

Ecosystems Services and Idaho Farmers

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to understand how farmers in southeastern Idaho perceive, value, and use ecosystem services.

WHY FARMERS?

Farmers are stakeholders in ecosystems services because of their use of natural resources and economic and social influence. Farmers have an interest in the environment because it is vital to their daily life and work.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

Farmers throughout southeastern Idaho were recruited via phone calls, flyers, and community events. Thirty farmers provided in-depth interviews the summer of 2015 at community centers, churches, and cafes as well as farmer's homes, shops, offices, and fields. All the farmers interviewed were men, average age was 56. They manage farms from 100 to 10,000 acres. The crops they produce are grass, alfalfa, corn, wheat, barley, potatoes, and sugar beets.

BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH

As stakeholders in the ecosystem, farmers are tied together in a lattice of interdependence with other ecosystem services. Establishing trust with farmers is integral to solving ecosystem problems and concerns. These farmers were responsive to the opportunity to be interviewed in hopes of having their voices heard and their viewpoints expressed. The provision of the farmers' voice is a step toward valuable communication, better understanding, and development of mutual trust.



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What is your favorite thing about being a farmer?

"I just love to watch things grow. It's real exciting.
So I guess the most exciting thing for me is to watch the crops grow and turn into something that people can eat."

What about other people or organizations in this area, can you think of anything they could do to help you farm?

"The Ag organizations are extremely helpful, the crop consultants capabilities, the fertilizer production people, the insurance people. Those people are extremely helpful because it helps their bottom line also. It helps mine. So the amount of information, expertise, services that can come out of the local service people, organizations in the area, and fertilizer/chemical are excellent. Those people help you all the time."

FINDINGS

Have you implemented any conservation practices into your farming operation?

"We farm more land with the same amount of water and better water management. Also, some of the land I had was prone to wind erosion, so we plant cover crops. You leave residue to reduce that possibility. That is not only for conserving land but that is conserving my farm and my value. Those are synonymous with one another. Conserving the soil and conserving your own ability to produce is mandatory."

Are you worried about the health or availability of any natural resources in this area?

"I think the biggest worry is just keeping your water. In years past, you would think I've got my water right I'm good. It is not that way anymore. You just have to constantly be worried about that. It seems like your water is always under attack and I think it is going to get worse."

What are the biggest challenges you see to farming in southeastern Idaho?

"Not having enough water is one each year. These bugs is another one. The price for the crops is a big one....We feel like we are good stewards of the soil....We've planted windbreaks. I've planted probably 5,000 trees in my lifetime. Not that all of them lived, but the majority of them have. So we are trying to do things that will help save the ground. There's probably more things we could do, but to have somebody from--you get somebody east of the Mississippi trying to tell somebody out here what to do. It is just kind of odd because their experiences are different from ours. That part is invasive."

"Mainly the political side of things, the legislation trying to regulate, overregulate what we do. We are pretty good at regulating ourselves. Because if we screw our stuff up we are not here next year."

"You know one thing that I think we're faced with - It used to be that more people were from an agricultural background that were in the government, so we would get a little more of a voice. Now we are kind of looked at as a minority, especially when it comes to who has the money to support campaigns or whatever you want to call it. So, I think that our voice has gotten a lot quieter in agriculture. Until it starts to hurt real bad for us, then we try to be loud and try to put some money into it, but I just don't think that is there anymore. There used to be a lot more people that were. I mean that's how our whole nation grew up is with agriculture. I don't think we have much of a voice to just protect us from silly things sort of that can really do some damage."