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March 11, 2016

Michael E. Marshall
Secretary of the Senate
State Capitol Building
Des Moines IA 50319

Carmine Boal
Chief Clerk of the House
State Capitol Building
Des Moines IA 50319

Re: Collection of In-Field Agricultural Practices

Dear Members of the General Assembly:

As required by the 2015 Iowa Acts, Chapter 132 (SF 494), attached is the interim report on a Collection of In-Field Agricultural Practices – Three Year Pilot Project from Iowa State University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

If you have any questions or need more information, please don't hesitate to contact this office.

Sincerely,

Robert Donley

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Attachment
cc: Legislative Liaisons
Legislative Log

Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy: Measurement Pilot Project
2016 Annual Progress Report, March 11, 2016
Prepared by College of Agriculture and Life Sciences – Iowa State University

Introduction

The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS) is a science and technology-based framework to assess and reduce nutrients to Iowa waters and the Gulf of Mexico. It is designed to direct efforts to reduce nutrients in surface water from both point and nonpoint sources in a scientific, reasonable and cost-effective manner.

Crucial to the success of the NRS is improved assessment of progress. Measurement of the progress in NRS implementation, as well as the barriers involved, will help inform management decisions in this multifaceted, highly collaborative approach to water quality improvement.

The 2015 Iowa Legislature approved funding to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University to support a three-year pilot project focused on data collection of in-field practices. In general, the objectives are to:

- Enhance the state's ability to track its progress in reducing the transport of nutrients to water from nonpoint sources within watersheds.
- Develop a database of in-field agricultural practices and analyze the impact of those practices in the aggregate.
- Enter into a public- private partnership with an entity or entities responsible for receiving, collecting or holding data in accordance with the legislation and protecting the confidentiality of the data.

Progress to date

A request for proposals to develop the database of in-field agricultural practices was issued in July 2015. Two proposals were submitted. The proposal from the Iowa Nutrient Research and Education Council (INREC) fulfilled the required qualifications and demonstrated the additional resources needed to complete the project. The INREC team met with College of Agriculture and Life Sciences administrators to further discuss the proposal. On September 1, 2015, Iowa State verbally notified INREC that its proposal was selected for funding. INREC proceeded with the first year of the pilot project in the fall of 2015. Contracts between ISU and INREC were developed and nearing completion.

The first year of the pilot project is on track, with the following steps taken or underway:

- Secure web server and a data security consultant are in place.
- Work is continuing with ISU statisticians to develop a sampling technique and survey instrument.
- Completed design and development of online data collection system.

- Development of data collection questions completed, with input from ISU Nutrient Science Team.
- A beta test survey with a small set of crop input providers and farmers is underway and will be completed this spring. The process will be adjusted as needed with what is learned from the beta survey.

In December 2015, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences hired a full-time measurement coordinator to work with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources on collecting and reporting publically available data indicators as part of a system to assess progress toward the NRS goals. A part-time communications specialist to assist in report development was also hired in December 2015.

Communicating NRS Measurement

Effective communication of NRS measurement is necessary for continued outreach, accountability and transparency surrounding water quality improvement efforts in Iowa.

Results from the measurement pilot project will be reported and discussed in the NRS Annual Progress Report, submitted each year by July 1. Throughout the reporting period, significant findings will be reported on a continual basis on the NRS website, <http://www.nutrientstrategy.iastate.edu/>.

Additionally, other means of digital communication are currently under consideration to make information concerning NRS progress, results and management strategies more accessible to the public. Developments of these methods will be a priority in 2016, and will be facilitated by the part-time communications specialist funded by the pilot project.

Goals for 2016

The pilot project's four primary goals will guide NRS measurement efforts in 2016:

- To develop standardized measurement protocols that can be replicated and adapted as NRS implementation moves forward.
- To evaluate opportunities for improved database management.
- To address gaps in data access and availability.
- To improve the effectiveness of communications strategies for making NRS-related information more accessible to the public.