

Our Water #3 – What is missing?

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Water quality is a hot issue in Iowa. Farm groups, citizens, and public officials make hopeful claims about our progress in protecting water quality. But is something missing in our discussions? This is Prof. Neil Hamilton from Drake University with today's Our Water.

Iowans hear conflicting claims about water quality and the sources of pollution. But there is little doubt most nutrients – like nitrates and phosphorous - reaching our rivers and streams comes off farm fields. Other sources – cities, septic tanks, and natural processes contribute as well.

The good news is we know how to significantly reduce pollution from our 23 million acres of crops. We have great examples of farmers and landowners taking steps to reduce the nitrates and soil leaving their land. Watershed projects are showing how collective action like constructing wetlands and cover crops can be part of the solution.

But even with these examples the reality is little is being done on most farms to improve water quality. What is missing may be a sense of urgency and our reluctance to accept protecting water quality is a personal responsibility. We can't sit back and wait for someone else to do our job or hope a new law might be the answer. Truth be told - there is little in Iowa's laws restricting many practices causing most of our water quality problems.

If Iowans want cleaner water we must recognize we each have a responsibility to meet.

This has been Prof. Neil Hamilton for Our Water, a production of the Drake University Agricultural Law Center.