Non-operating landowners and conservation
...what we know and what we are learning

LEADERSHIP FOR MIDWESTERN WATERSHEDS, 11/7/2019
JENNIFER FILIPIAK, MIDWEST REGIONAL DIRECTOR
Agenda

Setting the context -
  what we know about NOLs
Engaging landowners –
  the learning circle model and its effectiveness
Engaging landowners –
  integrating NOLs and NOLs issues into programming
New data –
  what we’re learning from a survey of NOLs
Non-Operator Landowners

Those who own agricultural land, but do not operate it themselves.

- Resident or Absentee
- Motivations for Owning Vary—Investors, Recreational Interests, Family Interests, Former farmers
From USDA Ag Census 2012

60% of IL farmland is rented

63-71% rented

53% of IA farmland is rented

66-82% rented

Thanks to the Delta Institute (Illinois) and Iowa State University (Iowa)
Who owns the rented lands?

Ag Census only surveys FARMERS, it can only tell us if land *is* rented. It cannot tell us rented *by whom*...
2014 TOTAL Survey: Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land

Figure 9
Non-operators own 31 percent of the land on farms in the 48 contiguous States.1

- 557 million acres (61%)
- 70 million acres (8%)
- 53 million acres (6%)
- 32 million acres (3%)
- 138 million acres (15%)
- 51 million acres (6%)
- 10 million acres (1%)

Rented out by:
- Individuals
- Partnerships
- Corporations
- Trusts
- Other ownership arrangements

1Numbers in the tables and figures contained in this report may not sum due to rounding.

Note: Representative of the 48 contiguous States. In all figures based on the 2014 Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) survey data, a coefficient of variation (CV) between 25 and 50 is denoted with a * and a CV greater than 50 is denoted by a #.

What we know from TOTAL

39% of 911 million acres (368,668,620 hectares) of farmland in the US is rented. **Women** make up 37% of agricultural landlords. **For** those farmers who rent land, most rent from multiple landlords. **57%** of rented acres are renewed annually.
Qualitative data


• Women are particularly interested in conservation
• Deeply committed to healthy farm land, healthy farm families and healthy farm communities
• Underrepresented in farmland conservation programs
Women Caring for the Land℠

Developed in 2009, in Iowa, by WFAN

Why aren’t they enrolling in programs, visiting the office?

Based on science: gender-based learning, age-based learning

http://www.wfan.org/resources/wfans-publications/
Conservation Learning Circles

- Peer-to-peer learning, acknowledges women as the experts & decision makers on their own land.
- Conservation staff (women) participate in discussion – no hierarchy, no lectures
- Meetings without men for first part of the day
- 9am – 3pm: morning discussion + farm visits to see practices on the ground and discuss with farmer and staff
Excluding men?

I feel like there is some kind of secret society I don’t belong to with an alphabet soup of acronyms.

I had to become the bitch of the neighborhood for a while to get my tenant to fix some problems I saw in the fields.

My dad taught me that if you take care of the land it will take care of you.

I realized today that I am not alone.

I have to remind my advisors that I am the landowner, not my husband.

How do I tell my farmer that I’m concerned that my soil isn’t alive anymore?

My husband died last month and I don’t know where to start…
My impressions…

• Hungry for knowledge, not sure how to get it.
• Interested in detail/technical
• Farmer is the expert – family, community harmony is important
• Want to talk with farmer more, but don’t want to burden
• “All the chemicals…”
• Leasing – you can change it!
• Succession planning, love the land
• Surprised there are so many “women like them”, competition?
• What is “N-C-R-S”?
Saving the land that sustains us by...

Protecting farmland

Promoting sound farming practices

Keeping farmers on the land
Women for the Land

Our initiative supports female landowners in accessing resources and building strong networks around conservation.

- Engagement
- Research
- Scale through policy and allies
Hungry for knowledge, tend to act when they get it…
(research on effectiveness of WNOL outreach)

Results:
- 72% took action
- 23% implemented a conservation practice

Barriers to success:
- Gender barriers
- Lack of knowledge
Renting it Out Right

Why and how to start making changes on the land you rent out.
Why are you here?

• Approximately 50% of land farmed is rented land
• Non-operating landowners are not being addressed as a demographic with influence
• There are lots of actions you can do and conversations you can have to make changes on the landscape
• Agricultural land use, especially when focused on soil building and soil health, plays a major role in addressing many big concerns facing us today

Robin Moore, Land Stewardship Project
What can you do?

• Self Educate – Get information
  • Visit your land, look at your soil, look at what’s around the land, visit your local SWCD
  • Keep learning about soil health, local practices, innovative farmers

• Clearly identify your needs and goals for the land – write it down!
  • Financial needs/financial flexibility
  • Long-term goals for the land, as specific as possible

• Talk with your renter
  • Ask your renter about their needs and goals for their operation, your land
  • Share your goals with the renter
  • Discuss how changes could be possible in current system
  • Invite renter to go to field days and workshops

• Make soil building a part of your lease, get change on the land!
Self Educate...

• Visit your land, look at your soil, look at what’s around the land
• Keep learning about soil health, local practices, innovative farmers
• Conservation Lease toolkit: https://landstewardshipproject.org/conservationleasesourcesignup
  • Basic descriptions of farming terms and practices in the upper Midwest
  • Acronyms
  • Example leases, agency resources, contact information
Know your needs and goals...

- Clearly identify your needs and goals for the land – write it down!
  - Financial needs/financial flexibility
    - U of M Cash Rent Worksheet
  - Long-term goals for the land, as specific as possible
    - LSP goal setting worksheet
Talk with your renter, build relationships...

- Talk with your renter
  - Prepare to talk with renter
    - LSP toolkit resources
    - Practice
    - Have written goals and important points
    - Ask questions
  - Meet in person if possible
  - Involve all decision makers if possible
  - Ask your renter about their needs and goals for their operation, your land
  - Share your goals with the renter
  - Discuss what changes could be possible in current management system
  - Identify resources/assistance available for changes
  - Invite renter to go to field days and workshops

Robin Moore, Land Stewardship Project
Create a conservation lease...

- Look at lease examples

- Incorporate your goals, and your farmer’s, into the lease

- Look at a longer-term lease

- Consider creative means to incentivize soil building
  - Rent reductions with practices
  - Crop share lease
  - Cost share on improvements and infrastructure

Robin Moore, Land Stewardship Project
Creating access to terms, science, & practices

LSP’s Conservation Lease Toolkit:

- Farming Primer – describes terms, practices and general structures of farming in our region

- Acronym list – helps navigate publications

- LSP’s Pocket Guide to Soil Health – describes basic concepts and science of soil health and some basic practices around it

- Examples of conservation leases

Robin Moore, Land Stewardship Project
Creating access to events

- Consider accessibility to events, ramps and restrooms
- Combined events and promotion: Farm Beginnings, Land Access, field days
- Add-on programming
- Language in promotion – addressing landowners and farmers
- Language and assumptions during presentations
- Kitchen Table – home events to meet people’s needs

Robin Moore, Land Stewardship Project
Normalize engagement

- Repeatedly address NOLO’s
- Lift up stories
- Lift up relationships in field days
- Include in publications
- Recognize their agency

Robin Moore, Land Stewardship Project
The Data:

USDA Census of Agriculture:
- every five years, surveys FARMERS

USDA Tenure, Ownership, & Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) Survey:
- a “comprehensive study of all land, including non-operator landlords of agricultural land”.
- part of the Census of Agriculture program.
- Completed once, in 2014.

AFT Non-operator landowner survey:
- in progress, 11 states, Illinois is complete.
Agricultural Landowner Survey

www.farmland.org/nolssurvey

11-state* survey of NOLs focusing on:

- The NOL-renter relationship
- Communication in the relationship
- Conservation attitudes and behaviors
- Conservation outreach needs

*States were chosen to reflect highest rental rates and regional diversity: Washington, California, Kansas, Arkansas, Texas, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, North Carolina, New York.
Methods (www.farmland.org/nolssurvey)

Principal investigator is Dr. Peg Petrzelka, Utah State University.

Mail survey completed by Iowa State University Survey Lab.

Lists purchased from Farm Market ID. Owners only. Double-checked using Core Logic & deed searches.

1500 surveys mailed, goal is 300 returned
- 750 males, 750 females
- 25+ acres
- Acre range of high to low
- Land distributed throughout the state
- Land is in the state, landowner could live anywhere (samples resident and non-resident)
- Trusts eliminated
## The landowners

### Experience with farming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I/we have operated a farm</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/we have helped our parents or another relative farm</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/we have worked on a non-relative’s farm</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither I nor my spouse (if any) have farmed</td>
<td><strong>27%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Residency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I live on my land</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not live on my land (avg distance = 99 miles)</td>
<td><strong>72%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How often do you visit your land?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly, monthly, multiple times per year</td>
<td><strong>75%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yearly or less</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Who is the primary decision maker for land management?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am</td>
<td><strong>47%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The farm operator I/we rent to</td>
<td><strong>28%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children, siblings, spouse, parent, other relatives</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family corporation/partnership</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Management Company</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The land

- Average acres owned = 208
- Range of acres owned = 5-3500

Who will be the next owner of this land?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A relative who will farm it</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A relative who will rent it out</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed into trust</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whoever offers best price (related or not)</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone unrelated</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/other</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The relationship and the lease

- Crop share = 62%
- Cash rent (fixed or flexible) = 33%
- Verbal = 64%
- Annual = 71%
- Two or three years = 10%
- Length of time with same tenant = 17 years average (range: 1-60 yrs)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to maintain soil productivity</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That they care about my land</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That they are financially responsible</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation as a good farmer</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to avoid soil erosion</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to avoid contaminating waterways</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability in paying rent on time</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good communicator</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That I like them as a person</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That they care about me</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of time renting from my family</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of rent they will pay per acre</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to maintain wildlife habitat</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trust in Farmer

- 92% of respondents “trust my operator to make good conservation decisions”
- 88% of respondents are “committed to my operator’s continuation as a renter on my land”
# Land management and conservation information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is primarily responsible for these types of decisions?</th>
<th>Operator</th>
<th>Operator &amp; Me</th>
<th>Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crop inputs (fertilizer, seed, chemical)</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tillage practices</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop varieties/rotations</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation practices used or not used</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How important are the following sources* of information about conservation on your land? | Important or very important |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My farm operator/lessee</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local SWCD</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/neighbors who live near the land</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land trusts</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Also asked about: spouse, children, friends/neighbors who farm, farm manager, ag retailers, NRCS, Extension, IDOA, IDNR, Farm Bureau, conservation or sustainable ag groups.
## Changing the lease?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Agree or strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable <strong>extending the length of my operators lease</strong> to facilitate implementation of conservation practices on my land</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable asking my operator to amend or make an addendum to our lease <strong>requiring conservation practices</strong></td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be willing to include a lease provision that requires my operator to implement <strong>soil erosion control practices</strong> to conserve or improve soil health</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be willing to include lease provisions relating to <strong>specific conservation practices</strong> (e.g. grassed water ways, no-till, adaptive nutrient management, cover crops, filter strips and wildlife habitat)</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be willing to include a lease provision that requires my operator to prepare and comply with a <strong>USDA conservation plan</strong></td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions –

• Landowners trust their tenants

• A longer lease is risk mitigation

• Landowners are willing to change lease terms to accommodate conservation

• Anecdotal evidence that landowner would contribute to the cost of practices
American Farmlands Trust
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

Robin Moore
Renting it Out Right
320-269-2105
rmoore@landstewardshipproject.org

Gabrielle Roesch-McNally
Women for the Land
360-631-8489
groeschmcnally@farmland.org