Workshop: Federal and State Policy Issues and Innovations  
*Presenter: Michael Duffy, Iowa State University*

This presentation on the panel will follow two major themes. One will be a further discussion of the demographics of landowners and existing and possible policy surrounding this issue. The second major theme will be a discussion of a proposed policy that would shift the focus of commodity programs from production to a labor basis.

Landowners are aging and we are seeing a significant shift toward the elder age categories away from the younger categories. Today in Iowa 1 in 10 acres is owned by a single female over the age of 75. And, 28 percent of the land is owned by someone over the age of 75. In addition, we are seeing a significant increase in the amount of absentee land ownership. In Iowa, over one in five acres is now owned by someone who either doesn’t live in the state or only lives there part time. This is up from just 6 percent 25 years ago.

So what does this mean for the future and is it something that should concern us? This presentation will present the argument that the aging land ownership should concern us and it will present possible alternative policy options. Some of the policies are being used whereas others will be ones for discussion.

To date most of the commodities programs have focused on production. Payments were based on a per bushel basis. Not surprisingly the more production, the higher the payments. This system obviously is not size neutral.

One possible alternative would be to develop a policy that based payments on the amount of labor involved with the farming operation. The maximum payments would be set at some full-time employment level. The hours per enterprise will also need to be addressed. This session will outline the proposed changes. It will also address issues and problems that have already been brought forward.