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CONSERVATION TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION CENTER AND THE FERTILIZER INSTITUTE SURVEY FARMERS' CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

More Than 500 Farmers Surveyed in Illinois and Indiana to Identify Current Environmental Management Practices

Washington, D.C. – A recent survey conducted by the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) and The Fertilizer Institute (TFI) has found that farmers in Illinois and Indiana are actively engaged in a variety of conservation activities including nutrient management; conservation tillage; integrated pest, disease and weed management; and developing grass waterways. The survey, which was adapted from a national survey conducted by CTIC and TFI in 2007, reached just over 500 farmers and provided a glimpse into how growers in those states determine which agricultural conservation practices they adopt and implement.

“Gaining a better understanding of how and why farmers adopt certain conservation practices is critical to TFI’s continuous efforts to develop programs and other materials that promote the safe and environmentally responsible use of fertilizers,” said TFI President Ford B. West. “This survey not only provides information regarding farmers’ current environmental practices, but also demonstrates the most effective outlets for reaching them with educational materials that will assist them in applying agricultural best management practices that will result in economic, social and environmental benefits.”

Survey respondents had an average of 31 years of farming experience and most often were 53 year old males. Ninety-seven percent of those participating in the survey grew corn, soybeans or wheat in the last three years and the total acres farmed by survey respondents represented just over a half million acres of cropland.

“It’s encouraging to see that so many producers are using a comprehensive system of conservation practices,” said Karen Scanlon, executive director of CTIC. “We know that many, many producers are doing the right things to deliver profit and protection of resources. Now, we need to share that story with other producers and encourage them to take the next step.”

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The comprehensive Web survey netted great results that also showed similarities to the findings of the larger national survey that was completed by nearly 2,000 farmers in 2007. The top messages from the survey completed in Illinois and Indiana follow.

- ***Half of farmer-respondents soil test according to state recommendations.*** Just over 50 percent of respondents conduct soil tests every four years and 75 percent claimed soil testing as a nutrient management practice. Nineteen percent of respondents stated that additional soil testing was not completed due to the cost of tests.

- ***Farmers participating in the survey are actively engaged in a number of conservation practices.*** More than half of the survey respondents have adopted the following best management practices (BMPs):
 - Nutrient management
 - Conservation tillage
 - Integrated pest, disease and water management
 - GPS yield monitor

- ***Nearly half of survey respondents feel that their BMPs are adequate.*** Top reasons cited by respondents for not increasing their use of BMPs include costs and returns, as well as the need for more technical information.

- ***Farmers responding to the survey identified several ways that they prefer to receive information regarding BMPs:***
 - Tours, demonstrations and field days
 - Farm magazines
 - E-mail
 - Internet Web site
 - Brochures and fact sheets
 - Information on CDs, DVDs and software

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- ***The top five most trusted sources for information on BMPs differed slightly for farmers in Illinois and Indiana.*** Farmer-respondents in Indiana stated Certified Crop Advisors; Cooperative Extension; Agribusiness; Soil and Water Conservation District; and the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) as their top five BMP information sources. Farmer-respondents in Illinois selected Farm Management Advisors; NRCS; local farm leaders; family members; and the state agricultural department as the top five sources relied upon for BMP resources.

CTIC and TFI plan to continue conducting additional surveys that are state-specific, commodity-specific and with retailers across the country.

“In order to successfully achieve benchmarks associated with improving and preserving land and water resources, it’s absolutely necessary that we continue this type of outreach to gather information from the agricultural community,” added West. “Although this survey has revealed that a number of farmers are choosing to implement fertilizer BMPs and other conservation practices, it also shows that there is room for improvement and knowing that reaffirms our industry’s commitment to educate the agricultural community regarding the safe and environmentally sensitive use of our products.”

CTIC and TFI worked with the Certified Crop Advisers (CCA) and the International Plant Nutrition Institute (IPNI) in developing the survey questions for the nationwide survey in 2007, which were adapted for the survey that was distributed in Illinois and Indiana. NRCS provided additional assistance by completing an analysis of the survey results.

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Conservation Technology Information Center, a not-for-profit organization located in West Lafayette, Ind., is the reliable source of information and technology for environmentally responsible and economically viable agricultural conservation. **Contact:** Karen Scanlon (765) 494-9555 or scanlon@conservationinformation.org.

The Fertilizer Institute represents the nation’s fertilizer industry. Producers, importers, retailers, wholesalers and companies that provide services to the fertilizer industry which comprise its membership are served by a full time Washington, D.C., staff in various legislative, educational and technical areas as well as with information and public relations programs. **Contact:** Sarah Monke (202) 515-2715 or smonke@tfi.org.