Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance

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New report shows targeted watershed success backed by water monitoring data

DES MOINES, Iowa — A new water quality monitoring report provides data-backed insights on how targeted conservation practices like cover crops improve water quality in Iowa.

The report comes out of a partnership between Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance (ACWA) and the Iowa Soybean Association (ISA). As a partnership, the two organizations have some of the longest running water monitoring data in the state. This comprehensive data collection has been vital in identifying nutrient "hot spots" and securing millions of dollars in funding for conservation infrastructure like bioreactors and wetlands.

The report demonstrates that voluntary, science-based conservation practices guided by real-time water monitoring are delivering measurable improvements in water quality.

Since the monitoring program's expansion began in 2015, the initiative has grown from 56 sites to more than 125 sites in 2025, a 123% increase.

Key Findings from the 2026 Report:

- **Cover Crop Efficacy: Data** from 2015–2025 reveals that fields using cover crops have nitrate concentrations averaging 28% lower than fields without them.
- **Targeted Success in Elk Run:** The flagship Farm to River Partnership in the Elk Run watershed achieved a 51% reduction in nitrogen loss (measured in pounds) between 2013 and 2024, significantly outperforming a nearby control watershed which saw only a 29% reduction.
- **Management ROI:** Beyond environmental benefits, water monitoring serves as a tool for farmers to improve nutrient management and return on investment (ROI) by maximizing nutrient efficiency in crops rather than losing them to waterways.

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"Anything you are measuring, you are managing," said Jake Geisler, a farmer from Webster County who has done water monitoring since 2015. "Seeing the numbers in real time helps us think about what more we can do and keeps our eyes on that ball".

The full 2026 Water Quality Impact Report is available on ACWA's and ISA's websites. Farmers and landowners interested in joining monitoring efforts are encouraged to contact Tony Seeman at 515-334-1042 or aseeman@iasoybeans.com

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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.