



*Building a Culture of*

# CONSERVATION

***Iowa Learning Farms | 2018 Evaluation Report***

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## Introduction

Iowa Learning Farms continues to build a *Culture of Conservation* as we bring together farmers, landowners, agribusiness, researchers and state and federal agency partners. In 2018, Iowa Learning Farms delivered or participated in 63 outreach events that reached a total of 3,690 people. Our staff, trailer fleet and partners across the state helped us reach new communities and participants as we continue to build a *Culture of Conservation*.

## Highlights

**72%**

of field day/workshop attendees described themselves as either **farmers/operators or landowners.**

Respondents who attended an ILF field day in 2018 planted

**23,595**

total acres of cover crops, **20% of which were new acres** of cover crops.

An estimated

**33%**

of attendees have never planted a cover crop and **57% reported no current acres in strip-till or no-till.**



## ILF Approach to Evaluation

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

- **Event Evaluations** for every event in which ILF team members participated. These forms, completed by ILF team members, help us to understand the audience's level of engagement, document the questions that were asked by participants, and help us to improve future outreach activities. For detailed information of a specific event from this evaluation work, please see the ILF quarterly reports on our website at <https://www.iowalearningfarms.org/content/ilf-reports>.

**The remaining evaluation process is specific for farmer outreach activities that we hold:**

- **Comment Cards** filled out by all participants at ILF-sponsored field days and workshops in order to gain a better understanding of who they are and why they are there.
- **Demographic Cards** filled out by all participants at ILF-sponsored field days/workshops. Demographic cards provide a snapshot of attendees in terms of their age, gender, role in agriculture and information about their farming operations. The cards also capture preferences on timing and topics of interest for future outreach events.
- **Follow-up Evaluations** mailed to participants at ILF-sponsored field days/workshops that happened before November 7. These questionnaires were sent within three weeks following the event. The questions focused on the clarity and accessibility of the information received and inquired whether participants planned to make any changes in their land management as a result of the event. The individual field day evaluations are available in a separate report.
- **January Evaluations** mailed to only farmers/operators and landowners at all ILF-sponsored field days/workshops. These questionnaires were sent in January 2019 to see if the participants had made the changes



## Event Evaluations

Event evaluation forms were completed by Iowa Learning Farms team members following all outreach events, including field days/workshops. For detailed information of a specific event, see the respective quarterly reports.

### ILF 2018 Events

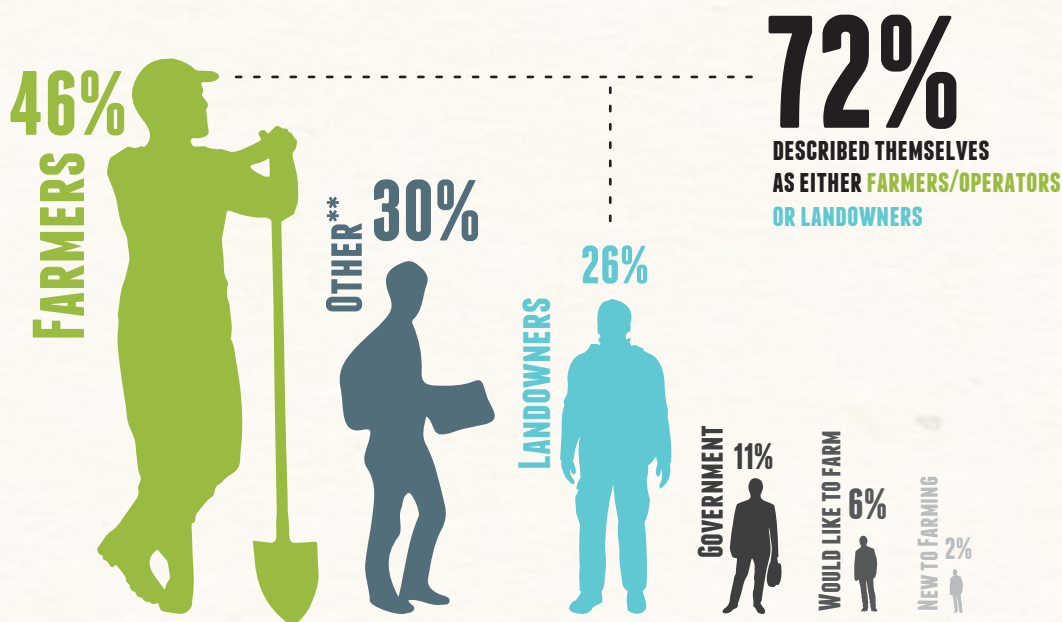
	Number of Events	Number of Attendees
Field Days/Workshops	24	1,134
Presentations	10	1,120
Community Events/Conservation Station Appearances	24	1,383
Listening Sessions	5	53

## Field Day Attendees

In 2017, the Iowa Learning Farms field day demographic card was introduced. A separate demographic card allows us to track if we are reaching less traditional field day attendees such as younger farmers and women and how we can continue to improve our appeal to this audience. Each attendee, excluding speakers and partners, was asked to fill out the card at the beginning of the field day. Since each individual attendee fills out a demographic card (rather than each household that fills out a comment card), we are able to get a more accurate representation of who is attending our field days. We use these data throughout the year to help us plan better field days. We will continue to experiment with time of day and week for field days to see if we can't get a better diversity of audience. The total number of demographic cards collected in 2018 was 625.

### Description of Field Day Attendees (n=625)

Seventy-two percent of the field day attendees identified themselves as either farmers/operators or landowners (n=451). On average, farmers attending ILF field days/workshops in 2018 have 638 acres in row crops and 746 total acres.



\*Respondents could choose more than one category

\*\*Other includes: student or educator, media, agricultural business or industry, or unspecified

About half (43%) of respondents indicate they own over 75% of their land. However, when looking at respondents aged 50 and under, that changes dramatically to 61% of respondents reporting that they own 25% or less of their acres. Faced with many acres changing hands in the next five to ten years, it is important to continue to develop outreach materials and plan events accessible to both landowners, farmers/operators and emerging farmers (folks with ties to farmland who want to farm). To reach our goals of increasing conservation implementation, it will be a coordinated effort by landowners, those who actively farm and giving opportunity to those who want to farm.

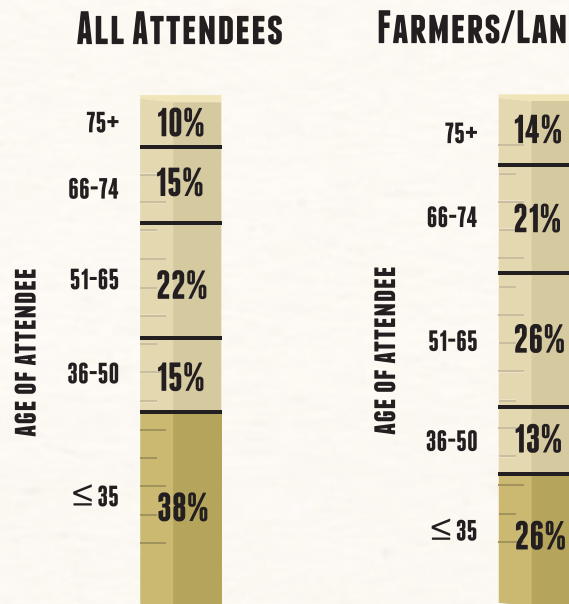
The average age of farmers/operators attending ILF field days was 46 years, which was younger than the average age of a farmer in Iowa (57 years). This finding has been consistent in the five years that we have been tracking age information. The average age of landowners attending ILF field days was higher at 65 years.

### Farmers 35 and Younger

Thirty-eight percent of our field day attendees were 35 years or younger with 26% farmers/landowners; 67% of attendees in this age group were men while 33% were women. On average, farmers in this age group farm 774 acres of row crop land (range of 2–5,000 acres, with one farmer reporting farming 10,000 acres) and own 30% of their farmland. **Fifty-one percent of respondents in this category reported that they did not own any of the acres that they currently farm.**

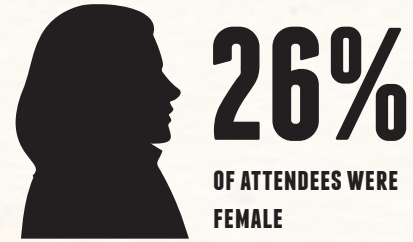
Livestock is an early entry point for the next generation to begin or return to the farm. Nearly 44% of this age group’s farmers/operators and landowners reported having livestock compared to 29% of respondents over the age of 35 who identified as a farmer/operator or landowner.

These younger attendees indicated a slight preference for events held on Tuesdays and Thursdays (39%) followed by Saturdays (37%). Preferred times of day included afternoons (41%) or evenings after 5 pm (46%).



## Gender at Field Days/Workshops

Twenty-six percent of attendees at ILF field days/workshops in 2018 were women. This number has remained consistent over the last three years despite efforts to increase female attendees. Nineteen percent of all attendees who identified as farmers/operators or landowners were women; 34% of those who identified as “other” were women (agribusiness, students or educators). Since Iowa Learning Farms first started hosting field days, the number of women attending field days has increased. There are more women serving as extension specialists, agronomists, and government employees and this is reflected in our data.



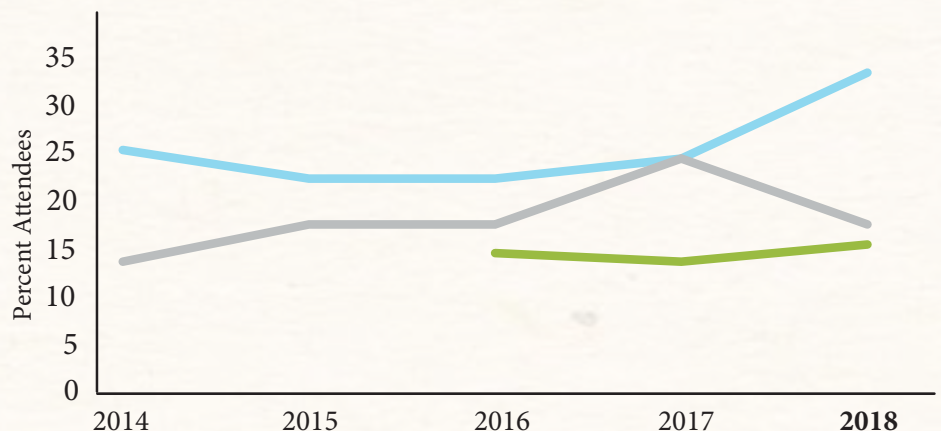
Twenty percent of women attendees describe themselves as active farmers/operators and 35% describe themselves as landowners. **Nearly 55% reported owning more than three-quarters of their land.** This finding is consistent with the trend of increasing numbers of acres owned by female landowners. It is encouraging to see these women taking an active role in the management of their land as both farmer/operator and/or landowner.

In 2019, ILF will continue to seek new ways to increase female attendance, especially female farmers/operators and landowners, at field days and workshops. Women indicated to us that they would prefer to attend events during the week on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays with a preference toward afternoons. In 2019, we plan to offer events at these times to see if we can increase the number of women attending our events. We also plan to partner with organizations that focus on women farmers/operators and landowners for multiple events in 2019.

## How Did Attendees Hear about the Field Day

Word of mouth (34%), newspapers (18%) and email (16%) were the primary ways that field day attendees found out about ILF field days/workshops. **Word of mouth is up 9% over last year and also the highest it has ever been.** ILF will continue to use a diversified communications approach in order to maximize the number of attendees at our events. Respondents specifically mentioned Farm Bureau Spokesman as one of the newspapers where they heard about ILF field days/workshops.

How did you hear about the field day?	
Neighbor/Word of Mouth	34%
Newspaper	18%
Email*	16%
Mailing	15%
Class/Teacher	10%
ISU Extension Staff	8%
District Office	8%
Website	6%
Social Media	6%
Other	4%
Radio	3%



Individuals could choose more than one category.

\*Emails were not tracked until 2016.

## Summary of Follow-up Evaluations for Field Days

Follow-up evaluation questionnaires were mailed to participants at ILF-sponsored field days and workshops that occurred before November 7. The one-page questionnaires were mailed within three weeks of the event and focused on event feedback and whether participants intended to change any land management practices. A total of 300 evaluations were mailed; 121 questionnaires were returned for a 40% response rate (n=121).

	# Attendees	# Comment Cards	# Returned Surveys	# Demographic Cards
3/28, Union Co. Women Landowners Field Day, Diagonal	19	9	5	9
3/29, Brian Meyer Field Day, Readlyn	101	38 & 27 students	16	40
6/7, Marshall Co. Women Landowners Workshop, Marshalltown	25	25	6	14
7/17, Bioreactor Field Day, Boone	35	35	10	26
8/7, Scott Co. Saturated Buffer Field Day, Walcott	40	40	9	17
8/8, Story Co. Cover Crop Field Day, Roland	52	52	16	36
8/9, Dickinson Co. Edge of Field Field Day, Spirit Lake	53	53	11	32
8/22, Walnut Creek Watershed Field Day, Dallas Center	33	33	11	12
8/23, Poweshiek Bioreactor Field Day, Brooklyn	52	52	14	36
9/5, Dordt College Ag. Field Day, Sioux Center	186	72 & 73 students	13	140
9/13, LICA Field Day, Melbourne	89	39	10	39
11/7, Lake Geode Watershed Field Day, West Burlington	66	40	Not sent	46
11/13, Nick Meier Cover Crop Field Day, Waterloo	45	35	Not sent	36
11/14, Dick Lund Cover Crop Field Day, Laurens	23	11	Not sent	10
11/15, Mike Helland Cover Crop Field Day, Huxley	25	9	Not sent	11
11/20, Cedar Creek Partnership Field Day, Ottumwa	55	26	Not sent	27
11/27, Kossuth Co. Cover Crop Field Day, Algona	49	38	Not sent	35
11/28, Lower Skunk River Field Day, Hillsboro	49	33	Not sent	33
11/29, Clayton Co. Cover Crop Field Day, Luana	37	27	Not sent	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,034</b>	<b>667 (300 mailed)+</b>	<b>121*</b>	<b>625</b>

\*40% response rate

+Field days held in November or later are sent only the January survey.

In 2018 we increased the number of categories that were used to evaluate the effectiveness of field days from evaluating on the overall quality, the effectiveness of expert presentations and the effectiveness of farmer presentations to the overall quality, the effectiveness of ILF presentations, the effectiveness of ISU presentations, the effectiveness of government presentations, the effectiveness of farmer presentations and the effectiveness of the field portion of the field day (each category: when applicable). **Overall, the quality and effectiveness of presentations were rated very highly, with the largest portion of respondents rating the quality of the field day and the effectiveness of presentations and the field portion as excellent.** The individual field day evaluations are available as a separate report.

	Excellent (5)	Good (4)	Average (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)	Average
Overall quality of field day or workshop (n=118)	53%	38%	7%	2%	--	4.43
Effectiveness of ILF presentations (n=104)	57%	34%	7%	2%	--	4.46
Effectiveness of ISU presentations (n=42)	52%	43%	5%	--	--	4.48
Effectiveness of government presentations (n=89)	54%	38%	6%	1%	1%	4.43
Effectiveness of farmer presentations (n=87)	60%	33%	5%	2%	--	4.51
Effectiveness of field portion (n=56)	57%	37%	4%	2%	--	4.50



Overall quality of field day



**4.43/5**



Overall quality of farmer presentations



**4.51/5 +11%**



Effectiveness of field portion



**4.50/5**

This year we also asked field day attendees to rate the length of the field day and the helpfulness of the take-home materials provided. We will use this information for planning the length of 2019 field days and to try to provide more helpful take-home materials at future field days.

#### Length (n=103)

Too Short	Just Right	Too Long
3%	94%	3%

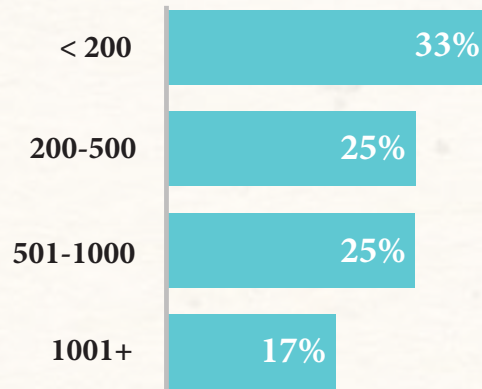
#### Helpfulness of Take-Home Materials Provided

	Extremely Helpful (5)	Very Helpful (4)	Somewhat Helpful (3)	Slightly Helpful (2)	Not Helpful (1)	Average
One Page Document (n=81)	32%	44%	21%	3%	--	4.06
Four Page Document (n=81)	25%	46%	25%	2%	2%	3.88
Full Research Report (n=55)	23%	32%	23%	19%	3%	3.52
DVD (n=57)	17%	25%	30%	16%	12%	3.19
Presentation Slides (n=68)	25%	35%	27%	9%	4%	3.68



### Number of Acres Farmed (n=52)

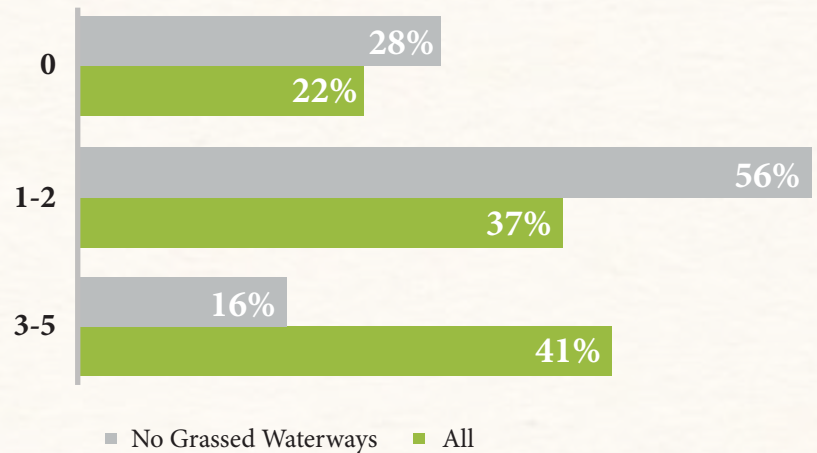
According to the follow-up evaluation data, 67% of respondents in our data set farmed 200 or more acres, which is Iowa Learning Farms' target audience. Respondents reported an average of 587 acres farmed per farmer (median 400) with 30% of respondents reporting. These acreage numbers closely match our demographic card data set (average of 638 acres farmed), further validating both data sets.



### Number of Conservation Practices (n=117)

Respondents were asked what types of conservation practices they currently utilize, and they were given a list of the following practices: no-till/strip-till, cover crops, rotational grazing, prairie strips, extended crop rotation, grassed waterways/filter strips/buffers, and other.

Forty-one percent of respondents answered that they utilize three or more conservation practices, an increase from last year (30%). The most common conservation practice reported was grassed waterways with 60% of respondents already using that practice.



Practice	Percent (n=117)
No-till/strip till	54%
Cover crops	36%
Extended rotation	19%
Other	14%
Rotational grazing	6%
Prairie strips	10%
Grassed waterway, filter strips, buffers	60%

### Leased Land

In 2018 we asked field day attendees about the farm land they lease to a tenant. Fifty-six percent leased land to tenants, at an average of 353 acres (range: 25-1500 acres). Forty-three percent of respondents reported that they have conservation practices built into their tenants' leases.

## Summary of January Evaluations for Field Days

January evaluations were mailed to only farmers/operators and landowners for 16 ILF-sponsored field days/workshops of 2018. We mailed these questionnaires in early January 2019. The goal of the January evaluation is to investigate whether respondents

made changes to their farming practices. Due to the government shutdown and the economic uncertainty it brought, we did not get an adequate response rate from the first mailing. We did a second mailing in early February and ended up with a 48% response rate, which is what we normally get from a one-time mailing.

# Evaluations Sent	# Evaluations Returned	Response Rate
284	136	48%

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

	Field Day Season 2016 n=273	Field Day Season 2017 n=251	Field Day Season 2018 n= 136
Increased use of surface residue management (no-till or strip-till) on some of my acres	36%	28%	<b>49%</b>
Total acres of no-till/strip-till implemented by ILF field day attendees	78,309 (7,596 new acres)	67,711 (5,410 new acres)	<b>44,292 (6,231 new acres)</b>
Average # of acres per respondent who said they were putting more acres into no-till or strip-till	165	135	<b>223</b>
I fall seeded cover crops on some of my acres	62% (18,943 new acres)	70% (10,973 new acres)	<b>67% (4,461 new acres)</b>
Total acres of cover crops planted by ILF field day attendees	44,721	48,749	<b>23,595</b>
Average # of acres per respondent who said they were putting more acres into cover crops	174	127	<b>112</b>
I discussed +/- of using no-till/strip-till/cover crops with my landowners/tenants	69%	62%	<b>70%</b>
I networked conservation ideas with other farmers or my farmer clients	65%	68%	<b>73%</b>
If yes, how successful were you? (Number of people you influenced)	One other: 37% Two or more: 34% No others: 29%	One other: 40% Two or more: 37% No others: 23%	<b>One other: 44% Two or more: 27% No others: 29%</b>
I did not make any changes	13%	7%	<b>10%*</b>

\* This number comes from the 2-week survey.

ILF is reaching a variety of producers. Our target audience of those who farm 200 or more acres made up 73% of our January evaluation respondents. Respondents reported farming an average of 785 acres and collectively operated on 88,692 total crop acres in Iowa.

..... **73%**  
OF ATTENDEES FARM  
200 OR MORE ACRES



## Cover Crops

Due to the small sample size of the end of year surveys for 2018, a more detailed analysis of cover crop trends can be found in the Iowa Learning Farms 15 Year Report.

### Number of years with cover crops? (n=87)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
1	19%	21%	16%	10%
2	18%	10%	16%	7%
3-5	47%	36%	26%	44%
6+	16%	33%	42%	39%

**83%**

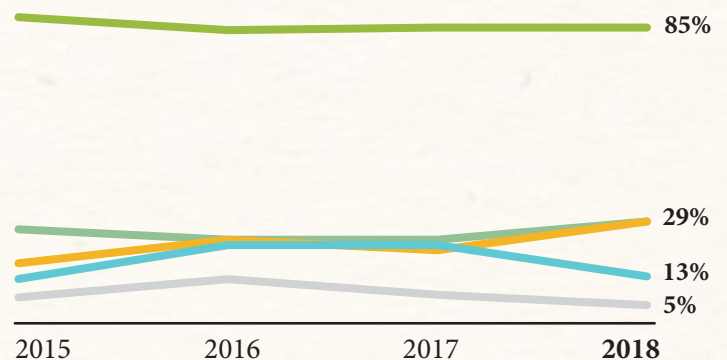
HAVE BEEN USING  
COVER CROPS FOR THREE  
YEARS OR MORE

### Was cost share used? (n=93)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Yes	60%	61%	65%	68%
No	40%	39%	35%	32%

### Cover Crop Planting by Species

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Cereal rye	88%	84%	85%	85%
Radishes/ Turnips	27%	24%	24%	29%
Oats	17%	24%	21%	29%
Other*	12%	22%	22%	13%
Wheat	7%	12%	8%	5%



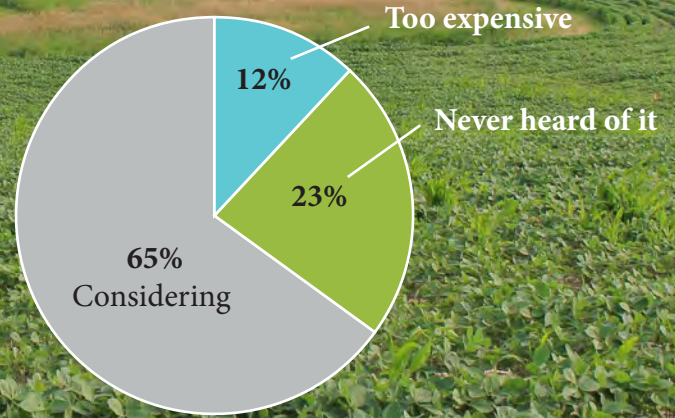
\* Other includes hairy vetch, clover, winter pea, cowpea, rapeseed, triticale, mustard and annual rye

# Prairie Strips

Eighteen percent of farmers/operators and landowners who attended ILF field days in 2018 reported using prairie strips on their land. This number has fluctuated in recent years – we saw 9% in 2015, 14% in 2016 and 8% in 2017. Respondents who reported acres in prairie strips accounted for a total of 940 prairie strip acres in Iowa (17 of those acres were reported to be new in 2018).

While last year the majority of respondents who answered this question indicated that they were unfamiliar with prairie strips (84%), this year only 23% said they were unfamiliar. Sixty-five percent said that they were considering prairie strips, a considerable jump from 13% who were considering it in 2017.

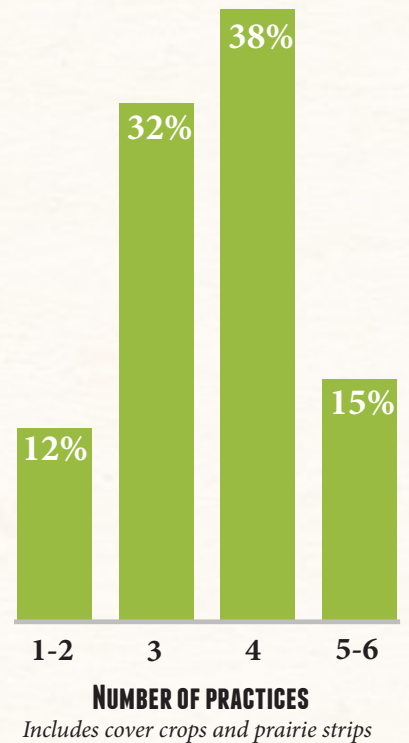
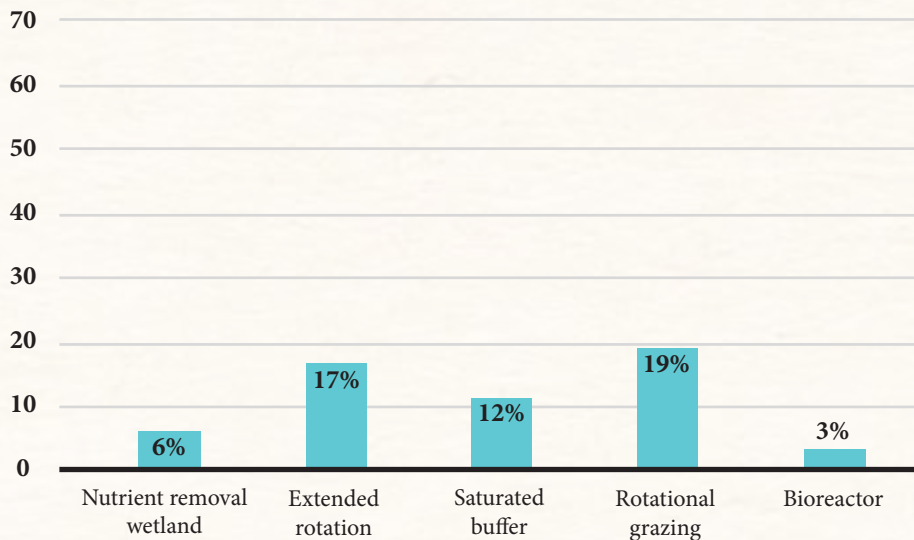
Thoughts on prairie strips



# Edge of Field Practices

Edge of Field practices became more of a focal point in 2018 with ILF hosting more field days related to wetlands, saturated buffers and bioreactors. Clearly looking at the list below we are not “preaching to the choir” in terms of edge of field practices. The majority of the folks attending an ILF edge of field field day do not currently have an edge of field practice.

What additional practice(s) are you currently using? (n=136)

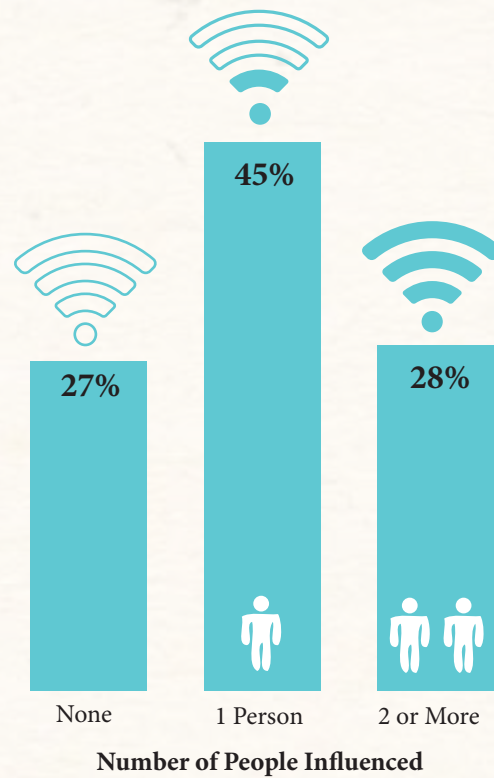


## Networking

Networking by field day attendees remains an important outreach method for Iowa Learning Farms as we host farmer outreach events and provide valuable information to farmers, landowners, agricultural professionals and others. In 2018, networking by field day attendees continued, with 73% of respondents reporting that they networked with others about conservation ideas.

Of those attendees who networked, 55% reported that they were successful, influencing at least one other person. Given this, these farmers are extending ILF's influence to 55% more farmers than attended ILF events in 2018. **That's a \$1.55 value for every dollar invested in ILF.**

### How Successful Were You in Networking? n=90



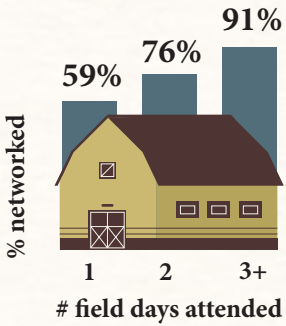
# Field Day Success Loop

**22%** 

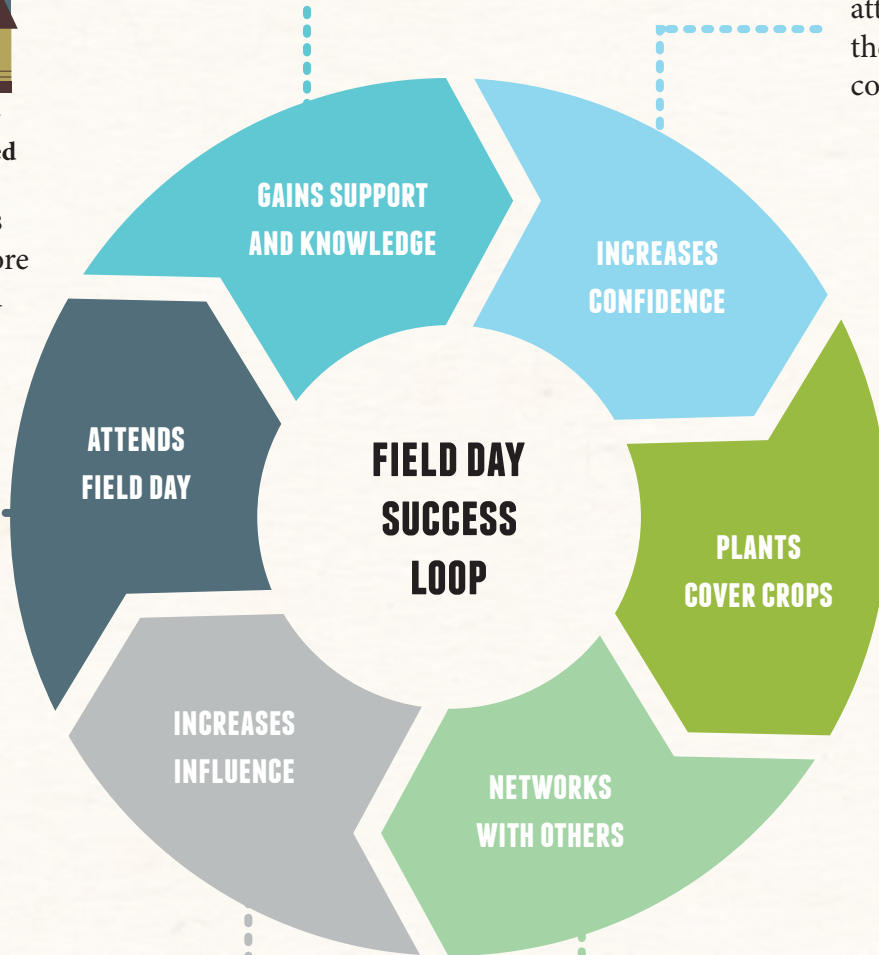
of farmers reported knowledge as a barrier to implementing additional conservation practices.



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



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



**20%**  
of cover crops were new acres.

FARMERS ARE EXTENDING ILF'S INFLUENCE TO

**55%**

MORE FARMERS THAN ATTENDED THE EVENT



*That's a \$1.55 return for every dollar spent on an ILF event. ILF makes sense!*



**73%**

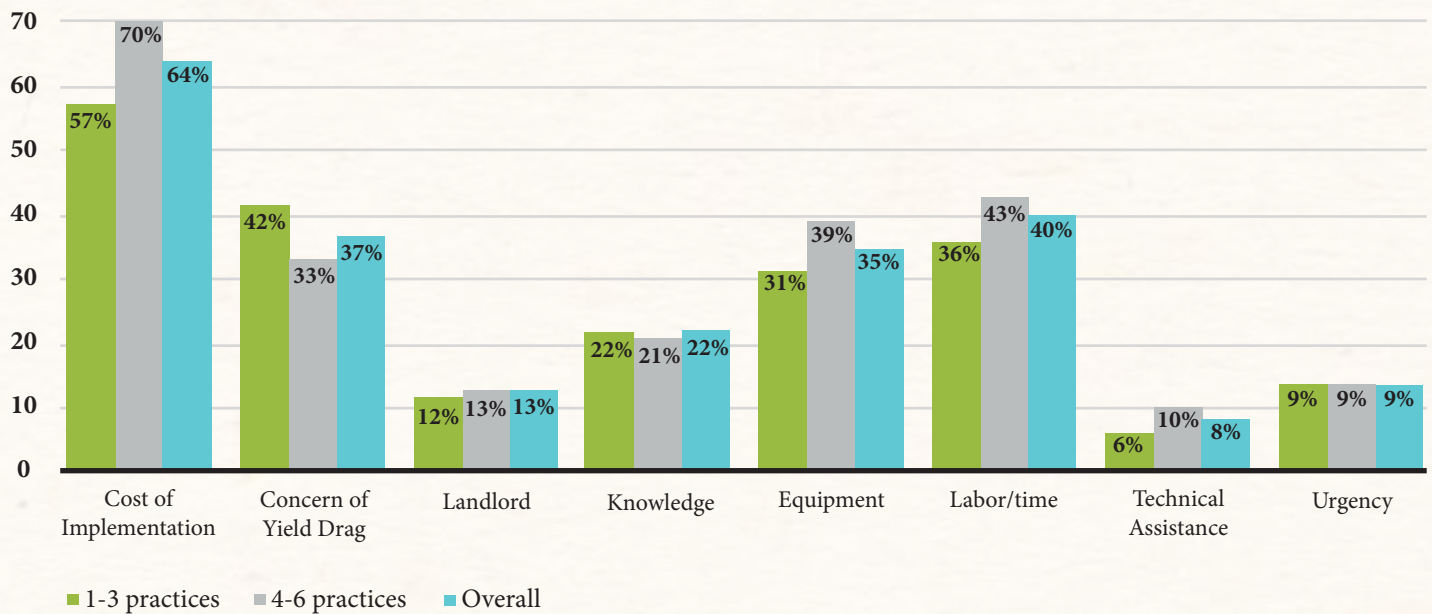
OF FARMERS AT ILF EVENTS NETWORKED



## Barriers

Respondents cited cost of implementation as the biggest barrier to applying conservation practices on their land for the fifth year in a row. The graph below breaks down barriers based on the number of conservation practices the farmer/landowner is currently using. This year we also asked if having no sense of urgency or a lack of technical assistance were barriers to implementing additional practices.

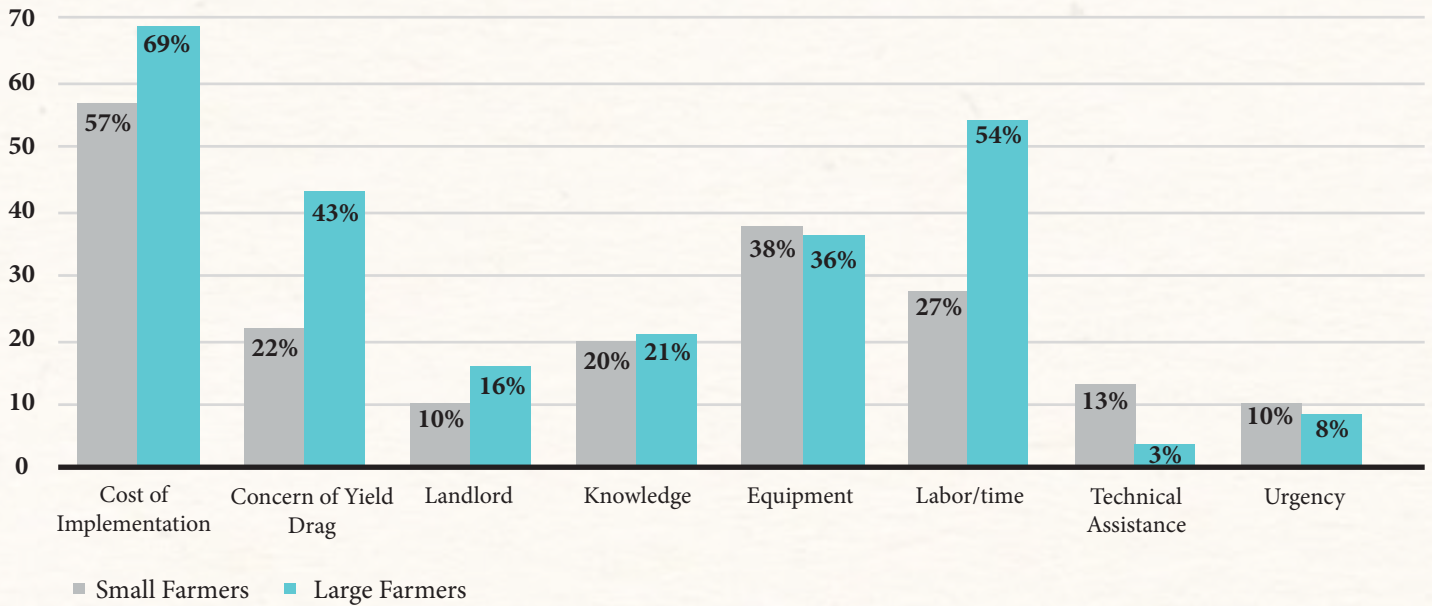
What are the biggest barriers to implementing additional conservation practices? (Could list more than one) n=136



If we compare respondents' opinions based on two broad categories – total acres farmed and number of years with cover crops – additional themes emerge. Farmers who reported farming a larger number of acres were more concerned about cost (69% vs. 57%), yield impact (43% vs. 22%), landlord (16% vs. 10%) and labor/time (54% vs. 27%) as barriers to implementing conservation practices than farmers who reported farming a smaller number of acres.

Farmers who have been using cover crops for more years were more concerned about their landlord (21% vs. 13%) and labor/time (52% vs. 33%) being barriers to implementing conservation practices than farmers who have been using cover crops for fewer years. Farmers who have been using cover crops for fewer years were more concerned with yield impact (54% vs. 27%), knowledge (23% vs. 10%) and equipment (44% vs. 31%) as barriers compared to farmers who have been using cover crops for more years.

**Small vs. Large Farmers (using median # of acres farmed: 600):**



**Fewer Years of Cover Crops vs. More Years of Cover Crops (using median # of years using cover crops: 5):**

