Marketing Conservation to Absentee Landowners: Lessons Learned

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Overview

- Why is the absentee landowner audience critical to conservation?

- Is there real opportunity for working with this hard-to-reach group?

- What work has been done so far and what have the results been?

- What have we learned?

- Where to from here?
Why Absentee Landowners?

Nationally-

- 42% of the ag land owned by non-operator landowner
- 85% not actively engaged in decision making on the farm
- Less than 4% use professional farm management services

USDA ERS Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey, 1999
Absentee Landowners = Conservation Opportunity

- Majority indicated they rent their land to a local farmer instead of a family member or friend
- Most indicated they would feel comfortable encouraging their operator to use certain conservation practices
- Recreation or wildlife reported to influence decision-making a great deal
- Majority do not rely on their land as an important source of income
- Top 3 topics of interest are wildlife, soil, and water
Marketing & Outreach Efforts

Target Audience

- 1200 out-of-county landowners owning land in 4 counties
- Sorted from tax roll records
- High potential for CREP filter strip eligibility
Marketing & Outreach Efforts

Strategy

• Unique to pilot area, tailored to survey results

• Outside marketing/communications expertise

• Consistent branding, from local “Conservation Connect”

• Audience is a diverse group- convey same message, many times, many different ways
Marketing & Outreach Efforts

- Multi-media
  - Phone calls
  - Direct mail
  - Small group or one-on-one meetings
  - Local website, toll-free hotline
  - Other experimental- conference calls, bus tour, email

- Multi-contact
  - Minimum # = 6
  - Maximum # = 16

- Designed to move landowners through “AIDA” process
AIDA Model

**Awareness**
- Initial contact list minus undeliverables and requests to take off list

**Desire**
- Returning a response card, calling the hotline, requesting phone call or more info by mail
- Participate in meeting or personal phone call regarding specific parcel of land

**Action**
- Pursue CREP sign-up or other conservation practice

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Lessons Learned

• Very new audience

• Building to action takes time for landowners to consider and commit

• Targeting is most efficient, but difficult without more landowner/land info

• “Lead nurturing” is EXTREMELY important

• Challenging (at best) for field offices to provide necessary time and resources
Conclusions

• Critical audience in resource management

• Direct marketing can be very effective in engaging interest

• Lack of infrastructure, resources to effectively build relationships, “make sale”

• More work is needed to better understand best ways to engage action
Current Initiatives

• Landowner advocate
  – Similar to concept of patient advocate in hospital
  – Additional assistance to “new” landowners
  – Centralized point of contact
  – On-going follow-up (lead nurturing)
  – Sets realistic expectations
  – Facilitates communication- field office and/or operator
Current Initiatives

• Customer relationship management
  – Sharing of contacts
  – Consistent branding
  – Improved customer service
  – Improved efficiency
  – Profiling and targeting
Questions??

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