Professionals Offer Sustainability Perspectives

The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS), developed by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and Illinois Department of Agriculture with input from groups including the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA), calls for a 15 percent reduction in nitrogen (N) loss and 25 percent reduction in phosphorus (P) loss by 2025. The ISA checkoff program is promoting the good work farmers already are doing, while encouraging continued improvement with the “Try One Thing” campaign.

The Illinois Field & Bean talked with sustainability professionals and other stakeholders about meeting NLRS goals. Here are perspectives that farmers can translate into their own operations.

Q. Why does continuous improvement matter to you and your customers?

DAVID DROSTE
ISA director and farmer from Nashville, Ill.

“Striving for continuous improvement and increased efficiency helps producers be more productive with less cost. Plus, it is better for the environment when input applications are managed to reduce nutrient loss.”

HOWARD BROWN, PH.D.
manager of agronomic and stewardship, Illini FS

“Continuous stewardship improvements matter, not to just our customers, but to independent entrepreneurs we call farmers. Improvements with environmental stewardship at the farm gate must be driven by farm profitability — M.O.M. — if we maximize input utilization while optimizing harvest yield and farm profitability, we will minimize the environmental impact of production agriculture. It is not about nutrient reduction, it is about nutrient utilization.”

JILL KOSTEL, PH.D.
senior environmental engineer, The Wetlands Initiative

“Continuous improvement means finding ways to reduce nutrient loss from the world’s most productive agricultural region without taking swaths of our great farmland out of production.”

FRANKLIN HOLLEY
Manager - sustainable food, World Wildlife Fund

“An approach of continuous improvement shares value along the entire supply chain. Sustainability should not just be on producers’ shoulders; it also is the responsibility of traders, retailers and consumers. Any approach needs to be economically sustainable for producers.”

SUZY FRIEDMAN
senior director of agricultural sustainability, Environmental Defense Fund

“Continuous improvement is critical because there is no single solution or silver bullet when it comes to agricultural sustainability. Instead, we need to focus on gathering information and knowledge that enables farmers and their advisors to make ever more informed decisions, identify and pursue opportunities to improve efficiency, reduce loss and improve resilience.”
Q. What sustainability goals are important to you, your organization and your customers. How do on-farm practices affect your operation’s goals?

DAVID DROSTE

“If we make good decisions, we can increase productivity and profits, while minimizing impacts beyond our farm. We need more research, outreach and education to help our industry adapt to these new challenges. We all need to work together to promote the voluntary management practices that make sense for our own operations.”

HOWARD BROWN, PH.D.

“As farmers, suppliers and consultants, we have an opportunity to show the non-farm public and global marketplace that we truly have a focus on M.O.M, and we are the best place in the world to provide a sustainable, reliable source of grains. We still have a significant amount of work ahead to demonstrate how improvements in soil health can be accomplished while improving farm profitability.”

JILL KOSTEL, PH.D.

“Pairing in-field nitrogen management practices with edge-of-field nitrogen removal practices, such as constructed wetlands, is a great path to achieving nutrient reduction goals and keeping Illinois farms economically and environmentally sustainable.”

FRANKLIN HOLLEY

“When it comes to food, WWF’s goal is to drive sustainable food systems to conserve nature and feed humanity. This includes using natural resources more efficiently. Conservation practices can build soil health. Nutrient optimization and precision agriculture can slow nutrient losses and protect water resources.”

SUZY FRIEDMAN

“We want to expand collaborations across the commodity crop supply chain, from consumer-facing retailers and food companies to agribusiness and farmers, so that efficient use of nutrients and soil health practices are the cost-effective business norm for production.”

Checkoff COLLABORATION

Try One Thing

To help meet Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy goals, every Illinois farmer must consider voluntary best management practices for every acre. There’s no one right answer, so ISA encourages farmers to consider changes that make sense for their operations to reduce impact without compromising yields or profitability. Try One Thing is the ISA checkoff program activity for farmers to find a solution for improving their own strategies that can help enhance the entire industry and to meet the needs of end consumers around the world. Visit ilsoy.org for more information.