

How to Write a Farm Conservation Legacy Report

The Allamakee SWCD recently completed a project with funding from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture to help current farmers pass on information about their conservation efforts and ethic to the next generation of farm owners. These Farm Conservation Legacy Reports included some or all of the following information: a history of farmland ownership, past farming practices, a history of conservation practice installation including maintenance dates for practices that received federal or state cost-share funds, current and suggested land-use including crop rotations, and suggestions for future management. Maps detailed the location of installed conservation practices, different soil types, and the progression of conservation on the land through aerial photography starting with the 1930s photos up to present day. The idea for this project came from one of the Allamakee SWCD commissioners who wanted to write down information about how he would want his ground to be farmed in case something happened to him.

You can write your own Farm Conservation Legacy Report

You can include whatever information you want, but here are some ideas to get you started. Maps can be very beneficial to provide additional information and there are several web-based sources for maps.

History

Has the farm been in the family for generations? How have farming practices on your land changed over time? Were there previously livestock on the farm? If so, soil test results could potentially be impacted. Historic aerial photos can be used to show how farms have changed over time. Some historic aerial photos can be obtained from the ISU Geographic Map Server at

ortho.gis.iastate.edu including photos from the 1930s to the 1990s.

More recent aerial photos, including 2014, are also on this website.

Additional historic map layers that may be of interest include the

Andreas Atlas of 1875, the General Land Office Survey of 1836-1859, and the 1832-1859

General Land Office Historic Vegetation. You may need to hit the “refresh map” button on the

site to update the image if you change the map layer. To save an image, click on “jpeg base map” under Download. Right click on the image and click on “save picture as”.



Soils



Information about soils on the farm can be obtained from your local NRCS office or from the Web Soil Survey at

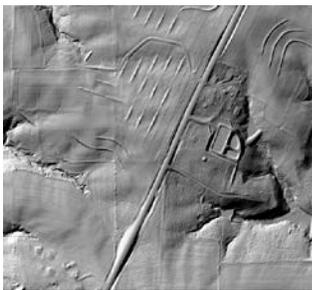
websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov. A basic tutorial on the web soil survey is on the website’s homepage. More detailed instructions are on the right side of the home page under “I want help with...”. A soil overlay option is also available from the ISU map server. As the farmer, you know areas of good/bad soils to point out. The legend

on the Web Soil Survey can help mark points of interest in the soils such as wet, sandy, or clayey spots. If you have tilled your ground to reduce wet spots, that information should be passed on to future owners, ideally with maps to show approximate location.

Land Use

What is your current or preferred rotation? Have you tried other crops/rotations in the past and decided to change? What did you learn from past rotations? What suggestions do you have for tillage and why? It would be good to include your NRCS conservation plan. If it hasn't been updated in a while, or if you don't have one because you have NHEL ground, stop by your local NRCS office.

Conservation Practices



Your NRCS conservation plan may show the location of some of your conservation practices. Try to determine when different practices were installed. If you have terraces or ponds (410 or 638 structures), they may show up on LiDAR Hillshade maps, which can be found at ortho.gis.iastate.edu. If you received state or federal cost-share to install conservation practices but do not know when you installed them, your local NRCS office may be able to help. If you have practices that are still within their maintenance agreement period, it is suggested that you keep track of when they expire. If you have no idea when practices were installed, you may be able to get a rough idea from historic aerial photos, depending on the practice.

Suggestions for Future Management

Are there areas that may need conservation practices installed in the future? For example, have you done some stream bank management and would encourage future owners to monitor the stream condition? If you have steeper ground more suited to grazing, explain why you think it should be maintained as pasture. What are your long-term goals for the land? This will not be a legally binding document, but can be a place to document what you would like to see happen to your ground in the future.

If you decide to write a Farm Conservation Legacy Report, make sure you go over it with your spouse/heirs. Make sure they know where a copy is. If they would rent out the ground in the future, some of the information may be beneficial to include in a lease or when choosing a tenant.

If you have questions, please contact Sara Berges at the Allamakee SWCD by emailing sara.berges@ia.nacdn.net or calling 563-568-2246 ext. 3.

