

Ten Key Observations from Nov. 2015 Drake SOIL conference
Prof. Neil Hamilton – May 2016

1- Ditch the idea of tolerable soil loss and focus on Soil Health - We need to change our thinking about T or the idea is there is an acceptable level of soil erosion. The goal should be no soil erosion. And we need to shift our attention to Soil Health so we take a more comprehensive view of our soil.

#2 – Ramp up the Adoption of Cover Crops - We need to continue and expand the adoption of Cover Crops and other innovative conservation practices, such as field edge buffers. Keeping livestock on the land is an opportunity we shouldn't overlook.

#3 – Engage Ag retailers - We need to more fully engage ag retailers in efforts to reduce nutrient loss and promote soil health– in large part because they are the main source of farmer advice on fertilizer use.

4 Get landowners engaged in soil and water conservation - The changing nature of land tenure in Iowa means we need to get landowners, especially the increasing number of women, more engaged in efforts to address soil and water conservation.

#5 Work at the Watershed level to develop effective projects - We need to use the watershed planning approach to develop collaborative projects in which neighboring farmers and landowners are invested.

#6 Harness the Opportunities with Water Quality Trading - We need to explore and develop the opportunities to use water quality trading and other market driven approaches so point sources can help fund efforts at non-point pollution control.

#7 Support IWILL and the sales tax increase - One key to improving water quality is increased availability of public funds to help cost-share investments by farmers and landowners. IWILL is the most accessible opportunity to do so.

8 Engage business and consumers and use data analytics to improve practices – The growing interest of consumer food companies and other businesses in sustainability and supply chain management creates the opportunity to employ improved conservation techniques based on data analytics.

9 – Enforce the Soil Conservation laws on the books - Iowa has a rich history of legislative and judicial support for protecting soil and water resources. The soil

and water conservation districts need to make more effective use of the tools already in place.

#10 – Make sure farm programs work to protect soil and water - Current federal farm programs may be working at cross purposes, some helping protect soil and water while other programs, such as the expanding crop insurance coverage may contribute to soil and water problems.