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Feb. 24, 2026

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New Report Highlights Strategic Value of Conservation Agronomists in Ag Retail

DES MOINES, Iowa — Interviews from ag retail leadership across the state of Iowa conclude that conservation agronomy is a critical strategic capability for the industry, according to a new report released in Feb. 2026.

The report, [which can be downloaded here](#), is from Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance (ACWA) and the Iowa Soybean Association (ISA). It's a follow-up to the 2024 "Making Retail Conservation Real Conference.

Based on interviews conducted by Baton Global in early 2026 with leaders across six Iowa-based retail organizations, the research found that dedicated conservation agronomist roles are essential because traditional sales agronomists are often at maximum capacity with sales goals and other responsibilities. By providing 100% focus on conservation implementation and program navigation, conservation agronomists allow sales teams to maintain commercial performance while deepening grower relationships.

"Conservation cannot simply be successfully layered onto already burdened sales agronomists," the report states.

Instead, the integration of specialized CAs acts as a competitive differentiator, particularly among progressive growers who view retailers without these services as incomplete.

Key Findings from the Evaluation Include:

- **Tangible Value Creation:** CAs drive customer retention by providing strategic advising. This increases "switching costs" for growers.
- **Expanded Revenue Capture:** CAs are positioned to help growers get more money for crops with the expansion of conservation incentives.



Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance

- **Path to Profitability:** Data from the study shows that a conservation unit can become profitable between years three and four.
- **Intangible Benefits:** The presence of a CA enhances a retailer's brand equity while building trust.

The report also addresses challenges, such as policy instability and the need for new engagement models for tenant farmers, who operate over half of Iowa's farmland. It emphasizes that retailers who treat conservation as **core business infrastructure** rather than a grant-funded add-on are best positioned to lead in a rapidly changing market.

About ACWA

Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance (ACWA) is a coalition of Iowa-based agricultural retailers and cooperatives committed to reducing nutrient losses from farm fields through science-based practices, education, and collaboration. Founded in 1999, ACWA supports the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy and advances voluntary stewardship to improve Iowa's water quality.

About ISA

The Iowa Soybean Association is Driven To Deliver market demand, production research, information and insights and regulatory action benefiting Iowa's 37,000 soybean farmers and the industry. For more information, visit iasoybeans.com.