

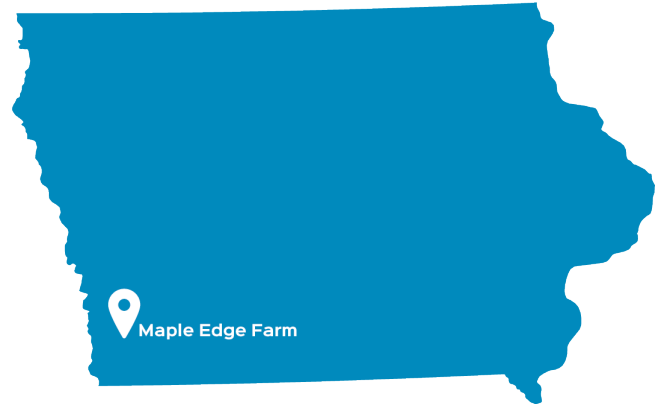
IOWA'S WATERSHED MANAGEMENT AUTHORITIES:

A FARMER AND LANDOWNER PERSPECTIVE

THE FOLLOWING TESTIMONIAL WAS WRITTEN BY JON BAKEHOUSE OF MAPLE EDGE FARM NEAR HASTINGS, IOWA.

As a farmer and landowner in rural southwest Iowa, I am no stranger to the importance of flood mitigation and water quality. We are a family farm and have been fortunate enough to farm the same acres for six generations. We want to ensure the farm is viable for generations to come. In my experiences working with my local Watershed Management Authority, I can attest to their support and effectiveness in helping us address water concerns by implementing voluntary conservation measures.

It's hard to believe now, but in March 2019, most of the ground up to the bottom of the hill in the photo below was underwater. That year, the West Nishnabotna River exploded out of its banks during an unusually large rain event when the ground was still frozen. Our farm had been practicing no-till for decades, installed filter strips, and installed dugouts to help slow water runoff. Still, these measures did not save us from dramatic flooding.



After the water receded, our fields were unrecognizable. We estimate that we lost more nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, in addition to micronutrients) in this single event than we did in the previous five years.



PHOTO TAKEN JAN. 9, 2023

It's easy to say, "This is a once-in-a-lifetime event, we'll chalk this one up as a loss and continue with business as usual." But, we need perspective. We need a system that can see this field as part of the entire watershed and prepare it for future catastrophic events 10, 20, even 100 years from now. Doing so will ensure the future viability of our family farm.

Working with Cara Morgan, coordinator for the West Nishnabotna Watershed Coalition, we are starting to find that perspective. With her assistance, we recently installed three prairie strips. This conservation practice originated at Iowa State University and protects soil and water while providing habitat for wildlife.

One of our three strips is visible on the left side of the above photo, appearing as a brown runway leading from the bottom of the hill toward the river. It looks tiny in comparison to the adjacent crop ground, but the science behind prairie strips shows the small feature having disproportionate benefits for the larger landscape. We have already seen the benefits of the prairie strip slowing water as it leaves our farm.



PHOTO TAKEN JAN. 9, 2023

Cara contacted us when funding opportunities became available, showed us different options, then made the project happen. It was an extremely easy process for us, and our strips were installed in the spring of 2022. Had Cara not contacted us, we would have been unaware of such a project, and our soil would still be at unmitigated risk.

The photo above is initially unremarkable until weather data reveals we've had a grand total of 2.8 inches of snow, the last of which fell in mid-December. The snow on crop ground disappeared weeks ago, leaving bare patches of soil prone to wind and water erosion. Not only did this young prairie strip catch and hold snow, it also caught and held moving soil. We look forward to continuing to see it develop and the benefits multiply.

Over the years, our cropping system has evolved from a patchwork of small grains, pasture, alfalfa, corn, soybeans and miles of fencerows into long, straight rows of corn and soybeans. Less than 10% of our acres are in perennial crops, such as pasture and alfalfa. Through our interaction with the West Nishnabotna Watershed Coalition, and Cara specifically, we've come to better understand the implications for the watershed. We are now eager to continue additional conservation practices to help prepare for the next catastrophic event, and do our part to ensure the community's water supply is clean.

Jon Bakehouse
Maple Edge Farm
Hastings, Iowa



A LEADERSHIP IOWA FARM TOUR IN NOV. 2022, FEATURING OUR PRAIRIE STRIPS AND CONSERVATION.



WATER FLOWS FROM OUR FARM, TOWARD THE PHOTOGRAPHER, THROUGH THIS PRAIRIE STRIP TO OUR NEIGHBOR'S FARM.