



Talking Points: Approaching Farmers about Conservation Practices

Preparation

- Know what you need from farmers and why.
- Do what you can to understand the landscape conditions that you're hoping to change.
- Every landscape is different (as environmentalists well know), and farmers are less interested in general suggestions.
- Be prepared to make an economic argument. If you can't, consider rethinking what you're asking.

The Farmer/Environmentalist Relationship

Addressing the issue of mistrust that's grown historically between environmentalists and farmers is key to establishing a working relationship. You may be working for different causes, but the conservation measures for which you're advocating are mutually beneficial. Remember, however: *You're approaching them*, not the other way around. You may have to make the first show of trust—and that's never comfortable. Here's some ways to get started:

- Ask the farmer what s/he is already doing for conservation measures. This puts the farmer on the "right" side of the conversation, rather than on the defensive.
- Ask how those measures are working, and what problems they're still dealing with.
- Frame your conservation recommendations to address farmer needs. Specifically:
 - Reducing the workload to farmers (permanent solutions to gullies, pest control benefits of biodiversity, etc.)
 - Improve sustainability of land (crop rotations, cover crops, etc.)
 - Reduce costs/Increase revenue (CRP programs, fertilizer monitoring, etc.)
- Tailor your conservation recommendations towards the individual farmer's needs.
- Don't pressure. The mistrust between farmers and environmentalists means you may not see immediate agreement, even if the farmer sees your point.

Follow Up

- Go to the farmers, don't expect them to go to you.
- Follow through on your promises, even casually mentioned intentions. This will show farmers that you can be taken at your word (addressing mistrust).
- Some farmers *will not be interested* in conservation. Leave them be. Excessive pressure on these individuals will only strain relations more.