



Policy Perspective on Conservation

Farmers in ICGA Survey Want Links Between Conservation and USDA Farm Program Payments

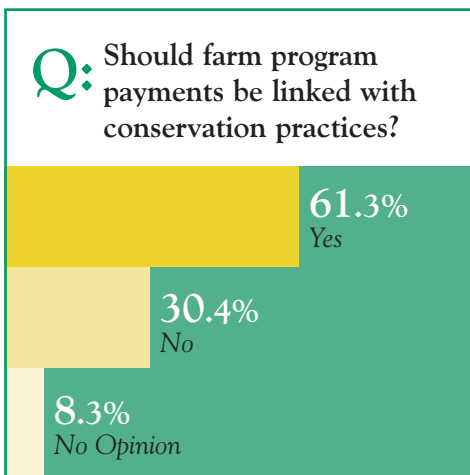
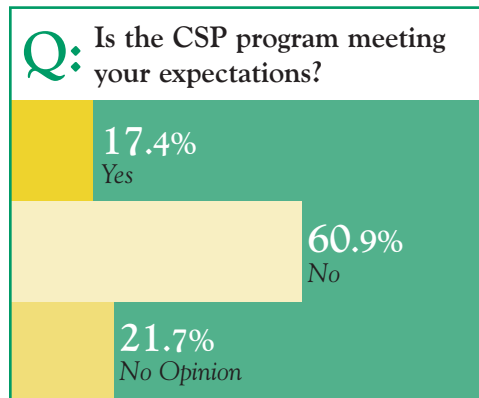
More than 61% of farmers responding to an Illinois Corn Growers Association survey believed that government payments should be tied to conservation practices, and when added to those respondents without a strong opinion, 70% endorsed cross compliance with conservation regulations.

Over 61% believed that government payments should be tied to conservation practices.

Conservation issues, while of great importance to the respondents, created an opportunity for diversity of opinion, according to the harvest time survey of Illinois farmers.

Conservation Security Program Needs Uniformity

Uniformity of regulations from watershed to watershed and from state to state is being sought by the Illinois Corn Growers Association to resolve implementation discrepancies in the Conservation Security Program (CSP).



Members and leaders of the Illinois Corn Growers Association also believe improvements can be made in USDA conservation programs and want to help make needed changes.

The CSP in the 2002 Farm Bill has been less than popular, in part over rules that restrict staff assistance in Illinois, but offer unlimited staff assistance in other states. Other complaints focused on the NRCS computer programs that evaluated farm applications without on-site verification.

While 61% of Illinois farmers said it had not lived up to their expectations, another 22% had no opinion. It drew only 17% support. Those responses came in an autumn survey of more than 200 Illinois farmers.

As evidenced by the Illinois leadership in conservation tillage and no-till acreage, Illinois farmers would support the philosophy of the CSP program. However, after 4 years of implementation, less than 20% of the farmers applying for the program have been accepted and enrolled.

See Conservation Security, p 2

Big, Small, All Offer Conservation Ideas

Survey respondents, whose opinions about U.S. soil and water conservation policy are reflected in other articles in this fact sheet, represented a diverse group of members of the Illinois Corn Growers Association, as well as some non-members attracted to the public listening sessions for the opportunity to voice their opinions. While 60% of the survey respondents maintained interest in a grain-only farm, about 30% of the respondents had both grain and livestock, and 10% indicated "other," such as those in agricultural service vocations, but not otherwise engaged in farming or farm ownership.

Regarding acreage of corn produced on their farming operations, 31% raised between 501 and 1,000 acres, while 24% raised over 1,000 acres, and 36% grew 500 or fewer acres of corn. Thirty-one percent of the respondents were between 51 and 60 years of age, 28% were over 61, and 24% were 41 to 50 years old. Seventeen percent were 40 or under. Statistically, over two-thirds of the survey respondents would be expected to be involved in agriculture at the expiration of the 2007 Farm Bill.

Off-farm income was reported by 72% of the respondents, indicating a need to either supplement their income, manage their family's financial risk, or have sufficient funds for health insurance.

While 31% reported that personally owned acreage made up the largest portion of their farm, 25% reported cash rented acres made up their largest

See Big, Small, p 2

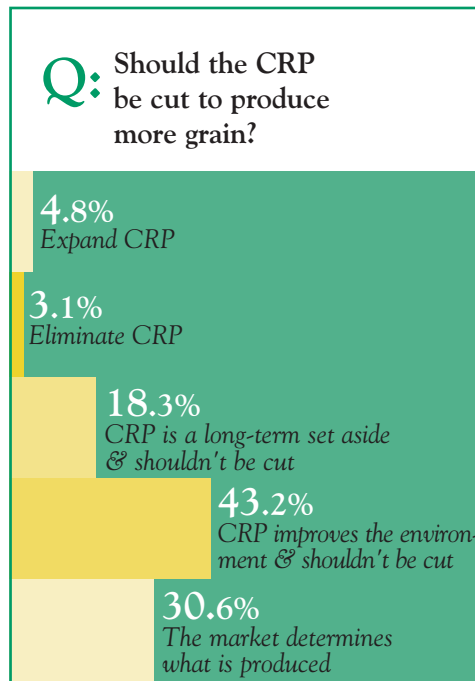
Survey Respondents Want Conservation Retained

Does the demand for more land to produce more corn destined for ethanol refineries outweigh the need for soil and water conservation? Not at all say two out of three farmers who responded to a survey of the Illinois Corn Growers Association about the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

When asked if the CRP should be reduced for more grain production, over 66% of the respondents want it retained as either an environmental or set-aside program, or even expanded. The 30% of respondents who wanted the market to determine what is produced may have indicated their intentions if the USDA offers an early-out for CRP landowners who want to convert CRP acres to crop production.

Conservation programs are also seen as a benefit to society. Seventeen percent of the respondents said conservation policies provided taxpayers with the “biggest bang for their buck,” which trailed only agriculture research and rural development in a list of six farm program elements. But that 17% taxpayer benefit more than doubled

what they thought about conservation’s contributions to the short and long term benefits for their farm.



Conservation Security Program Needs Uniformity (from p 1)

Illinois Corn Growers Association leaders have expressed concern at the indication NRCS may be giving sign-up priority to the biggest farms. This could exclude

participants who may be doing an exemplary job with conservation practices on their farm. Said one member, “My conservation plan should be the end result!”

The Illinois Corn Growers Association leaders say the CSP program should credit farmers with their long time conservation practices, but that is not being done.

The CSP computer program is supposed to predict residue cover but it is far from accurate, and there is no “ground-truthing.” “Instead of a reward program for good conservationists, CSP has become an environmental documentation nightmare for producers, with few qualifying,” they say.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is praised by farmers for solving erosion and benefiting wildlife.



Big, Small, All Offer Conservation Ideas (from p 1)

share, and 22% reported crop share as the largest percentage of their acres. The balance of the acreage fell into cash rent or crop share categories identified by landowners who did not farm.

The Illinois Corn Growers Association solicited the advice and counsel of its members through a series of ten Listening Sessions from late October to mid-November, as well as web-based and postal surveys. Input from 236 respondents was gathered on a variety of questions focused on farm policy, international trade, and farm operational management, as well as on conservation questions reported here.

NCGA's NFSA

Complete details about the National Farm Security Act can be found on the Internet at: www.ncga.com/news/notd/pdfs/10_23_06NFSA.pdf.

White Paper Offered

To obtain a copy of the White Paper which details all of the survey responses from the ten Listening Sessions, contact the Illinois Corn Growers Association at 309-557-3257, or send your e-mail request to: mlambert@ilcorn.org. The document is also available at: www.ilcorn.org.

