

## “Promoting Conservation Practices with Iowa Crop Growers”

\$5,000 Mini-Grant awarded by  
the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Institute of North America, Inc.  
to Iowa State University for the period January 1 – May 1, 2009

Iowa State University (ISU), represented by Dr. Jerry DeWitt and personnel affiliated with the Iowa Learning Farm (ILF) project, have worked with Iowa NRCS Technical Staff, ISU Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension IPM Specialists, ISU campus faculty, and Iowa corn and soybean growers to increase awareness and understanding of the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) pest management practices and incentives.

On January 6, 2009, three members of the Iowa NRCS technical staff (John Myers, Barb Stewart, and Don Carrington) met with seven campus-based ISU Extension IPM Specialists (Paul Brown, Betsy Buffington, Matt O’Neal, Rich Pope, Kristine Schaefer, Greg Tylka, and X.B. Yang) and three ILF personnel (Jerry DeWitt, Erin Harpenau, and John Lundvall) for an introductory meeting. NRCS staff explained how EQIP funding is currently administered in Iowa, and stressed that many farmers are not aware of the availability of IPM cost-share funds within EQIP; in fact, soil erosion and livestock issues typically dominate priorities for EQIP funding in many Iowa counties. ISU Extension specialists were encouraged to become more active on local (county-level) working groups that prioritize how local EQIP funds should be spent. NRCS staff outlined current EQIP cost-share fund limits and tips on writing good IPM plans. NRCS and ISU staff identified four IPM strategies Iowa crop growers might be encouraged to adopt, using EQIP IPM funds: 1) buffer improvement for beneficial insect habitat; 2) increased crop scouting; 3) release of beneficial insects; and 4) use of cover crops to disrupt pest reproductive cycles.

On February 4, 2009, ILF hosted a winter workshop including a small group of Iowa farmers currently hosting corn and soybean tillage, nutrient application, cover crop, and residue removal demonstrations on their respective farms. Twelve ILF Cooperators (corn and soybean growers) completed a six-question survey gauging their level of engagement with, and knowledge of, the NRCS EQIP cost-share program. To increase the pool of survey respondents, ISU Extension Area Field Agronomists were each asked to share the survey with 10 additional opinion leader farmers in their respective areas; a total of 120 farmers were emailed the same survey, with only 12 responses received (10% response rate). Of 24 total survey respondents, 54 percent participate, or have participated, in the EQIP program; 46 percent of respondents could identify members of their county EQIP working group tasked with allocating EQIP funds; 46 percent of respondents were aware that IPM strategies could be funded with EQIP funds; only 33 percent of respondents felt that current EQIP cost-share limits offered sufficient incentive for them to participate in the program. Respondents were asked to choose from a list of four IPM practices they would be willing to adopt to receive EQIP IPM cost-share funds; responses included the following: buffer improvement for beneficial insects (42%); release of beneficial insects (67%); enhanced scouting to limit

unnecessary insecticide applications (88%); use of cover crops to break insect pest reproductive cycles (38%). Respondents cited excessive paperwork, minimal per-acre incentive payments, and “too-low” acreage enrollment limits as reasons why they, or their neighbors, do not currently take advantage of EQIP IPM cost-share funding.

On May 21, 2009, four members of the Iowa NRCS technical staff (Dave Brommel, John Myers, Barb Stewart, and Don Carrington) met with seven campus-based ISU Extension IPM Specialists (Paul Brown, Betsy Buffington, Bob Hartzler, Darren Mueller, Rich Pope, Kristine Schaefer, and Nick Schmidt) and two ILF personnel (Jerry DeWitt and John Lundvall) for a follow-up meeting. Discussion at the follow-up meeting centered on new “FY 2009 Iowa Pest Management Intensity Options for EQIP” handouts that were created in response to discussion at our initial January 2009 meeting with ISU Extension IPM specialists. Opportunities for enhanced joint educational activities among Iowa NRCS and ISU Extension, particularly for organic specialty crop (fruit and vegetable) growers in Iowa, were suggested.

In summary, enhanced communication among Iowa NRCS Technical Staff and ISU Extension IPM Specialists is seen as a positive outcome from this mini-grant funding. ILF will also continue to educate Iowa row crop growers about IPM cost-share funds available within the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program.