



Increasing Iowa farmers' resiliency through the Practical Farmers of Iowa Cooperators' Program

Abstract: Practical Farmers of Iowa uses their Cooperators Program to engage farmers in answering their research questions with demonstrations on their own farms. They share what they learn at field days, and through publications and webinars.

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What was done and why?

Using funding from this grant, Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) supported farmers' development of innovative, practical solutions to their most pressing on-farm research and demonstration questions. PFI farmers are leaders in extensive outreach to bring those practical research and demonstration results to all Iowa farmers.

Objectives for this three-year effort were:

- Seventy farmers each year will undertake projects that will make them more resilient when faced with higher oil prices, climate instability and economic fluctuations;
- Thirty of those farmers each year will undertake projects that will help transition them from highly specialized one- or two-product systems to more resilient working farms and landscapes, resulting in more living roots in the ground, management for multiple benefits, and enhanced profitability;
- More than 1,500 other farmers each year will learn from the 70 participating farmers through PFI field days, meetings, publications, website, and print and radio media offerings.

What did we learn?

The farmer field school model of information distribution used for this project proved to be an effective means of increasing the adoption of new practices at the farm scale and empowering farmers with each other's knowledge. Results from Cooperators Program evaluations indicate approximately 87 percent of the respondents report they have changed farming practices as a result of participation in a Practical Farmers project. In addition, 63 percent of field day evaluation form respondents indicated they intend to change one or more practices (production, marketing, in-field, conservation, or food purchasing practices) as a result of attending PFI's field day. Of those, 27 percent report they already have changed one or more practices (in these same categories) as a result of previous Practical Farmers field days.

Championing farmers as the experts and leaders in their field is the most effective way to change the current narrative about agriculture. Other groups that have tried this method also found it beneficial to their programming. Pre- and post-test reporting remains important to shaping the future of the program.