

EMPOWERING FARMERS IN THE MIDDLE CEDAR RIVER



Project Facts

TIMELINE



Status: **COMPLETE**

COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS

Cargill
The Nature Conservancy

FUNDED PARTNERS

Iowa Department of Agriculture
and Land Stewardship
Iowa Agricultural Water Alliance
Black Hawk Soil and
Water Conservation District
Miller Creek Water
Quality Improvement Project
4R Plus

OTHER PARTNERS

Practical Farmers of Iowa

PROJECT SUMMARY

SYSTEMS CHANGE PATHWAY(S)

- + De-risking practice adoption
- + Engaging Agricultural Retailers

GOALS

- + Establish on the ground presence to test strategies
- + Increase farmers' awareness and knowledge of soil health, conservation, and nutrient stewardship practices
- + Help local watershed groups reduce shortfall in financial assistance for conservation practices that address growing demand for additional cost share

APPROACH

Tie together 4R Plus with local initiative, Miller Creek Challenge, to provide financial support to integrate new conservation practices in the Middle Cedar River Watershed.

ACTIVITIES

- + Lead and motivate local partners to coordinate action at the watershed and state level
- + Develop relationships with growers
- + Develop conservation programs and incentives
- + Outreach to grower groups & local agencies
- + Funding support for Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Water Quality Initiative in two sub-watersheds of Middle Cedar River Watershed
- + Technical and financial assistance to watershed coordinator
- + Provide cost-share funding to farmers to implement practices

KEY OUTCOMES

- + Provided watershed coordinator capability to deliver technical and financial assistance to watershed
- + Additional 17 farmers signed up for Water Quality Initiative cost share program, with more than 3,700 acres of cover crops and 1,500 acres of no-till/strip till
- + Strengthened relationships with Miller Creek Advisory Council, which is now looking to start its own cover crop business
- + Hosted Cover Crop Summit, bringing in local experts throughout the cover crop supply chain, including seed sales professionals, cooperatives, watershed partners, National Resource Conservation Service, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and farmers
- + Developed white paper to capture most relevant solutions that can reduce barriers and provide incentives for cover crop expansion
- + Campaign materials reached 85-90% of farmers in Middle Cedar & across IA
- + 130 Certified Crop Advisors took 600 4R Plus Continuing Education Unit courses earning 300 CEU credits
- + Estimated 50 farmers/advisors directly reached and indirectly another 3,300 farmers in the watershed

Project Insights

- + There is interest in pursuing cover crops as an economic growth opportunity for local enterprising farmers. The economic development aspect might provide non-traditional partners with opportunities to develop cover crop production in IA.
- + Certain financial, legal, and technical barriers will need to be addressed. Some of these are low hanging fruit that could quickly be addressed. Others, like a strengthened secondary market for small grains, are more complicated, requiring collaboration of a variety of partners throughout the supply chain.

ABOUT THE MIDWEST ROW CROP COLLABORATIVE

The Midwest Row Crop Collaborative is an innovative partnership aligned to drive positive environmental change in the upper Mississippi River Basin. It is comprised of leading businesses and nonprofits that span the full food and agriculture value chain, working together to catalyze and implement joint, systemic projects and initiatives that accelerate sustainable agricultural solutions.

ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE

Environmental Initiative is a nonprofit organization that works with business, nonprofit and government leaders to develop collaborative solutions to environmental problems. In 2019, Environmental Initiative became the administrator of the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative.