



Soil Health & Farmland Owners



USDA-NRCS Conservation Webinar, April 11, 2017
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American Farmland Trust

Today's agenda

- About AFT
- What we know about non-operatoring landowners
- AFT's work: women and soil health
- Other's work with landowners
- Implications and next steps

Saving the land that sustains us

- Protecting farm and ranch land
- Promoting sound farming practices
- Keeping farmers on the land



In the Midwest...

Promoting sound farming practices by:

- Nutrient Loss Reduction:
 - ◆ Upper Macoupin Creek Watershed
 - ◆ Vermilion Headwaters Watershed
- Advancing “Conservation Cropping Systems” or “Soil Health Management Systems” in Illinois
 - ◆ Statewide seminars
 - ◆ Soil Health Specialists network
- Engaging non-operator women landowners – national initiative (IL, IN, MD, VA, OH, NY)

Definitions and Acronyms

Non-operating landowner (NOL)

- Woman non-operating landowner (WNOL)
- Absentee landowner

Operating landowner

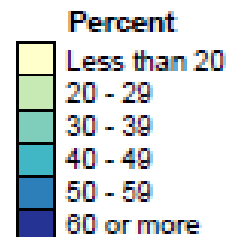
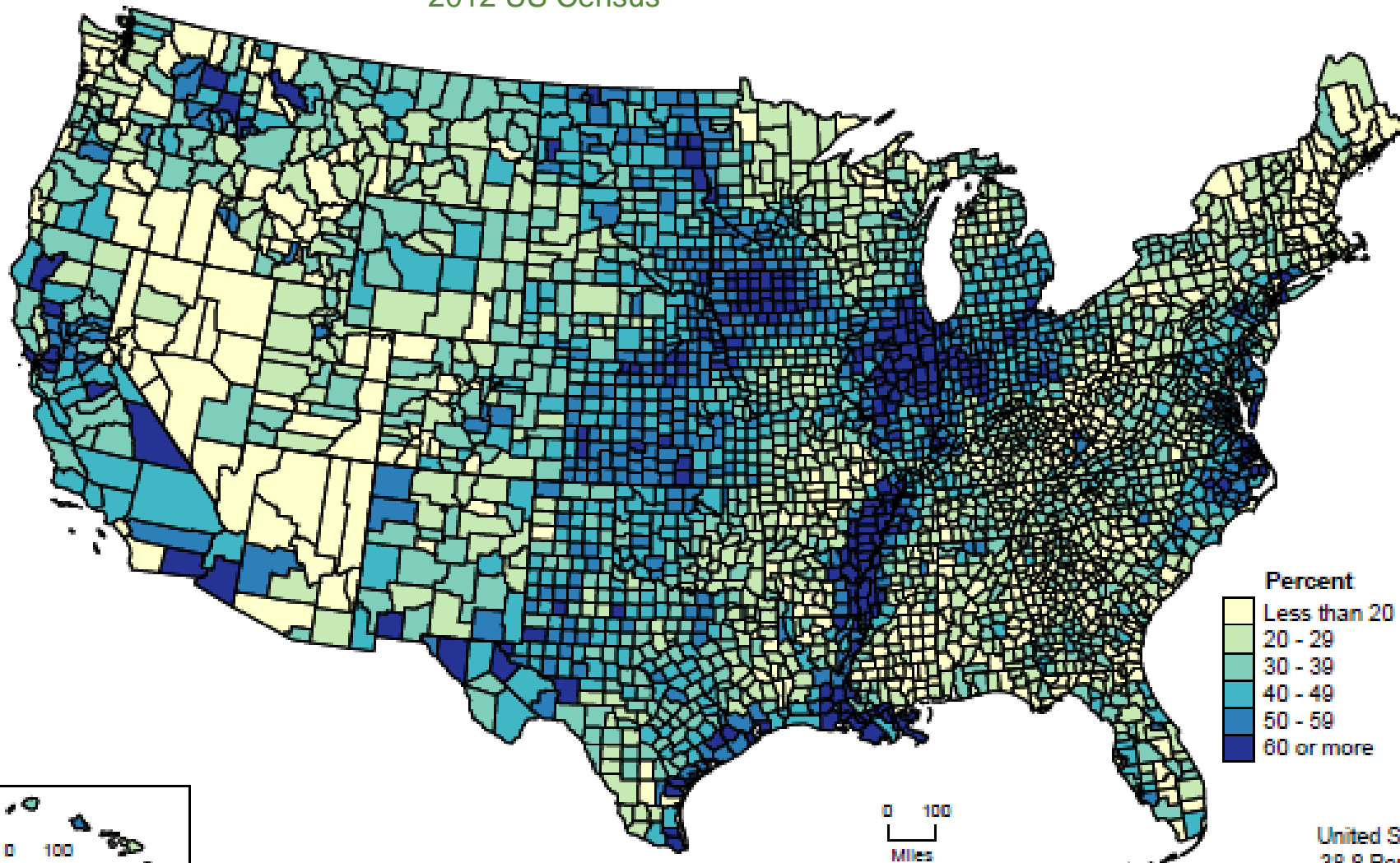
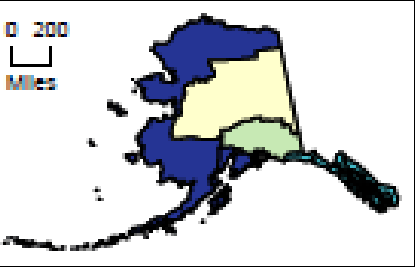
Landlord (individual, partnership, trust, corporation, municipality, LLC, etc.)

Rent vs Lease ???

Those who own agricultural property but do not farm it themselves.

Percent Land in Farms Rented or Leased, 2012

2012 US Census

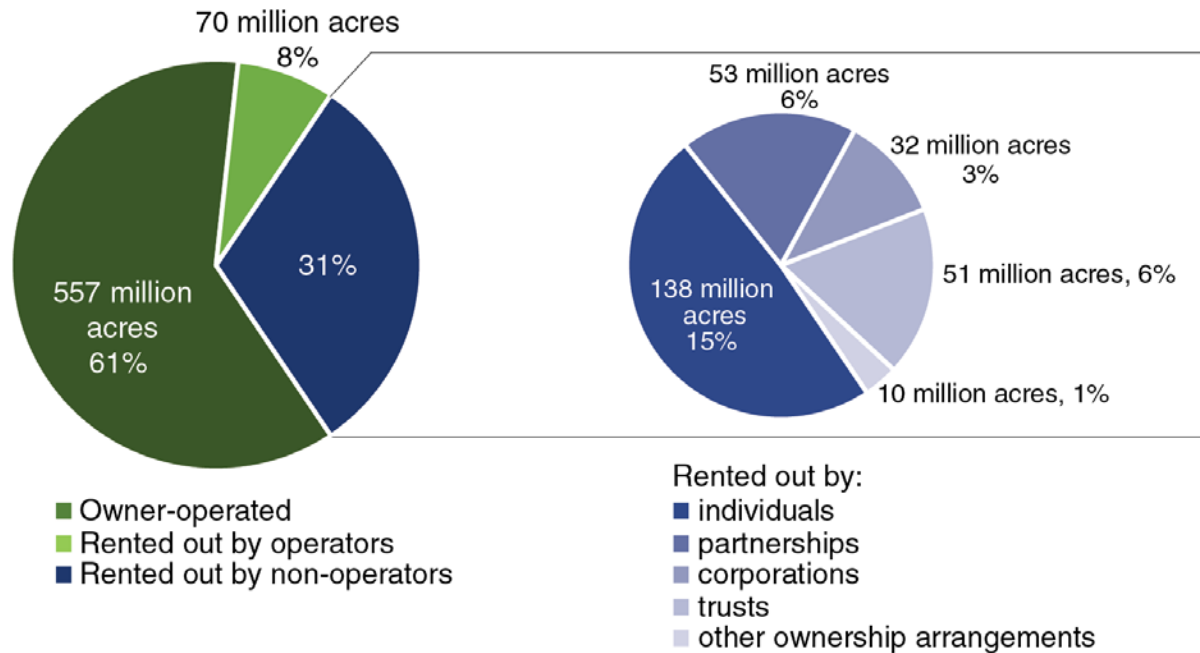


United States
38.8 Percent



2014 TOTAL Survey: Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land

Figure 9
Non-operators own 31 percent of the land on farms in the 48 contiguous States¹



¹Numbers in the tables and figures contained in this report may not sum due to rounding.

Note: Representative of the 48 contiguous States. In all figures based on the 2014 Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) survey data, a coefficient of variation (CV) between 25 and 50 is denoted with a * and a CV greater than 50 is denoted by a #.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service and National Agricultural Statistics Service 2014 TOTAL survey.

Agricultural land ownership varies by state and region

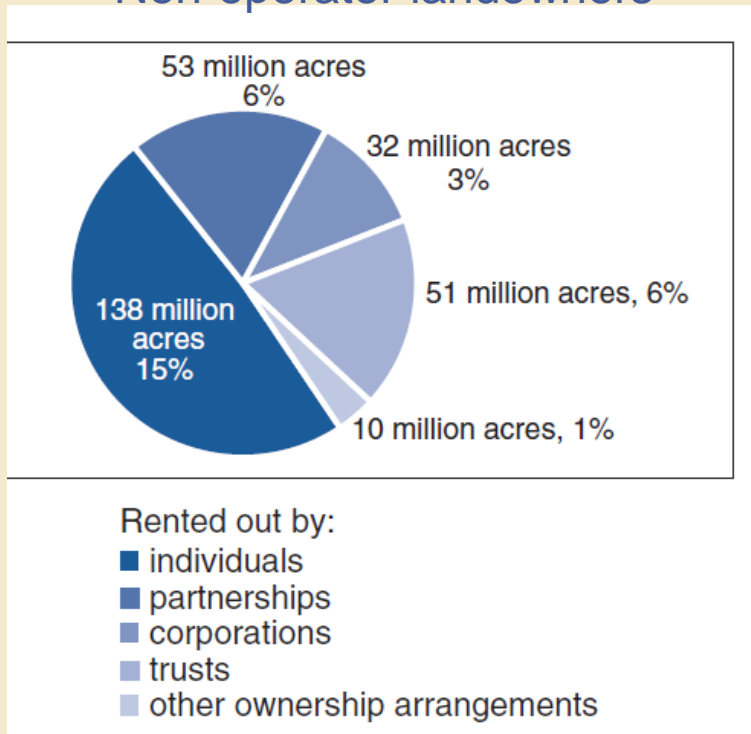
Region	Owner-operator	Operator-landlord	Non-operator landlord
Midwest	53	9	37
Plains	56	9	35
South	63	6	30
Appalachia	65	6	29
Northeast	71	4	25
West	70	6	24

Illinois – 60%
Iowa – 53%
Indiana – 50%

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service and National Agricultural Statistics Service 2014
Total survey. Table 1.

Slicing the pie further...

Non-operator landowners



Age data TOTAL:

Landlords – 66.5 years

Operators – 58.3 years

Women/Men?

Nationally (48 states):

- 37% of all principal landlords are women
- They owned 10% of ag lands (25% of rented lands)
- Women tend to be older

Iowa*:

- 47% of farmland owned/co-owned by women
- 61% of the rented land owned/co-owned by women
- Women tend to be older

**2007 Farmland ownership & Tenure in Iowa*

Why focus on women NOLs?

- Women own a lot of land that is rented out (more than their male counterparts)
- The percentage of women who own land is expected to increase in the next decade as more women inherit farmland from spouses & parents (Eells & Adcock 2012, Parsons et al. 2010)

From Carolyn 2005, Eells et al. 2008, Bregghendal & Hoffman 2011, Secchi et al. 2014:

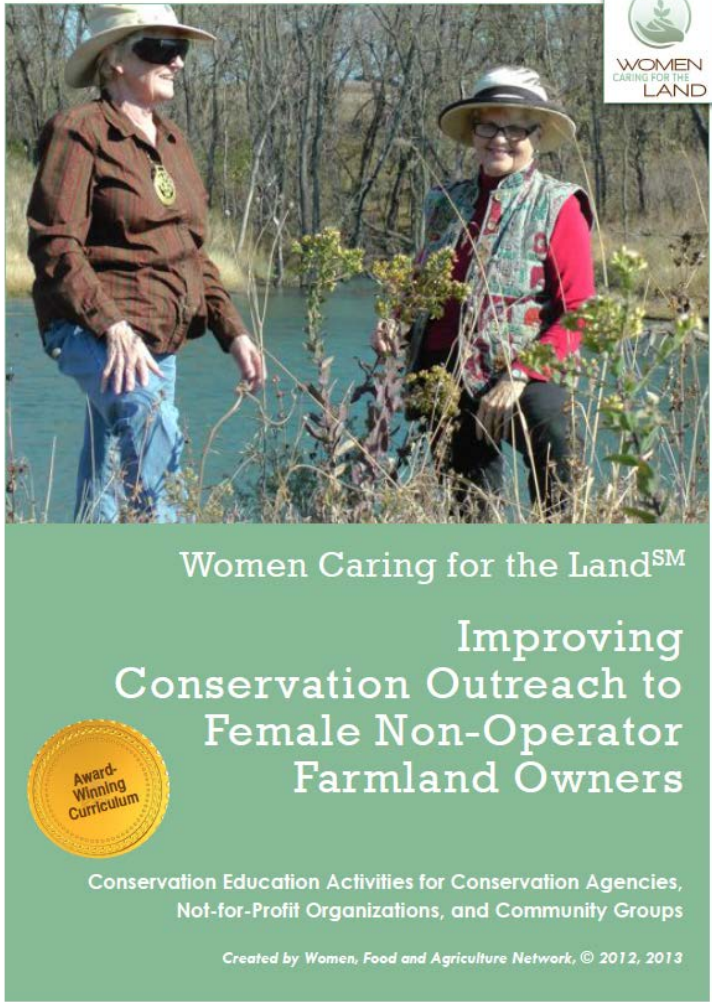
- Women are particularly interested in conservation
- Deeply committed to health farmland, farm families and farm communities
- Under represented in farmland conservation programs

Programming for women?

- Annie's project
- WAgN (Women's Agricultural Network)
- Purdue Women in Agriculture
- USDA Women in Ag
- For conservation specifically? For women who do not farm?



www.womencaringfortheland.org



Women Caring for the LandSM

Improving
Conservation Outreach to
Female Non-Operator
Farmland Owners

Award-Winning Curriculum

Conservation Education Activities for Conservation Agencies,
Not-for-Profit Organizations, and Community Groups

Created by Women, Food and Agriculture Network, © 2012, 2013

Learning Circles (womencaringfortheland.org)

- Peer-to-peer learning, acknowledges women as the experts & decision makers on their own land.
- Conservation staff (women) participate in discussion – no hierarchy, no lectures
- Meetings without men for first part of the day
- (after a meal) Farm visits to see practices on the ground and discuss with farmer and staff



How is this different??

- Lengthy introductions
- Peer-to-peer
- Opt for “hands-on”



©J Eells, E Resources Group

- No caravans
- Conservation topics!
- Women only, but...

Excluding men?

I feel like there is some kind of secret society I don't belong to with an alphabet soup of acronyms

I had to become the bitch of the neighborhood for a while to get my tenant to fix some problems I saw in the fields

My dad taught me that if you take care of the land it will take care of you

I realized today that I am not alone.



©L Balek, McHenry County Land Conservancy

I have to remind my advisors that I am the landowner, not my husband

How do I tell my farmer that I'm concerned that my soil isn't alive anymore?

My husband died last month and I don't know where to start...

Conservation topics: Soil Health



Discussion:

What is it? 50% pore space,
45% mineral, 5% organic

How to describe it?

Chemical, physical, biological

BIOLOGY! Underground food
web powered by the sun.

Everything eating, breathing,
pooping, dying

Then: 4 principles:

Do not disturb, Keep it covered, living roots, diverse crop rotations



Conservation topics: Soil Health







Outcomes for women

- ❑ Clearer idea of what they want from their farm in terms of conservation and production
- ❑ Be more comfortable discussing conservation & management issues with renters, other landowners and agricultural agency staff.
- ❑ Establish a network of their peers for on-going learning and support
- ❑ More familiar with conservation options & programs.
- ❑ *60% move forward with conservation planning and implementation in 1 year.*

But...

What does it take to influence *change on the land*?



Lessons learned from Agren, Inc.

-Intensive research and multiple campaigns from 2005 - 2014

-Absenteelandowners.org/info-for-organizations

-Rule of marketing/sales – “AIDA”

AFT building on learning circle model:

- Progressive model
- Adding conservation based succession planning
- Adding conservation leasing
- Adding concurrent operator outreach

Is rented land less likely to have conservation practices?

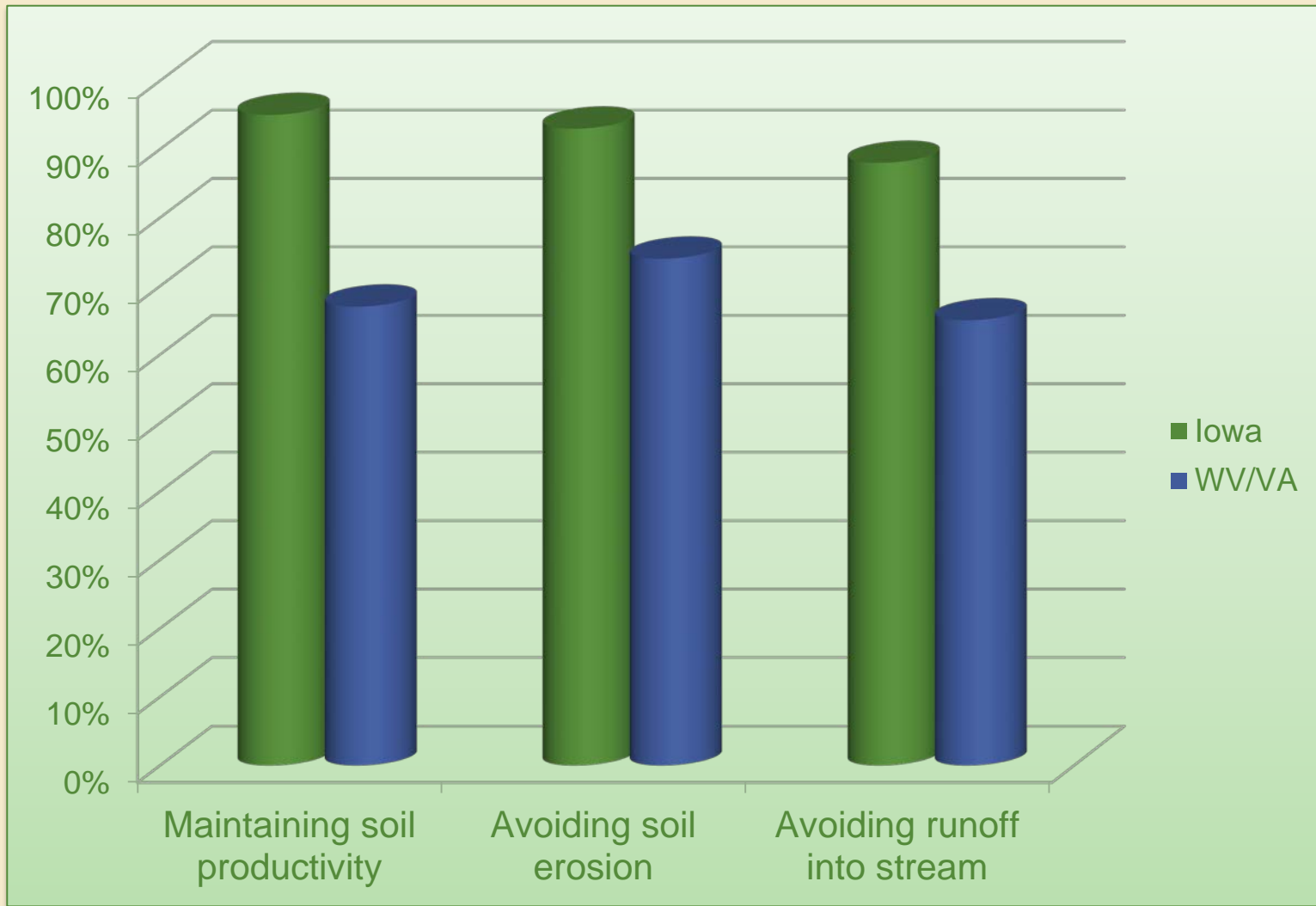
Topic	Who makes the decision?			
	Tenant	Landowner	Both	Don't know
Fertilizers & Chemicals	92.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cultivation practices	90.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Crop rotation	83.3	1.3	5.4	.2
Harvesting practices	82.2	1.3	3.4	.1
Marketing	76.6	2.0	5.8	5.1
Crop Insurance	83.0	1.3	5.4	5.7
Permanent Conservation	63.5	1.3	5.4	5.7
One-season conservation	82.0	1.3	5.4	5.7
Gov't program	69.9	7.0	5.4	5.7

You need to come talk to my landowner!

On my land, conservation is an investment, on the rented ground, it's a cost.

I'd be more likely to try cover crops if I was sure I'd have control of the land for more than a year at a time!

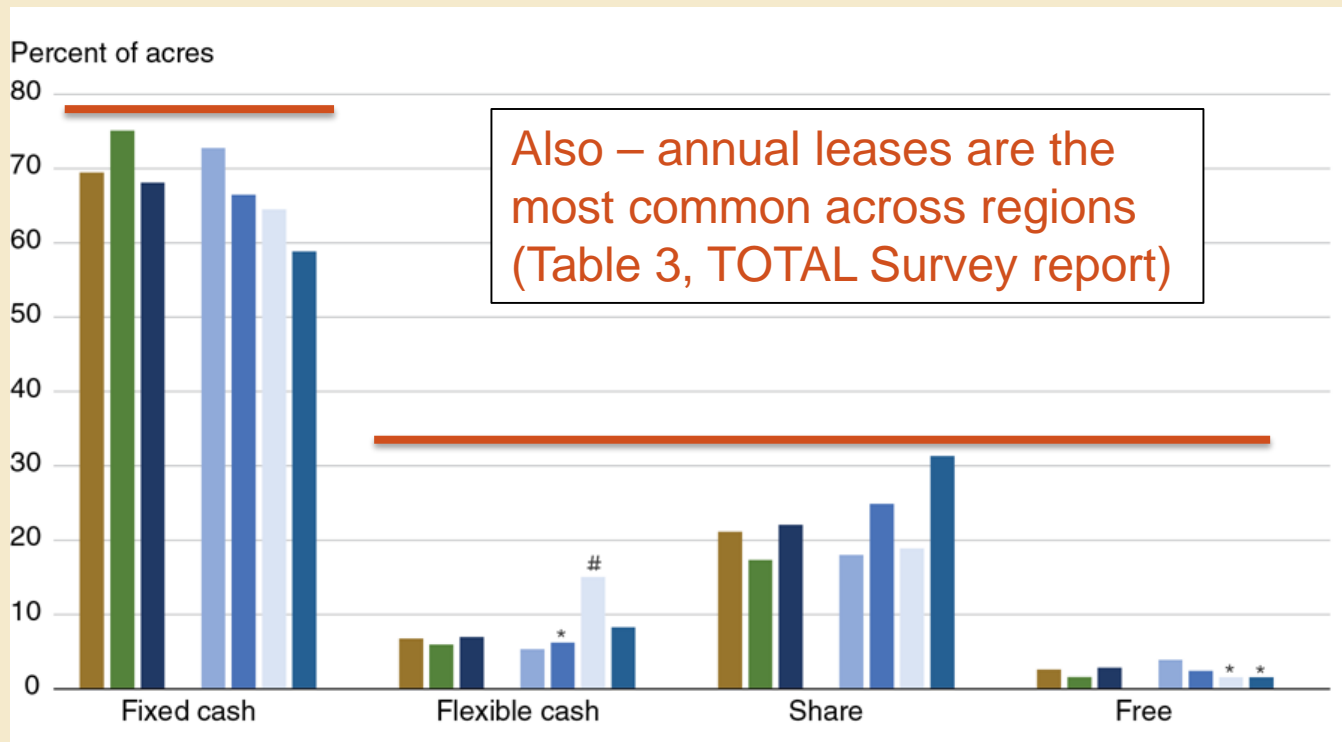
From the NOL: My renter does a good job...



Iowa: 2009 survey by J. Arbuckle, n=712

WV and Virginia: 2013 survey by Agren, Inc, n=251

Fixed cash leases are most common across the board...



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service and National Agricultural Statistics Service 2014 Total survey

Women in Iowa rent 77% of their leased acres using fixed cash agreements (Duffy & Smith 2008)

Conservation topics: sustainable leasing & talking to your tenant

- Requested topic!
- Lease discussion:
 - Cash rent
 - Flex lease
 - Share crop
- Peer to peer: rely on their knowledge!



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Women for the Land – new AFT initiative

Purpose: To understand, engage, and empower women landowners to adopt environmentally sound farming practices, protect farmland, and enhance farm viability, now and for the future.

- Build the **field of knowledge** regarding women landowners in conservation (research)
- **Women landowners take action** (outreach)
- Outreach specific to WNOLs **becomes “new normal”** (training)



Regional similarities... And differences

- Trustworthiness was the most desirable quality in a tenant
 - “Care about the land” is a quality equal to or second to trustworthiness
 - Conservation decisions:
 - 1-soil quality
 - 2-water quality
 - 3-future availability of land for farming
 - 4-biodiversity
 - 5-need for income
- How long women lease to the same tenant
 - How often they are in touch with their tenant
 - How often they discuss conservation with their tenant
 - Their primary sources of information
 - Comfort with government agencies

Summary & Lessons Learned



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- No silver bullets – this is hard work!
- Demonstrate a problem before offering a solution - not simply lack of information
- Multiple “touch points”, “lead nurturing”
- Land use and landowner demographics vary, but barriers to engaging them are similar
- Very “new” audience with unique barriers – remember the lack of farming knowledge doesn’t mean they don’t care
- Know your audience – messages tailored to white male farmers aren’t reaching or resonating with NOLs and especially not WNOLs

Recommendations & next steps

We also need to become innovators!

Quantitative plus qualitative: storytelling, listening sessions:

Learning about and accepting the multiple realities of understanding the world.

Social networks:

What already exists?

The message and the messenger – tailored to the audience:

Ag advisors, farm managers, tenants, landlords/ladies, owner-operators



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Saving the Land that Sustains Us

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