Photo courtesy of Iowa State University

Prairie Strips

A win-win for farmers and water quality

What is a Prairie Strip?

A strip of native perennial vegetation strategically placed with a farm field. It retains soil, nutrients, and rainfall on farmland while providing habitat for pollinators and grassland birds. Research at Iowa State University[1] has shown that prairie strips can yield water quality and biodiversity benefits with minimal impact on crop production.

They Work in Wisconsin

Sand County Foundation works with landowners on voluntary conservation practices that improve soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat. That work includes establishing prairie strips with Wisconsin farmers.

The layout of a prairie strip is customized to fit cropping patterns and the width of farm machinery. Even the native seed mix is selected with the farmer's objectives in mind.

Our work with prairie strips began in 2017 on a handful of Wisconsin farms thanks to funding from the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) program.

We are looking to partner with more Wisconsin farmers in 2019 and beyond.

Interested?

Contact these Sand County Foundation staff:
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[1] Prairie strips improve corn–soybean croplands, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Oct 2017, https://www.pnas.org/content/114/42/11247

Design and management considerations:

Prairie strips should:

- Be at least 30' in width
- Occupy 5-10 percent of the field (depending on slope)
- Include a minimum of 30 native grass and wildflower species

Prairie strips require mowing for weed control in the first two years. Maturing native vegetation will crowd out weeds with minimal maintenance in subsequent years.

Sand County Foundation is working with farmers and the University of Wisconsin to estimate the performance of the prairie strips utilizing SnapPlus nutrient management planning software.


Photo by Jim Hess


Prairie strip in second season of growth

Learn more at:

Sand County Foundation
www.sandcountyfoundation.org/PrairieStrips

Iowa State University's STRIPS project
www.prairiestrips.org

Project sponsor

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