern shore of Lake Ontario, and a small portion of Orleans County is located in the Genesee Watershed of New York. The major land use in Orleans County is cultivated cropland.

Figure 2



¹¹ Frequency distributions and tables indicating tests of statistical significance available from Utah State University by request. Email Dr. Peggy Petrzelka at peggy.petrzelka@usu.edu.

In all four counties, corn is the dominant commodity raised (Census of Agriculture 2007). The average farm size at the time of the survey for the four counties was: Manitowoc Counties—172 acres, Tuscola County—250 acres, Arenac County—194 acres, and Orleans County—252 acres (Census of Agriculture 2007).

For the Great Lakes survey sample, names of absentee landowners were obtained through the county tax rolls, double checked by local natural resource agency staff and sorted to include only those landowners living outside the respective counties in the study (to be consistent with previous operationalization of absentee landowners—Constance et al., 1996). A pre-test of the questionnaire occurred in early 2007 with a small number of absentee landowners, with the mail survey conducted in spring 2007 using a modified Dillman (2000) Tailored Design Method (TDM). One week after the initial survey mailing, a reminder postcard was sent to all respondents. Three weeks after the initial mailing a replacement survey was sent to those that had not yet responded. If a “primary contact” was listed on the tax rolls, the survey was sent to this contact; otherwise, it was mailed to the name (or names) listed on the property deed. Overall, 275 absentee landowners responded to the Wisconsin survey (67 percent response rate), 556 absentee landowners responded in Michigan (66 percent response rate), and 73 absentee landowners responded to the New York survey (57 percent response rate), for a total N of 904.

Given our interest in this project on women landowners and adoption of sustainable leases by both the landowner and operator, we separated out from the larger sample those landowners who indicated they rent *at least some* of their agricultural land to an operator, then split the sample by gender and ran analyses (percentages, means, independent t-tests and chi-square tests) on this smaller group of respondents (n=350 men, n=134 women). The following discussion primarily focuses on these findings as they relate to women landowners who rent their land in the Great Lakes to an operator.

Socio-Demographic and Land Characteristics

The women landowners in the sample are significantly older than the male landowners, significantly more likely to be widowed and retired, and to report an annual gross income at much smaller levels than the male landowners. With this lower number of women employed outside of the home, WNOLs may be easier to reach (than their male counterparts who are employed), for involvement in the focus groups and learning circles to be conducted in the project.

When examining land characteristics between the male and female landowners who rent their land, the results show the female landowners are significantly more likely to live farther from their land and they are less likely to visit their land with much frequency, which could result in less opportunity to ensure that terms of the sustainable leases are being followed. While not a significant difference, it is important to highlight that of these women landowners who co-own their agricultural land (35 percent of the women), 50 percent co-own with siblings—a factor which is important to know when discussing sustainable leases since it will impact who will be involved in the decision-making regarding adoption of sustainable leases. That is, to what degree do co-owners need to be involved in the decision-making?

Women are also significantly more likely than male landowners to have inherited their land, which may possibly change the family dynamics for what is done on and with the land (for example, with inherited land there may be more generational pressure to do conservation, keep land in the family at all costs, etc.). Finally, the land as a source of income is much more

important to female landowners than male landowners, with 41 percent indicating it is either an important or extremely important source of income.

Decision-Making on the Land

For both male and female landowners, “conservation or concern for the environment” is the most important factor (of five provided) that influences the decisions they make on their land. The second most important factor for the women landowners is need for income (differing significantly from male landowners). This finding is consistent with the earlier finding that the land as a source of income is highly important to the female landowners in this sample. (This is not only evident when comparing differences between male and female landowners, but also when comparing differences between women landowners in the sample who rent their land, and those who do not, with those renting their land relying on income from that land much more than women not renting their land (results not shown but available). This finding is important to keep in mind when emphasizing with the landowners the importance of maintaining and improving the environmental resources on their land over time to ensure rental income.

“Not enough knowledge” and “complexity of the information” are the top two factors indicated by the women landowners as obstacles to more involvement in decision-making regarding their land (differing significantly from male landowners). While these are key findings to note for our project, it is also important to note the women are not indicating either of these factors are *major* obstacles to their lack of participating in decision-making.

Activities on the Land

In terms of activities done on the land, crop production is the primary activity for both male and female landowners. Male landowners have significantly more timber production on their land (18 percent compared to 4 percent of women landowners), and also have significantly more recreational activities on their land (48 percent compared to 25 percent of the women landowners). When asked what activity is done *most often* on the land, both male and female landowners indicated crop production (not surprisingly given the sample characteristics of renting their land to an operator).

When asked about conservation programs, only 25 percent or less of the landowners have enrolled in a state or federal conservation program. For those who indicated they have enrolled in a conservation program, men were significantly more likely to have enrolled in both set-aside and cost-share programs. Women were significantly more likely to not know what programs they have enrolled in, the results showing that WNOLs are less familiar with government conservation program opportunities possibly available to them.

Leasing

The landowners were asked various questions about their leasing arrangements. Forty-two percent of the male landowners rent out all of their land to others for farming, compared to 58 percent of female landowners, revealing female landowners rent all of their land at a much higher rate than do male landowners. Female landowners are much more likely than male landowners to have a written lease (62 percent and 48 percent respectively). Both male and female landowners typically had a cash rent agreement, had a local farmer operating their land, and indicated this farmer was the primary decision maker for crop inputs, tillage practices, crops grown and conservation practices (though both male and female landowners indicated they had more involvement in deciding conservation practices than for the other listed practices). When asked if they would feel comfortable encouraging their operator to do conservation practices, the majority of landowners indicated yes, with 74 percent of the women landowners indicating they felt comfortable doing so. However, this still differs significantly from the male landowners

(82 percent indicating they feel comfortable), showing WNOLs need more help to be comfortable working with their operator.

Information Topics, Preferences, Sources

Landowners were provided a list of 16 topics and asked to indicate which topics were important to them with respect to their land. For both male and female landowners, soil/land conservation (88 percent and 84 percent respectively) and water conservation (70 percent and 62 percent respectively) were numbers 1 and 2 in terms of importance. Leasing and renting options ranked as the third most important topic for the women landowners, with 57 percent indicating this topic important. Wildlife conservation was the fourth most important topic for the women landowners (52 percent indicating), followed by income generation/income security (48 percent indicating). Thus, conservation topics and topics related to leasing the land (by knowing options and by generating income) make up the top five topics in terms of importance to the women landowners. Given the focus of our project, this is an essential finding and bodes well for discussions about sustainable agriculture leases.

Further analyses were conducted to discern any differences among the women landowners who indicated leasing and renting options was an important topic to them, compared to those who did not indicate this. Initial results on this data show those women landowners who indicated information on leasing and renting options was an important topic for them differ significantly from those women landowners who did not indicate leasing and renting options as an important topic in the following ways: they live further away from their land, the land is more important to them as a source of income, they are more comfortable encouraging their operator to do conservation, they are much more interested in land transfer/succession information (they are also more likely to have inherited the land), more interested in information on business management, and much more interested in information on sustainable/environmentally friendly practices. These findings bode well for our project as they indicate both an interest by 57 percent of the WNOLS in information on leasing and renting options for their land, as well as show that conservation/environmentally friendly practices are also of interest to this group of women.

As noted earlier, the women landowners in this study were significantly more likely than the male landowners to indicate that “not enough knowledge” and “complexity of the information” were factors preventing their participating in decision-making regarding their land. The landowners were asked their preferences for information outreach—that is—how they would like to receive information regarding their land? Both male and female landowners were fairly consistent with preferences, with “direct mailings” and “one-on-one consultations” numbers 1 and 2 in terms of preference, and “direct mailings” a very strong preference on the part of women landowners. “Large public meetings” were indicated by both groups as the least preferred mode of outreach. Female landowners differ significantly from male landowners on this mode of outreach, with one possible explanation being they may feel more uncomfortable by the size of the meetings and intimidated at large agricultural settings, which are often male dominated. It is important to remember that the landowners in this sample are absentee, thus their preferences for information delivery may differ from those landowners who are residing on their land.

For both male and female landowners, the renter is their most important source of information (significantly more so for the women landowners) when wanting information regarding their land. This is followed by the SWCD (used significantly more so by the male landowners). Given the discussion the project team has had regarding potential use of ag retailers in our project as providers of sustainable leasing options, it is important to highlight where these retailers fall on

the list. “Seed dealers and/or chemical dealers” are ranked #17 (out of 19 sources used) for the women landowners. However, farmers likely use ag retailers as their main source of information so they could play a key role in outreach to farmers with leased land.

Over 50 percent of both male and female landowners have access to the internet, male landowners significantly more so (74 percent v. 56 percent). Both indicate a comfort level with using the internet, and the majority of landowners have high-speed service (most likely even more now, given the survey was conducted in 2007).

Farm Background

Lastly, to get a sense of the farming background of the landowners, they were asked if they lived on a farm. Only a small percentage of both male and female landowners currently live on a farm. However, the vast majority have lived on a farm in the past (66 percent of men indicating and 77 percent of women). The male landowners were significantly more likely to consider themselves a farmer currently (19 percent v. 11 percent of women).

Women Who Rent Land in New York

Given that the Genessee Watershed in New York will potentially be one of the two watersheds in our project, we also pulled from the sample women landowners in Orleans County¹², New York who rent at least some of their land to an operator (n=7). Given the small n, no statistical tests were conducted between the male and female landowners in Orleans County, however, highlighted below are some of the main findings and patterns found in the data.

In general, the findings show these women tend to live closer to their land (four living less than five miles) and visit it frequently (daily). Crop production is the activity done most often on the land. The New York women landowners are less likely to own the land with others, and more dispersed in their answers when asked about the importance of the land as a source of income (ranging from two indicating “not important,” two indicating “somewhat important,” two indicating “important,” and one indicating “extremely important”). This is consistent with their ranking of what influences their decisions about the land, where “Tradition” is the top factor in influencing their decisions about their land (four indicating “a good deal”), followed by “conservation or concern for the environment” (three indicating “a good deal”) and “need for income indicated by two as influencing their decisions “a good deal.”

All seven have a cash rent agreement and all indicated it is a family member farming their land. Five indicated they would be comfortable encouraging this family member to use certain conservation practices on the land (with two indicating they would not be comfortable). “One on one” consultation is the “most preferred” delivery method followed very closely by “direct mailings.” Both “farm manager” and “renter” are ranked as very important sources of information by three of the landowners. In terms of topics important to them with respect to their land, “soil/land conservation” was indicated by six of the seven women, followed by “water conservation,” “wildlife conservation,” and “leasing/renting options” indicated by four of the seven women as important topics.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings reveal both opportunities and obstacles for attempting adoption of sustainable leasing by women landowners. The findings point to many good justifications for why the focus of our project is on women non-operating landowners (e.g. the women’s feelings of not knowing enough and complexity of information preventing them from participating in

¹² Part of Orleans County is located in the Genessee Watershed.

decision-making on their land, their high interest in leasing and renting options). The findings also highlight where some major stumbling blocks in the project may be, with the most consistent one appearing to be the need to ensure that loss of income from the land does not occur with the sustainable leasing.

Findings from GLPF Planning Grant Preliminary Research in 2016

Peggy Petrzelka

WNOL Focus Group Themes

In April 2016, focus groups were conducted with women non-operating landowners in our two watersheds. Our local partner in Ohio is the Portage River Watershed Coordinator, and works out of the Wood Soil and Water Conservation District Office in Bowling Green, Ohio. Our local partner in New York is the Farm Business Management Specialist for Cornell Extension, and works out of Wyoming County Extension Office, located in Warsaw, New York. Both partners located names of both women landowners who lease their agricultural land and invited them to the focus group via letters, and announcements in the local newspapers and newsletters sent out from their offices.

The goal of the focus groups was to have an opportunity to talk with the women about incentives and barriers to adoption of conservation practices into agricultural leases and the state of their renter-landlord relationship.

Nine women attended the Ohio focus group session, and eight women attended the New York focus group session. Extensive notes were taken during each session, then analyzed for dominant themes by two individuals to allow for inter-coder reliability. The dominant themes from the women's focus groups are listed below.

Ohio

- There is a HUGE need for more information and communication on things such as taxes, land values, farm prices, writing leases, government programs, etc. The women are hungry for information.
- Women need to be braver. For example, they need/want more money from their operator for renting, but are afraid to ask. They also do not feel they have much decision-making ability and feel are more effective if man is present.
- They question if conservation is a deterrent to farmers and question the cost-effectiveness of conservation practices.

New York

- There is a HUGE need for more information and communication on things such as taxes, land values, farm prices, writing leases, government programs, etc. The women are hungry for information.
- The women want to be sure their land is being taken care of/respected/and well-maintained.
- As women, they feel they are being taken advantage of by the male farmers and often discuss their need to 'be strong.'

In June 2016, focus groups were conducted with farmers who rent from female landowners. The local partners again assisted in locating these farmers and inviting them. Three farmers attended the Ohio focus group session, and five farmers attended the New York session. The lower numbers of farmers can be attributed in part to the timing of the interviews and the unpredictable weather (and thus growing season) in both of our research sites.

Farmers were asked similar questions as the women landowners, specifically incentives and barriers to their desire for adoption of conservation practices into agricultural leases, and their views on the state of their renter-landlord relationship.

The dominant themes from the farmers' focus groups are listed below.

Ohio

- Relationship, trust and communication are all very important components to have with landowner.
- Farmers are conservation-oriented, but economically-driven.
- They are seeing differences between older and younger generations in terms of land ownership, with older generation more concerned with keeping quality of land, younger generation more concerned about dollars.
- There is a need for information distribution to landowners so landowners can better understand why farmers are doing what they are doing on the rented land.

New York

- Relationship, trust and communication are all very important components to have with landowner.
- There are challenges with newer generations and absentee landowners in terms of their understanding farm management
- Lease length changes are needed to improve conservation and land management

Women's Learning Circles

Also in June 2016, a staff member with WFAN conducted trial Women's Learning Circles (described previously in the outreach discussion) in Ohio and New York. Again local partners assisted in finding women to invite to the day-long learning circles as well as finding conservation professionals to attend and discuss government conservation programs available to the women and their renters. The morning discussion focused on soil health and cover crops. After lunch, a tour to various farms to witness conservation practices was conducted. At the end of the day, evaluations were done.

Five women landowners attended the Ohio learning circle. All of the women ranked the program as "excellent" for meeting their expectations and all five women also ranked the programs' content as "excellent."

Six women landowners attended the New York learning circle. Five of the women ranked the program as "excellent" for meeting their expectations, with one ranking it "good." All six of the women ranked the programs' content as "excellent."

We used the focus group findings and learning circle evaluations to help design the current proposal to be submitted to Great Lake Protection Fund in October 2016.

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