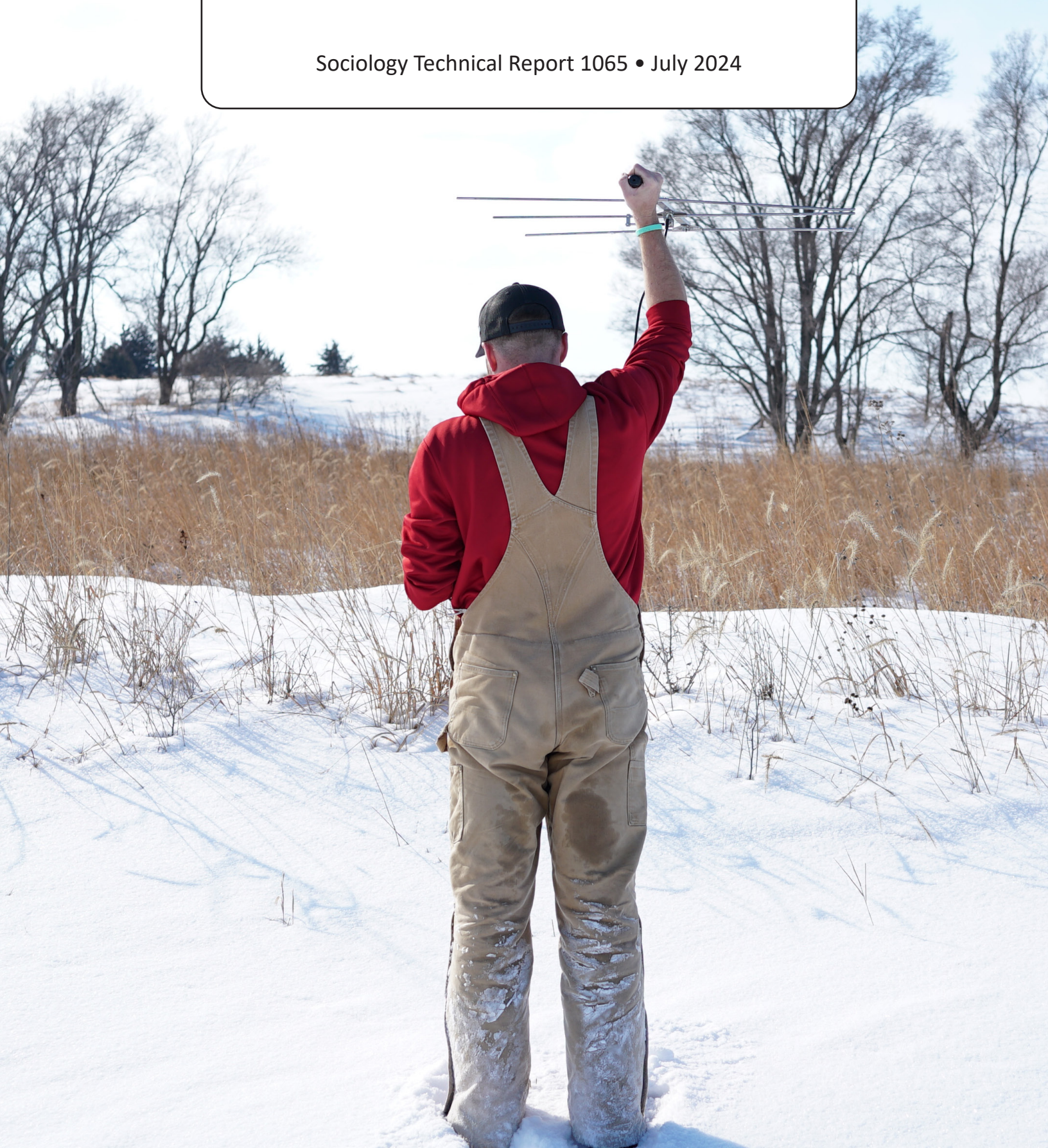


STRIPS Collaborator Survey: 2023 Results

Sociology Technical Report 1065 • July 2024





The research summarized in this report was conducted as part of the STRIPS project. STRIPS stands for Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips. Since 2007, the long-term project has been measuring the impacts of strategically planting prairie strips in crop fields across Iowa. Research has shown that small amounts of prairie can yield disproportionate, multi-functional benefits to soils, water quality, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity.

Find more information about the STRIPS project online at <http://www.prairiestrips.org>.

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Introduction

The STRIPS (Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips) project has developed collaborative partnerships with about 50 farmers, landowners, and organizations that have integrated prairie strips into their farm landscapes. One of the STRIPS project's guiding principles is to create and maintain feedback loops for information sharing among team members, farmer/farm landowner adopters, and other stakeholders. A major goal of these feedback loops is to learn from collaborators who have adopted prairie strips so project staff and partners can help current (and future) collaborators to successfully establish and manage prairie strips.

An important part of those feedback loops is this annual, web-based survey of STRIPS collaborators who have established prairie strips. The purpose of the survey is to learn about collaborating landowners' experiences with the establishment and management of prairie strips to help project staff understand (1) what positive and negative experiences they have had, (2) what information and technical assistance needs they may have, and (3) to learn from their ideas about how the STRIPS team can improve outreach and promotional efforts. The questions for the 2023 crop year survey were:

- Q1. What have been some of your positive experiences with your prairie strips this past year?
- Q2. What have been some of the challenges with your prairie strips this past year?
- Q3. What advice would you give someone who is getting ready to plant prairie strips?
- Q4. What have people (e.g., neighbors, friends, crop advisers) said to you about your prairie strips, whether positive, negative, or questions?
- Q5. What are some of the questions you have about prairies and prairie management?
- Q6. What else can the STRIPS project team do to help?
- Q7. What educational events that you attended this past year – formal or informal – have helped you to improve your understanding of prairie strips? In what ways were they helpful?
- Q8. How did you first hear about prairie strips?
- Q9. Have you ever recommended prairie strips to other farmers and/or landowners?
- Q10. If you have recommended prairie strips to others, what motivated you to recommend them?
- Q11. In 2024 would you be willing to show your prairie strips to potential adopters in your area and share your knowledge and experiences?
- Q12. Prairie strips are now eligible for annual rental payments through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Would you be interested in establishing CRP prairie strips?
- Q13. We are considering sending this survey every other year instead of every year to reduce the burden on our collaborators. While this would mean that we only get your important feedback once every two years, we want to be respectful of your time. Please indicate your preference about the frequency of the survey.

The web-based survey was sent by email to 45 collaborators in April 2024, and the survey remained open until late May. Twenty-seven collaborators opened the survey, and 19 completed at least some of the survey for a response rate of 42 percent. This report presents the responses to the questions.

Table 1. What have been some of your positive experiences with your prairie strips this past year?

ID	
1	Our strips are visible from [the highway], so I love to look over at them whenever I drive by, especially when they are a riot of color.
2	Stopping erosion.
3	[...] photos taken in our prairie strips were included in a story about Monarch butterflies.
4	More wildlife on our farm—native bees, butterflies, moths, birds, etc. Believe the soil health in the strips is improving—water infiltration, filtering nutrients, increased organic matter, etc. General environmental improvement—spending time in my prairie strips is inspiring, provides more connectedness with nature, joy, and sense of relaxation.
5	Seeing the strip develop—especially the rattlesnake master.
6	They still provide multiple benefits—especially to an organic farm.
7	They caught a lot of snow during our January snowstorm!
8	The pheasants, quail, and other birds sheltering in the strips during the winter; seeing the difference in prairie strip growth between good and not-so-good soil; hearing the riot of insects during the summer; just simply taking a break to stand in the strips and observe.
9	To see prairie growing where we used to have brome and trees.
10	Continued establishment across the farm...all buffers and some waterways now converted to natives.
11	Nice growth in a dry year. Uptick in upland bird numbers.
12	Additional species establishing themselves in the STRIPS.
13	Seeing diverse prairie vegetation and wildlife.
14	The flowers have been beautiful, some strips have thistles and want to get rid of them. One of my strips needs to be replanted. The renter made a mistake and planted it, but I mowed the crop down. I'm waiting to see if it will come back.
15	NR
16	All of our acres are in CRP with native grasses and native forbs. Whole farm.
17	Beauty of the wildflowers, stopping water and soil from leaving the farm, more and diverse wildlife, lots of bees and butterflies
18	Identifying new species. Receiving honey from the ISU research team.
19	Improved water quality, less visible signs of sediment delivery from the field.

Note: NR = no response

Table 2. What have been some of the challenges with your prairie strips this past year?

ID	
1	Cottonwood trees. Our operator mowed off seedlings a few years ago, and they rebounded by sending up lots of shoots from the roots. I lopped and daubed thousands of them in fall 2022, but left a patch unfinished when winter hit. That patch grew into a thicket in 2023, with only a few outliers that I missed around it. I haven't been back to finish them off, nor have we settled on a long-term plan.
2	None.
3	Digging out wild parsnips, leaving the Golden Alexander. I can tell them apart at a glance now.
4	The dry/drought conditions have slowed the establishment of our newest prairie strip (seeded December 2021). Continued Canada thistle pressure in newest prairie strip.
5	Canada thistles in one section.
6	Canadian thistles continue to be a problem and smooth brome grass keeps creeping further in.
7	Eliminating some of the small mulberry trees.
8	Not being able to do much other than regular maintenance to foster strip growth in poorer soil; keeping a lid on a relatively small patch of scouring rush that is trying like heck to spread; drought conditions that severely curtail or eliminate spring burning.
9	The strips need to be wide enough that if there is some drift that it doesn't impact the strip too much.
10	Control of invasives....cool season grasses and wild parsnips are the biggest problems.
11	Brome and reed canary grass intrusion.
12	STRIPS edge management.
13	Shrub invasion, Canadian thistles.
14	NR
15	NR
16	NR
17	The grasses have gotten more prominent, and the forbs less prominent
18	Finding a good time to burn the strips.
19	Dandelions in April and May but then are outcompeted during the growing season.

Note: NR = no response

Table 3. What advice would you give someone who is getting ready to plant prairie strips?

ID	
1	Don't wait!
2	Tell them to proceed at once.
3	Start with a weed-free seedbed without brome or any other perennials like clover.
4	Take time and be patient in preparing the site. Make sure all brome & reed canary grasses are well terminated.
5	Go for it!
6	Try and start out relatively weed-free and don't buy weed seeds with your prairie seed.
7	Use a good GPS system and also practice planting with your planter before you plant to make sure the spacing is accurate.
8	Temper expectations. Patience is a virtue.
9	Make them as wide as possible.
10	Kill everything that is there thoroughly before seeding.
11	Do good site prep and kill brome and reed canary Be patient.
12	Having RTK guidance to maintain STRIPS edge is valuable.
13	Use a diverse seed mix. We like frost seeding. Be patient
14	They seem to have been successful in stopping erosion. Mow at least two years to give the strips time to establish themselves. Be patient.
15	NR
16	NR
17	Be patient, it takes a couple years to get them looking like you want them to.
18	Just do it. Visit some other existing strips.
19	Prepare the site by planting soybeans. This will help reduce weed competition and provide a good seedbed. I would like to see FSA allow planting of soybeans in existing CRP for one year to help prepare the site for prairie establishment. Frequent mowing the first year is very important. For CRP rehabilitation.

Note: NR = no response

Table 4. What have people (e.g., neighbors, friends, crop advisers) said to you about your prairie strips, whether positive, negative, or questions?

ID	
1	NR
2	Asked how they have worked. Told them they were great.
3	I don't hear from neighbors, friends like them, I help promote them to crop advisers.
4	Most people respond very positively to all of my social media posts with photos of our prairie strips. They commend us for restoring prairie to our land.
5	Nothing.
6	Folks think they're pretty.
7	The beauty to the landscape and appreciation of the diversity and flowers.
8	Show general interest/curiosity about why we did it.
9	I have not heard any comments.
10	I get all positives...neighbors have noticed pheasants along the roadsides on my farm.
11	NA
12	People love the STRIPS when their forbs are blooming.
13	Generally positive. Farm operator wishes we could have eliminated point rows.
14	They don't make a lot of comments, still pretty new around here.
15	NR
16	Very little comment.
17	Love the beauty of the wildflowers. Asking what good they do, like erosion control. Neighbors have taken graduation pictures, and engagement pictures in them.
18	They are always curious as to why I would take out tillage acres for prairie.
19	Are there non-CRP options for Prairie Strips? Where can I get assistance planting and establishing the prairie strips?

Note: NR = no response

Table 5. What are some of the questions you have about prairies and prairie management?

ID	
1	NR
2	None
3	Comparative methods of weed management, trying to use non-herbicide methods such as mowing at the right time.
4	I'm working very hard to learn about and only plant prairie species native to my county. I'm very interested in making my restored prairies as close to what was here prior to white settlement as possible. No real questions. Just would like to know about any and all resources available to mimic the original prairie of our SW Iowa terrain.
5	How to control the Canada thistles?
6	I'd like to see more quantitative and qualitative analysis of the benefits.
7	Would grazing in early spring before the summer grasses emerge help cut back on non-native grasses?
8	How to find a network of people willing to perform burns?
9	NA
10	Controlling invasives and converting waterways.
11	Concerned about winter flattening from wind/snow.
12	NR
13	How to control Canadian thistles?
14	Can I mow where the weeds are thick? Can I spray the thistles?
15	NR
16	NR
17	Been at it for ten years now so have a good handle on it. Is there a trick to getting more flowers and less native grasses, which seem to predominate?
18	NR
19	Which is better, drilling or broadcast seeding or both?

Note: NR = no response

Table 6. What else can the STRIPS project team do to help?

ID	
1	Keep up the good work.
2	Help others to establish them also.
3	Just keep the flow of ideas and discoveries coming out to us and we'll try to help with anything we discover.
4	Continue to promote prairie strips as a viable conservation practice that can co-exist with traditional row crop farming. Make sure people know that a prairie strip doesn't have to run through the middle of a field; that a prairie field buffer is better than no prairie. Also, that prairie can be planted in old fence lines and other non-farmable areas of a farm.
5	Nothing that I can think of.
6	NR
7	I am good right now.
8	Touch base annually with updated lists of contacts of people in my area willing to help with questions and even some maintenance (like burning).
9	NR
10	NR
11	Happy with help.
12	I'd like to develop a method of baling the STRIPS in the fall and then using these shredded bales to establish more STRIPS. Is this a possibility?
13	Student researchers can study our STRIPS.
14	Tell me if there is more management I need to do?
15	NR
16	NR
17	Keep getting the word out.
18	Organize an annual prairie walk to show people the value of PS.
19	Send targeted information to landowners about the benefits of prairie strips and encourage FSA to streamline the sign-up process if using CRP.

Note: NR = no response

Table 7. What educational events that you attended this past year—formal or informal—have helped you to improve your understanding of prairie strips? In what ways were they helpful?

ID	
1	NR
2	None.
3	I don't know that I have learned anything new about the prairie strips but I have learned that there is greater flexibility in NRCS programs to fit them into a farmers' conservation plan.
4	Can't think of a specific event. I've [read] various articles/websites and talked with various prairie experts—the Allendan Seed customer service rep, Xerces Society rep, etc.—which has expanded my knowledge.
5	None.
6	PFI annual meeting workshop with Tim Youngquist.
7	Not able to attend.
8	Have not attended, but hosted one on-farm event last year and will host another this year for folks interested in strips. We always learn a lot from curious questions.
9	NR
10	NR
11	None.
12	NR
13	We hosted a PFI workshop. Several prairie specialists offered management ideas.
14	Didn't attend any.
15	I read Cornelia Mutel's book <i>Tending Iowa's Land</i> , which helped me understand more about soil health.
16	NR
17	Nothing in the past year.
18	Conversations with Tim Youngquist.
19	Field day which had multiple speaker stations. Subjects included prairie strip establishment and management, insects, water quality, wildlife, etc.

Note: NR = no response

Table 8. How did you first hear about prairie strips? (if you have answered this question in previous years, please feel free to skip it)

ID	
1	NR
2	NR
3	NR
4	Answered multiple times. God bless Lisa Schulte Moore and her entire team!
5	I don't remember.
6	NR
7	NR
8	NR
9	NR
10	NR
11	Iowa State NREM.
12	NR
13	Heard about STRIPS experiment at Neal Smith.
14	The conservation office introduced me to prairie strips.
15	NR
16	NR
17	NR
18	NR
19	Research papers.

Note: NR = no response

Table 9. Have you ever recommended prairie strips to other farmers and/or landowners?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	17	89.5
No	2	10.5

Table 10. If you have recommended prairie strips to others, what motivated you to recommend them?

ID	
1	I just love them, and I appreciate the importance of prairie reconstruction more each year.
2	Excellent experience with them.
3	Insect habitat.
4	Strong belief in that the better we mimic what was on the land originally, the better. Prairie Strips improve soil health, sequester carbon, and return our Iowa landscape to what it looked like prior to white settlement.
5	She's my niece.
6	The many benefits.
7	Erosion control and beauty in the landscape for more diverse ecosystem in a monoculture environment.
8	Our overall positive experience as well as conservation backed by ISU research.
9	Reaction in soil erosion in their field and wildlife habitat.
10	Positive for environment and for farmers. I think they could be sold as a refuge for weed species as well to help prevent herbicide resistance.
11	Spreading the word: erosion control, upland bird habitat.
12	They asked about the STRIPS.
13	Conservation benefits.
14	NR
15	NR
16	I am member of SWCD committee.
17	I like all of the benefits, so I think others would too.
18	The multiple benefits they afford.
19	Small areas removed from production but have multiple, disproportionate water quality, habitat and biodiversity benefits.

Note: NR = no response

Table 11. In 2024, would you be willing to show your prairie strips to potential adopters in your area and share your knowledge and experiences?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	14	73.7
No	1	5.3
Maybe	3	15.8
No Response	1	5.3

Table 12. Prairie strips are now eligible for annual rental payments through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Would you be interested in establishing CRP prairie strips?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	4	21.1
No	2	10.5
Maybe	2	15.8
I already enrolled prairie strips in CRP	9	47.4
No Response	1	5.3

Table 13. We are considering sending this survey every other year instead of every year to reduce the burden on our collaborators. While this would mean that we only get your important feedback once every two years, we want to be respectful of your time. Please indicate your preference about the frequency of the survey.

	Frequency	Percent
Annually	6	31.6
Every two years	12	63.2
Never, please don't include me in future collaborator surveys	1	5.3

Table 14. Collaborator type

	Frequency	Percent
Agency	2	10.5
Farmer	7	36.8
Landowner	10	52.6



Sociology Technical Report 1065 by J. Gordon Arbuckle Jr. with design and layout by Renea Miller.

The Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips (STRIPS) has many project partners. These presently include Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Flood Center, Iowa Soybean Association, Prairie Rivers of Iowa, The Eastern Iowa Airport, The McKnight Foundation, Trees Forever, University of Iowa Biomass Fuel Project, University of Northern Iowa Tallgrass Prairie Center, USDA-ARS National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment, USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Forest Service, USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA North Central SARE, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Walton Family Foundation, Whiterock Conservancy, as well as over 35 private farmers and farmland owners. Our partner list is updated over time at www.nrem.iastate.edu/research/STRIPS/content/partners.