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Stakeholder engagement for conservation agriculture adoption

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Farmers and agricultural and conservation professionals at a field day in southern Michigan in Jul 2021, discussing innovative cropping practices, including relay planting, interseeding cover crops into corn, and “planting green.” Photo by Julie E. Doll.

There is wide-spread recognition that farming practices such as reduced tillage, cover cropping, and extended rotations offer the potential to transform agriculture to a more vibrant, resilient system that protects soil, air, and water quality. Expanding long-term adoption of these practices requires not only addressing technical and economic barriers that farmers face, but also social challenges and systemic policy and market barriers.

By engaging farmers and agricultural stakeholders through repeated, facilitated discussions across Michigan, the authors of a new *Journal of Environmental Quality* study confronted the barriers to adoption and identified approaches that can support more and better conservation-oriented management by producers. The primary theme emerging from these discussions was that there is a complex web of barriers and opportunities to changing on-farm management, including markets, social networks, human capital, and conservation programs.

Farmers are under cross-pressures from a variety of community constraints, market access and availability problems, climatic and environmental changes, and policies (governmental and corporate) when it comes to making conservation decisions. Through this participatory study, the authors developed a shared understanding among participants of these constraints and potential solutions to overcome them. Engaging with stakeholders is a necessary step to developing approaches to enhance the resilience of agricultural systems.

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Reimer, A., Doll, J.E., Boring, T.J., & Zimnicki, T. (2022). Scaling up conservation agriculture: An exploration of challenges and opportunities through a stakeholder engagement process. *Journal of Environmental Quality*.

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