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## Technology can improve soil and water health

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CARROLL, Iowa — A company in Iowa makes it possible for users to plan a conservation practice such as a pond or waterway with online software in a matter of 30 minutes.

Agren Inc. provides conservation planning tools that produce high-quality plans and accurate estimates for both private- and public-sector conservationists, which is important to Tom Buman, the company's founder and CEO.

Buman, who worked for the Natural Resources Conservation Service for 14 before starting Agren, has committed his life to soil and water conservation.

He wanted to find a better way for farmers and ranchers to get involved in conservation and because of that he uses the software to provide better, faster and more accurate estimates, he said.

"From my standpoint, it's all about giving a farmer a quick turnaround, giving plenty of information to make a decision and doing all of this at a lower cost," he said.

In a recent web seminar Buman showed others how to use the technology.

"In 10 or 15 minutes, you can get an estimate that people who use it say is within 95 percent accurate of the final estimate cost," he said.

This kind of technology has the potential to not only apply practices more effectively, but to also change the way technical assistance is provided to farmers and landowners, said Lisa Holscher, soil health program manager at Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The company is one of the many examples of how technology can make it possible to target, plan and apply soil and water conservation.

"Almost any technology can be used to highly improve conservation practices on fields," Holscher said. "The possibilities are endless."

She works with the Conservation Cropping System Initiative, a partner in Indiana's On Farm Network program that is working to promote and do investigations that can improve soil health.

"It's something we're all passionate about," she said of the initiative.

Farmers are able to use technology to target what works best on their operation for soil health and can use precision agriculture to make decisions, Holscher said.

Although the type of technology being used varies, one thing all farmers have in common is they are adapting and choosing technology that works best for their operation, she said.

"Most growers talk about adopting these practices for their families and the long-term stability of their farming operation," she said. "It's about the next generation and the next generation."



Ted Buman



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