

Cover Crops and Soil Health: One Retailer's Experience

Betsy Bower, Agronomist



Ceres Solutions Go to Market Strategy

- Lead with agronomic expertise
- Solve customer problems using experience, information and services
- Build lasting relationships
- Continue to investigate products and services that create positive ROI
- We did 5 main things...



Overview: Cover Crops on the Farm

- Help a customer determine the goal(s) for cover crops on the farm and cover crop selection
- Put in perspective cover crop logistics ideal planting time and method, planting rate, termination timing and method, BMPs for no-till corn planted into grass cover crop residue
- Help determine when to terminate cover crops in the spring





1. Commit to Crops Team Training

- Assembled a Cover Crops Resource Guide
- Developed a Cover Crops Early Order Program
- Provided cover crops basics training using a webinar
- Planted cover crops plots with customers
- Provided agronomic programming for local SWCD field days
- Using cover crops enters into our every day conversations with no-till customers but also at times with conventional till customers

2. Promoted Early Order Booking

**2017
Jan 1 to
Feb 28**



Order by contacting your local Cisco Representative

- Winter (Cereal) Rye
- Ground Hog Tillage Radish
- Crimson Clover
- Oats
- Brazil Mix
- Winterhawk Annual Rye
- Hairy Vetch (Regular and Vallana)
- Purple Top Turnips
- Dwarf Essex Rape

Program Details

Option 1- Order/Pay 25% down on your 2017 cover crop needs before February 28, 2017 and receive a **5%** Discount. Balance Due August 2017.

Option 2- Order/Pay 100% down on your 2017 cover crop needs before February 28, 2017 and receive an **8%** Discount.



3. Planned Logistics: Business/Retailers

- Early order program is wonderful for planning, but....when will we get to plant the cash crop and will our cover crop mix need to change
- Broadcast spreading logistics - Using blender to mix seed – need to consider what is fields are to be applied following cover crops application
- Aerial application logistics – Size of plane, need to limit number of different mixes or have significant acres for each mix, need to devote manpower to load airplane and keep maps segregated
- Ag retail location logistics - How do you plan to move and mix cover crops – seed pro boxes, seed tenders, etc. have proven to be helpful
- Spring termination logistics - Will spring weather allow us to terminate cover crops timely? We need to be ready with a changeable plan that may end up being a termination product change depending on spring weather



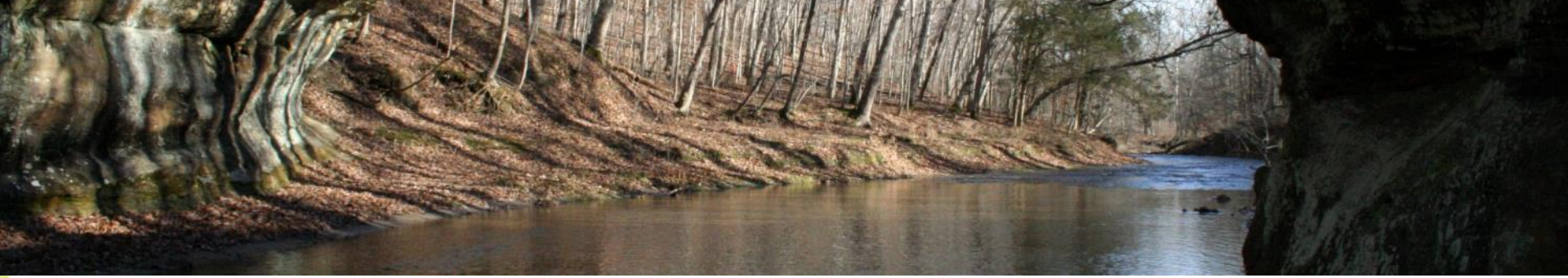
4. Maximized the Other Benefits

- Yes, Cover Crops improve soil health. PLUS...
- We have improved our working relationship with our local SWCDs and NRCS DCs
- We now can work on conservation together instead of in separate camps
- It leads to identifying other resource concerns we can work together on



5. Chose to Be Cover Crops Champion

- It takes a champion or champions - at the retail location:
 - To be willing to work with the customer
 - To work with the seed company
 - To work with the applicator
 - To make it all happen
- Not every retailer wants to be a champion, but when you find one, help make working with cover crops easy – In Indiana, we have those practical resources that help us!!!



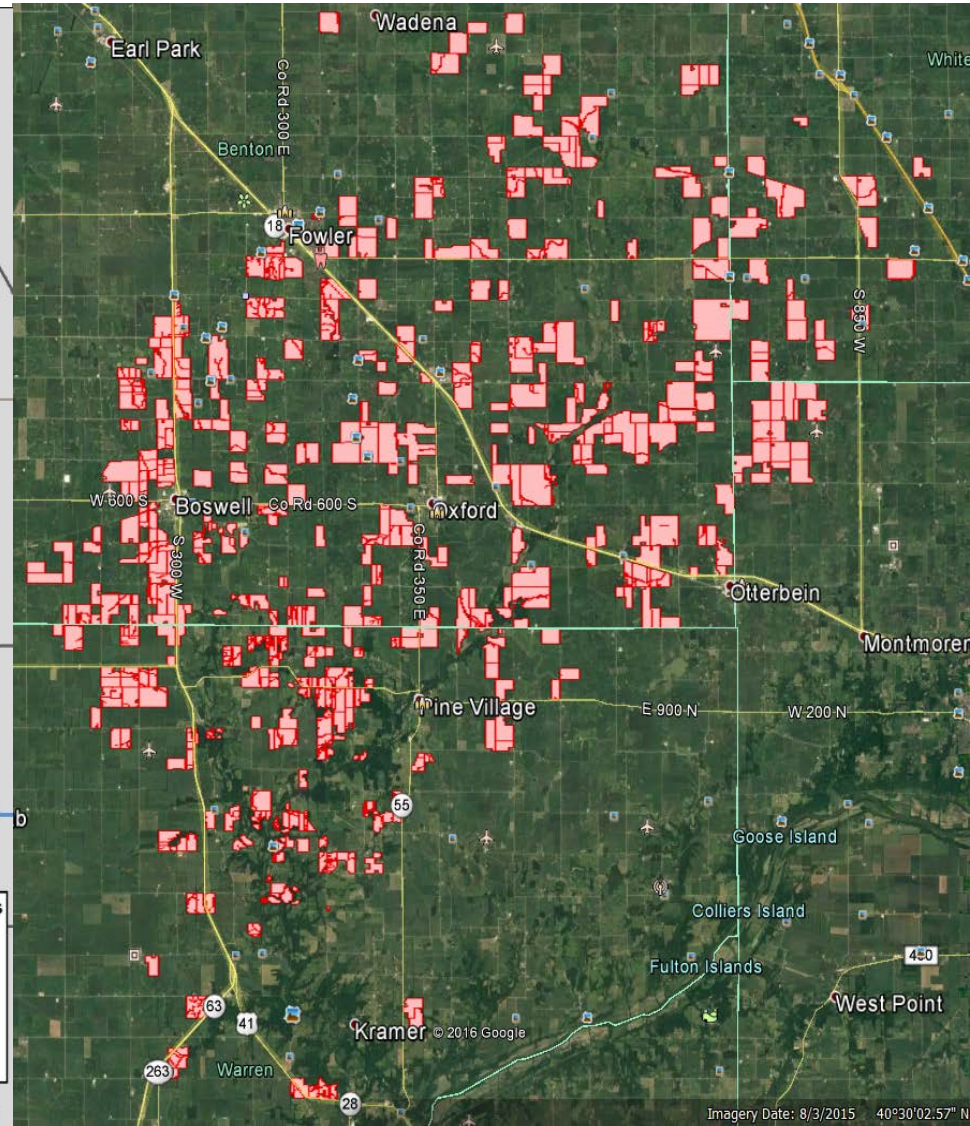
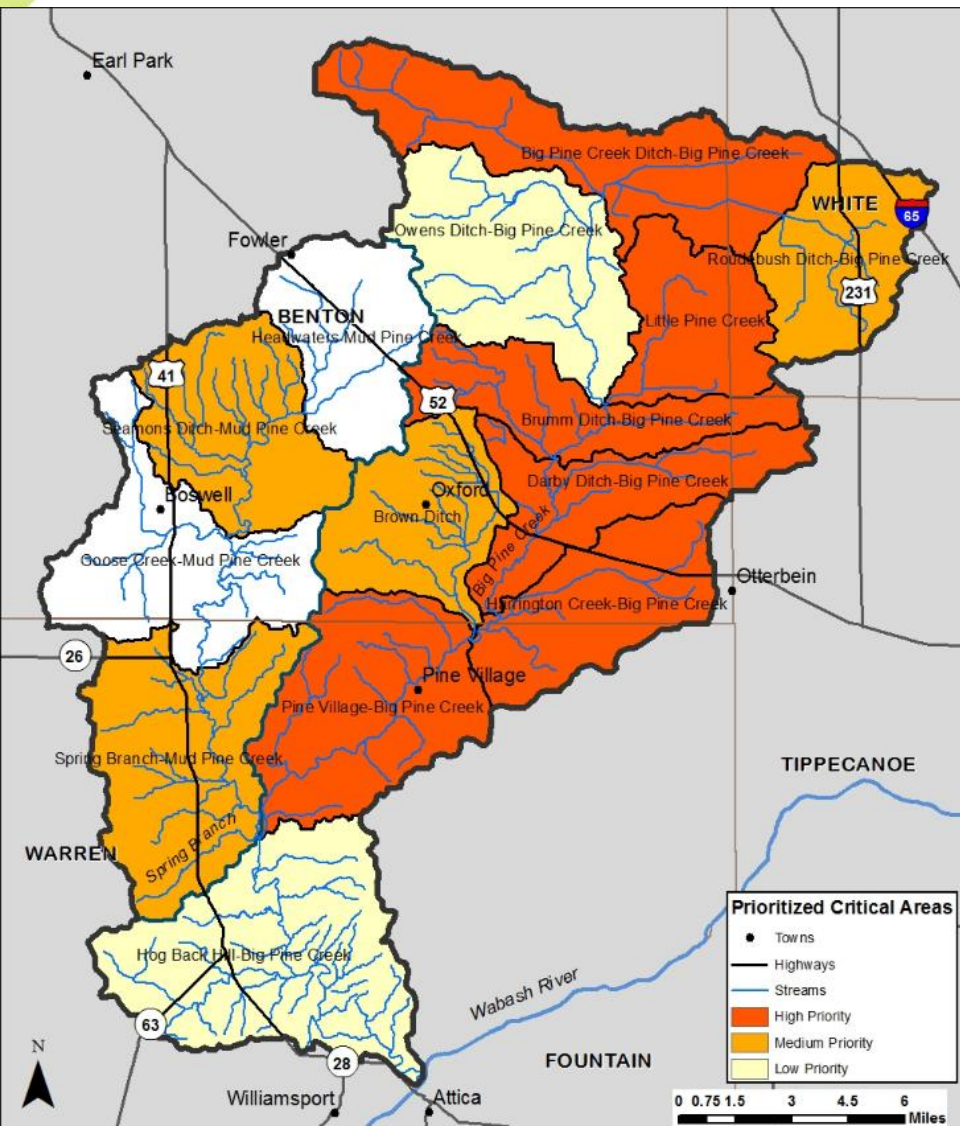
Ceres Solutions and Big Pine Watershed



Tom Stein and Betsy Bower, Ceres Solutions
RCPP (Regional Conservation Partner Program)



Current Winfield Solutions R7 Tool Mapping in Big Pine Area



Why?



*Templeton Manager
Tom Stein*

“It is the right thing to do for the watershed, for our customers, and for Ceres Solutions.”

- 2014 Templeton staff already engaged
- Nov 2014 hosted tour: Big Pine Creek Watershed Best Management Practices
- Summer 2015 – TNC sought RCPP partners; found CTIC, Ceres Solutions, Winfield United and Land O Lakes
- Spring 2016 – NRCS awarded the Big Pine RCPP over \$1.5 million in EQIP funding; Ceres support - \$1.37 million payment-in-kind services
- Improve perception of Indiana’s influence on hypoxia severity in the Gulf of Mexico. Indiana, Iowa and Illinois are considered bad actors.

Focus: Cover Crops and Nutrient Management

- Ceres Solutions offers time and resources to promote and help:
 - Select cover crop(s) – including species, seeding dates and rates, termination timing and product
 - Discuss and document nutrient management strategies for the farm
- Ceres Solutions helps customers with a pre-application by documenting fields, a cover crop plan, and potential interest in a nutrient management plan
- This project is very unique. We are the **first Ag Retailer in Indiana** to support such an effort; Indiana USDA-NRCS is extremely excited about this project



2017 Big Pine RCPP

- 22 applications were submitted
- 13 applications have funds obligated – 1 application yet to obligate
- Remaining 8 of 22 contracts will remain in the system for the next application round
- Roughly 20% of the funding for the RCPP proposal has been obligated.
- FUNDING **STILL AVAILABLE** FOR THE BIG PINE RCPP PROPOSAL



Ceres Solutions' Conservation Agronomy Initiatives

- **Betsy Bower**, Ceres Solutions Agronomist

A young boy with light brown hair, wearing a white t-shirt and brown suspenders, is standing in a cornfield. He is looking up at a corn cob on a stalk. The background is a lush green cornfield.

Sustainability is a journey,
not a destination.



**CERES
SOLUTIONS**

Centered on you.



Why...?

LAND O' LAKES SUSTAIN™

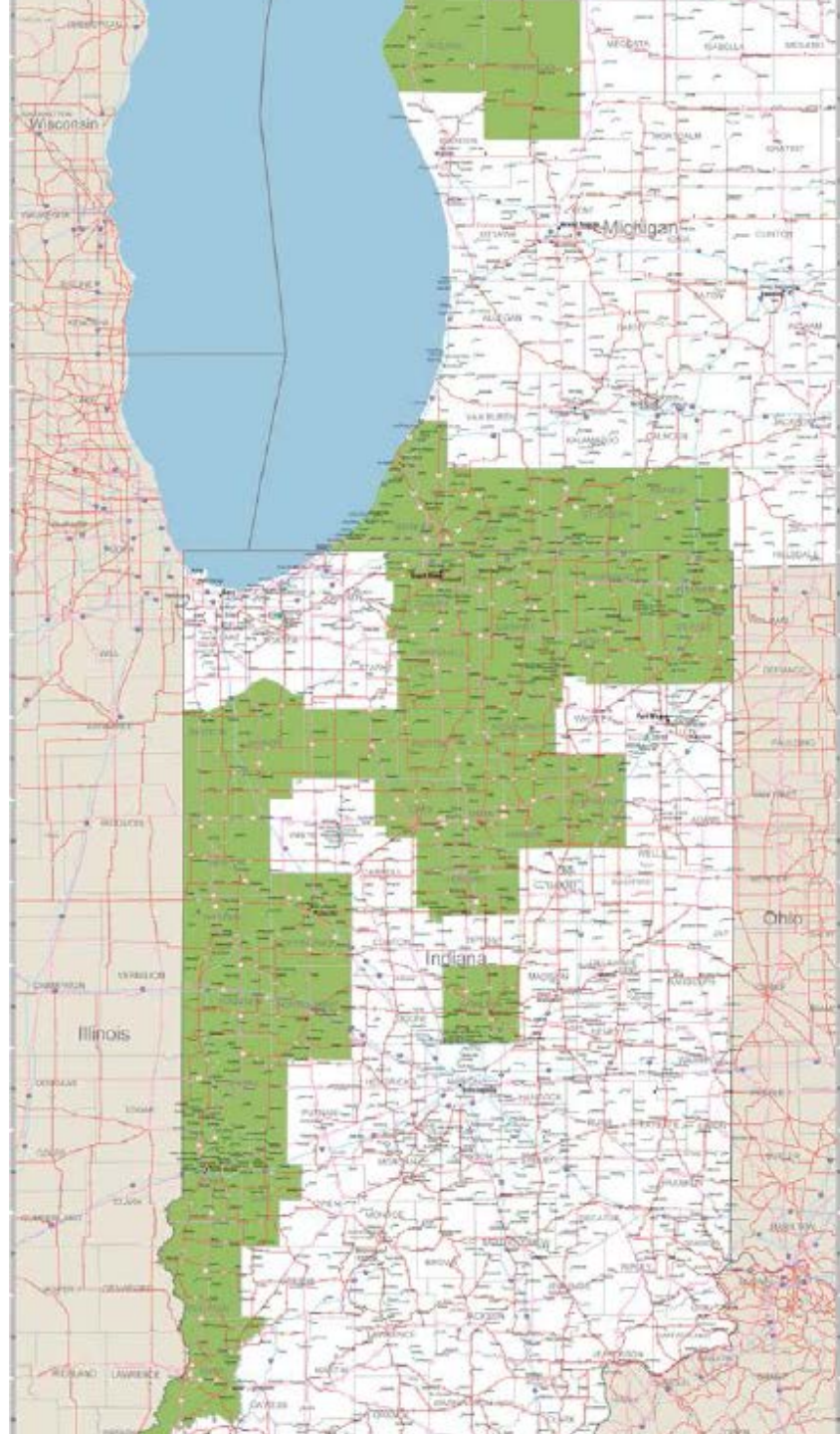
Why Ceres, Why Sustain, Why Now?

- **Relationships:** Ceres Solutions tapped because we serve customers with conservation mindset
- **Commitment:** to **reduce waste, improve soil health, and increase opportunities** for our customers
- **Experience:** team has conservation agronomy expertise and can shepherd this journey
- **Backing:** Land O Lakes and Winfield United are trusted resource partners for us all



Why You as a Customer?

- Sustainable production can offer opportunities
- CPG companies want sources
- Ceres Solutions Co-op (and you) are well equipped to lead
- Watershed locations... Wabash drainage heavily influences hypoxia severity in the Gulf of Mexico (IN, IA, IL in the news)
- As a customer you have **a positive story to tell.**
- So do we. Let's document it. Let's tell it.



Continuous Improvement

- All successful producers
- All good stewards of the land
- All want to improve their operation year over year

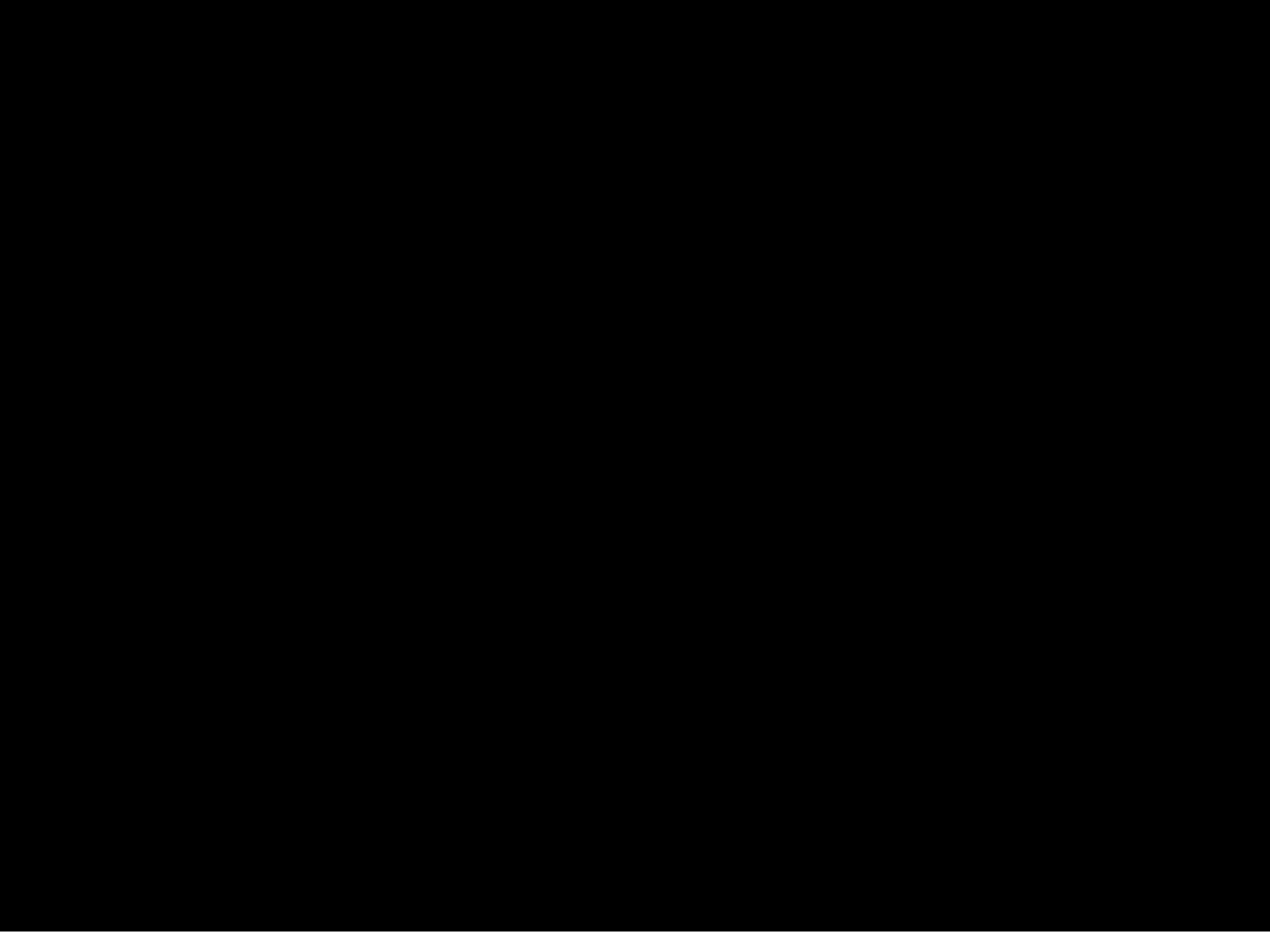


Ceres Solutions SUSTAIN is promoting and documenting conservation agronomy improvement year over year.

WIIFM: “What’s In It For Me as a Customer?”

Today:

- Many are already doing something. Sustain starts ability to prove it.
- Join like-minded producers with a wide range of expertise
- Access to a suite of a conservation tools. Better understand your resources.
- Increased visibility **telling your story** of conservation stewardship
 - Ceres Solutions SUSTAIN Farm sign
 - News feed to local papers, websites, power of video
- Collective voices engaged in more pointed discussions and potential conservation agronomy focused seminars and meetings
- Partners: Land O Lakes is a national food company. **Ceres Solutions is local.**





**What questions
do you have?**

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