

Where Do We Go From Here?
Written By: Dennis Frame, Co-Director, Discovery Farms

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In April we had our annual meeting with our steering committee. We started the meeting with a brief introduction, an overview of what the Discovery Farms Program has accomplished and our vision for the future. I also brought up the question "What happens when Fred and Dennis decide to retire? Where does the program go?" The purpose of this question was to get our committee to think about this program and decide if it's important enough to continue after we leave the program (whenever that happens). This question provides the basis for the development of our next five year plan of work.

Some of the issues the committee discussed include:

- We need to understand that unique farms are a key to our success and our focus must remain on working with real farms.
- It is necessary to be open and honest in order to maintain the trust producers have with our program. That's one advantage of working with USGS, because the data coming from them is unbiased and will be used correctly.
- Work with farmers to identify and implement best management practices.
- We need to work with producers to study when manure cannot be spread on the land.

Fields should be defined as to which are the most desirable to spread manure on when the conditions for spreading are not ideal. Since each farm and area of the state is unique, it is necessary for the public to see the whole story. It is important to understand manure regulations and what effect they have on the environment. Soil moisture monitoring and frozen ground are key study pieces.

- How can we get producers to change their farming style if necessary?
- How do we target the problem acres without dictating how farms will operate?
- How do we separate an accidental runoff event and a chronic offender?
- How do we develop an education and outreach program that works with producers to minimize their risk of environmental losses?

Neighbors watch what other neighbors are doing. If they see things working on other farms, they might be willing to change. Once we decide which systems work the best, then we can try to work with producers who are causing problems with their farming practices. There are lots of different ways to farm. Education is a key component.

After a day of brainstorming and talking, the steering committee boiled down the discussion and gave us seven points to focus on for the next five years:

1. Continue our current monitoring and baseline data collection,
2. Continue and expand our tile studies,
3. Write and publish papers and develop an information and education program,

4. Develop a targeted watershed approach that identifies critical sites, critical time periods and a variety of practices to mitigate negative environmental impacts based on field conditions,
5. Work with state agencies to develop a risk management assessment tool,
6. Participate and provide information to the Standard Oversight Council,
7. Continue to work on odor and air quality issues.

We are developing our plans now. If you want a copy, please contact Judy at 715-983-5668 or jgoplin@wisc.edu.