

Our Water # 4 – More Action is Needed

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News stories about farmers and landowners working to protect water quality show progress is possible. But the examples are just part of what is needed. This is Prof. Neil Hamilton of Drake University with today's Our Water.

Reports about the steps Iowa farmers are taking to protect water quality sound impressive – over 600,000 acres of cover crops planted, miles of new stream buffers, and sixteen demonstration watersheds funded by DNR. Each action is good news but we must recognize the reports involve only a small part of Iowa's land. We have over 23 million acres in row crops, 1,600 watersheds, and 72,000 miles of rivers and streams.

The scale of our challenge is immense and at the current pace it will take decades to make any progress. Plus, what progress we make in one place can be quickly overwhelmed by actions elsewhere – like CRP land being put back into crops or new supplies of fertilizer becoming available.

We need to accelerate the steps being taken to protect water quality. Landowners and farmers need to ask what they can do. Politicians need to recognize the scale of our challenge and provide the funds needed to share the costs. Iowans need to consider how we can best support these actions.

Until we each recognize our stake and responsibility in protecting water quality - progress will be minimal. This shouldn't be acceptable – we know how to do better.

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