# Talking with your Landlord:

# LAND USE CHANGES

There are many landowners looking for young, innovative farmers who are promoting a sound conservation ethic as they look at the future care of their land. Gaining conservation, communication and financial skills will help Emerging Farmers stand out in the community and create a competitive advantage for building relationships with future landlords. This publication series lays the initial roadmap to help develop those skills and provide resources for continued growth.

## Prairie Strips

Strategically placed within corn or soybean cropland perpendicular to the flow of water, prairie strips are sized based on the farming and machinery needs of each farm. They can be re-designed to respond to changes in machinery or sediment deposition. Strips can be both in the field as a contour buffer strip and on the edge of the field as a filter strip. Prairie strips studies have shown that strategically converting as little as 10% of a cropped field to perennial prairie, in narrow patches along contours and foot slopes, can reduce sediment movement by 95% and reduce losses of nitrogen and phosphorus in runoff by 84% and 90%, respectively.

**Land use changes** like prairie strips, perennial vegetation and extended rotations are important practices that can help achieve the goals of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

## The Dollars and Sense

Prairie strips rank among the least expensive in-field management practices. The average annual cost of treating a farm field with prairie strips ranges from $24-35/acre. That includes establishment, management and opportunity cost per year. There are also cost share opportunities to reduce the cost to the farmer or landowner.

## Prairie Strip Benefits

- SLOW — Encourage infiltration and slow the flow of water
- Minimal maintenance required
- N — Keeps nutrients in the field
- Tolerant of weather extremes
- Creation of wildlife and pollinator habitat
- Reduced soil erosion
- $ — Income generation from hunting leases

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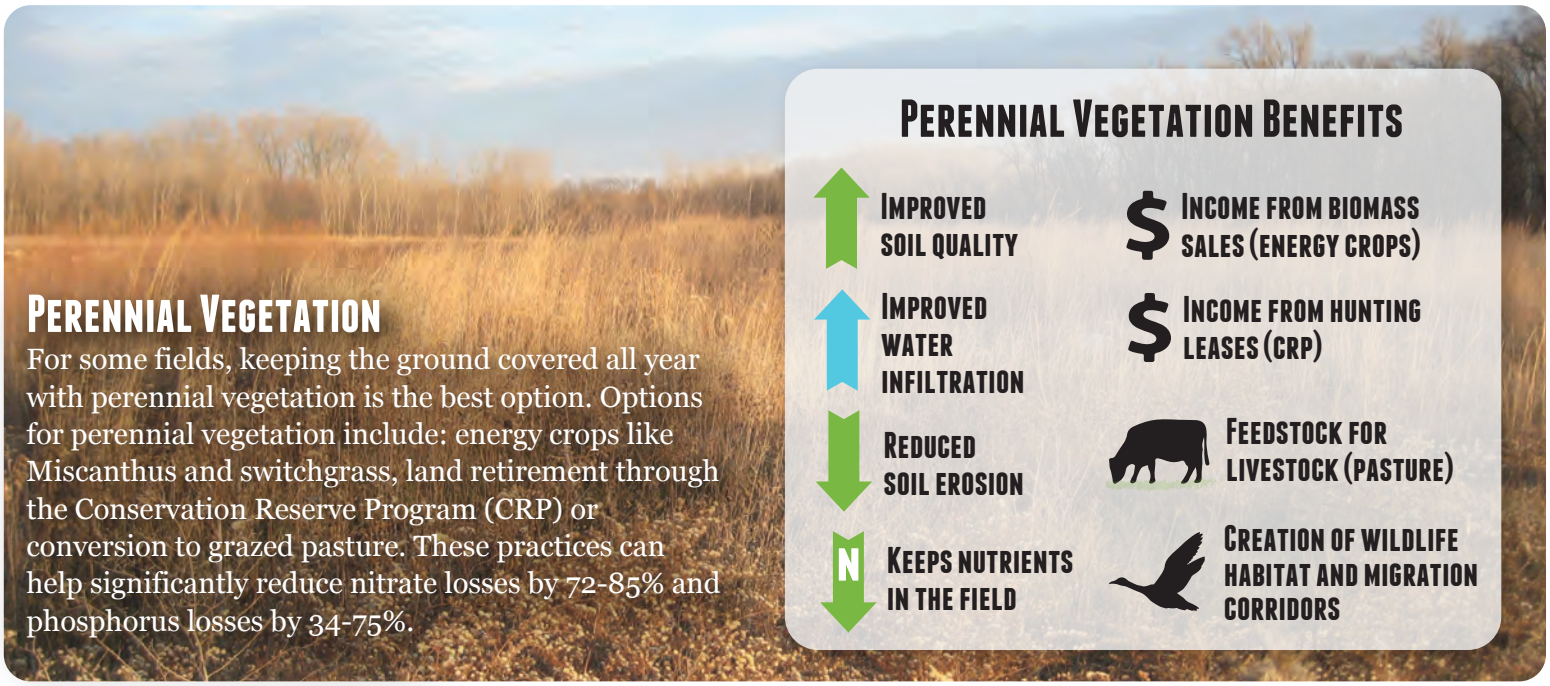
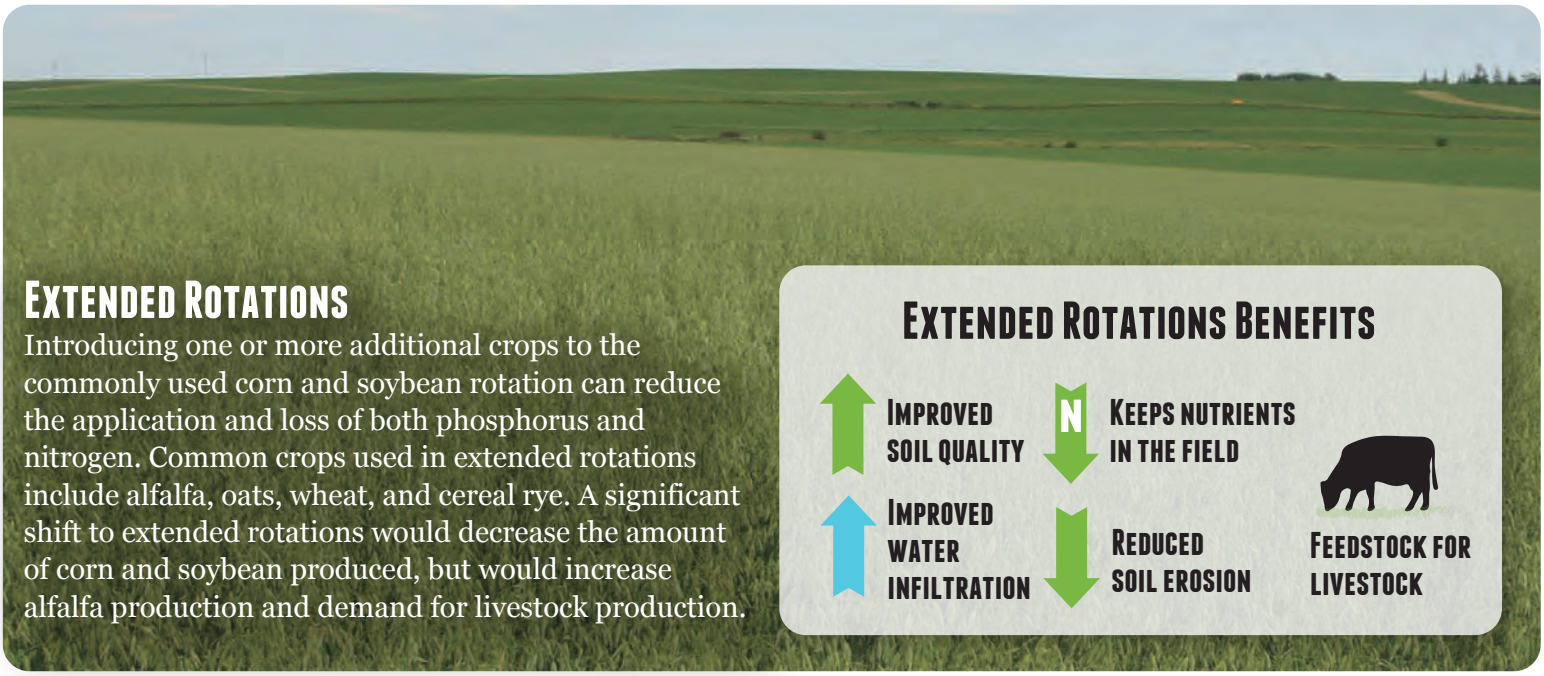


## Perennial Vegetation

For some fields, keeping the ground covered all year with perennial vegetation is the best option. Options for perennial vegetation include: energy crops like Miscanthus and switchgrass, land retirement through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or conversion to grazed pasture. These practices can help significantly reduce nitrate losses by 72-85% and phosphorus losses by 34-75%.

### Perennial Vegetation Benefits

- Improved soil quality
- Improved water infiltration
- Reduced soil erosion
- N Keeps nutrients in the field
- $ Income from biomass sales (energy crops)
- $ Income from hunting leases (CRP)
- Feedstock for livestock (pasture)
- Creation of wildlife habitat and migration corridors



## Extended Rotations

Introducing one or more additional crops to the commonly used corn and soybean rotation can reduce the application and loss of both phosphorus and nitrogen. Common crops used in extended rotations include alfalfa, oats, wheat, and cereal rye. A significant shift to extended rotations would decrease the amount of corn and soybean produced, but would increase alfalfa production and demand for livestock production.

### Extended Rotations Benefits

- Improved soil quality
- N Keeps nutrients in the field
- Improved water infiltration
- Reduced soil erosion
- Feedstock for livestock

## Start Small

It is important to recognize that it takes time to learn new management techniques. Consider using the practice on a smaller portion of the land and increasing each year, to learn new management skills to incorporate other practices successfully. Working with your landlord to gather information about the practice and addressing any concerns early will help smooth the transition to the new practice and minimize conflicts.

Your local NRCS staff and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach field specialists are available to meet with you and your landlords to help answer questions, provide resources and technical assistance.

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