

“FarmLink” - Promoting Conservation Practices One-to-One

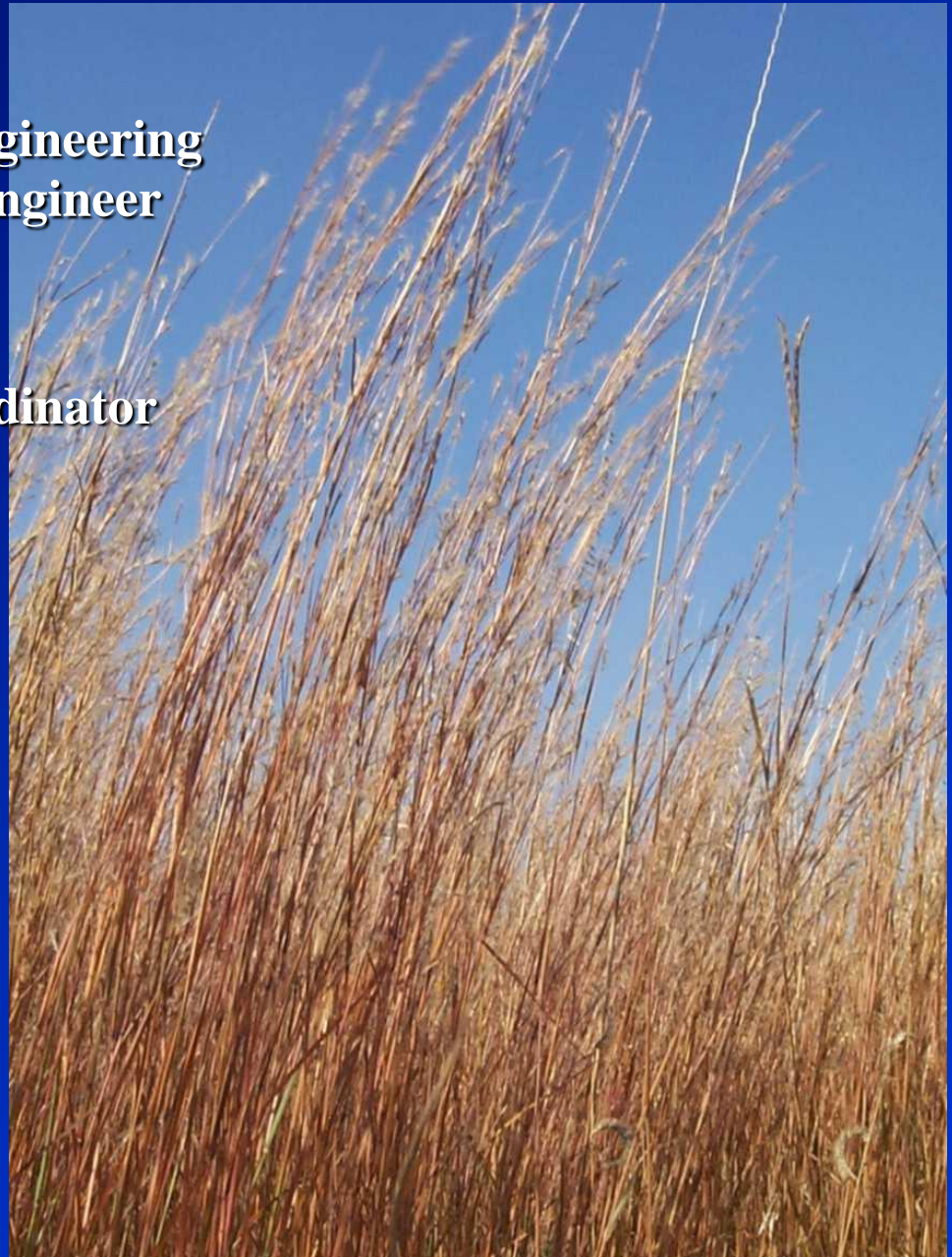


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Background

One-to-one educational programming is certainly not new or unique - it was one of the most-used Extension methods for many years. However, because of budget and time constraints, we have generally moved away from this technique.

In certain circumstances, though, one-to-one programming can be a very effective tool.

Accelerating Riparian Buffer Adoption to Enhance Water Quality and Farm Income

USDA-CSREES Extension Education
project funded in 2000

Overall Objective

- Foster the installation of conservation buffers to protect water quality



Three component approach

- Multi-faceted educational program
- Demonstration sites
- Peer-based outreach program

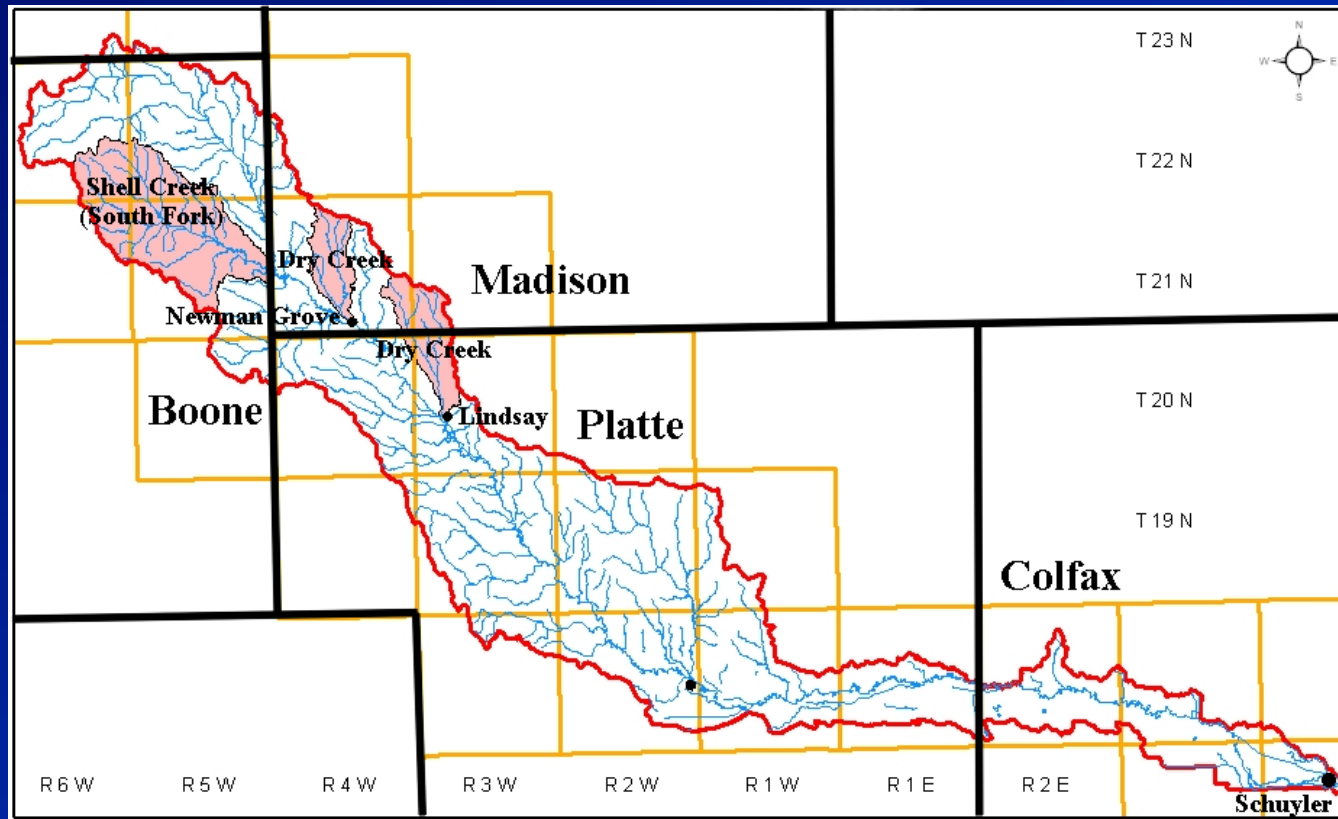


Peer-Based Outreach Program

- “FarmLink” - farmers or other rural leaders individually contact farmers and landowners to promote conservation practice adoption



Selected Target Area – Shell Creek Watershed



FarmLink Advisor Selection Criteria

- **Local farmer/landowner (possibly semi-retired)**
- **Land next to stream**
- **Well-kept farmstead**
- **Well-respected, recognized as a leader**
- **Strong conservation ethic**
- **Good communicator**
- **Motivated, positive attitude, out-going**
- **4 individuals selected**

FarmLink Advisor Training

- **Conducted by Extension, NRCS, NRD**
- **Buffer benefits and design basics**
- **Government program availability**
- **“Sales” techniques**

Farm Visit Process

- **Required to be “on-farm”, face-to-face**
- **Scheduled in advance via phone – not “cold”**
- **Generally 1.5 to 2.5 hours duration**
- **During “off-peak” periods – not during harvest or planting**

Farm Visit Content

- Discuss different conservation practices, benefits, other options, etc.
- Use aerial photo to show where practices might be utilized
- Discuss availability of government programs that can be used to help with costs of installation, maintenance, and land costs
- Sign intent form if interested/committed to practice installation
- Encourage follow-up visit to NRCS office to develop/sign practice installation contract



Advisor Payment

- **Made clear that Advisor was not University employee**
- **\$30 per on-farm visit**
- **\$0.30 per mile**
- **\$100 bonus if landowner signs practice installation contract with NRCS/FSA**

Project Coordinator Role/Responsibility

- **Locate and screen potential advisors**
- **Assist with training**
- **Provide on-going supervision and monitoring**
 - **Answer routine questions**
- **Process reimbursement claims**
- **Liaison with NRCS/FSA**
 - **Deliver signed intent forms**
 - **Follow-up on progress**
- **Contact landowners**
 - **Encourage to contact NRCS/FSA**
 - **Answer questions, etc.**

Shell Creek FarmLink Program

- **Some Accomplishments/Impacts**
 - **42 individuals contacted by advisors**
 - **28 signed intent form**
 - **16 contracts executed**
 - **61.3 ac. of conservation buffers**
 - **~20 ac. of grassed waterways**
 - **control runoff from ~225 ac.**
 - **~41 ac. of stream-side buffers**
 - **filter runoff from ~2000 ac.**
 - **protect 12,200 ft. of streambank**
 - **>\$73,800 payments over life of contracts**

Shell Creek FarmLink Program

- **Additional Accomplishments/Impacts**
 - **One advisor also installed 10.4 ac. of buffers**
 - **1.1 ac. grassed waterway**
 - **control runoff from >30 ac.**
 - **4.3 ac. streamside buffer**
 - **filter runoff from ~200 ac.**
 - **protect 5,282 ft. of streambank**
 - **5 ac. of cropland planted to grass**
 - **erosion reduced ~20 tons per year**
 - **wildlife habitat established**
 - **>\$10,000 payments over life of contract**

Some Problems Encountered

- **NRCS Field Office personnel often did not follow-up on indicated interest by landowners**
 - **Numerous other programs to administer**
 - **On-farm visits viewed as potentially discriminatory**
- **Some advisors did not perform**
 - **Too busy with their own operations**
 - **Not fully committed to conservation**
- **CCRP rental payments have not kept pace with current cash rents**
 - **No differential for irrigated land**

Some Reasons for Success

- **Individualized attention**
 - **Ability to tailor to individual person/situation**
 - **Discuss multiple practices and options**
 - **Many not aware of program availability**
- **Initial contact is with “neighbor”, not agency**
- **Personable, knowledgeable advisors**
 - **Well known and respected**
 - **Conservation advocates**
- **Promotes adoption vs. primarily awareness**
 - **Intent form implies commitment**
 - **Likely some feelings of guilt**

Summary

In some situations, one-to-one information delivery can be a very effective educational programming tool that can be adapted to a variety of situations.

“You have given me more information in this hour and a half than I could have ever gotten leaning across the counter at the USDA Service Center.”

- Shell Creek Landowner

Thank You

Questions?



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