



# Basics of Conservation Finance: Facilitator's Guide

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A curriculum for training conservation professionals and farm business management educators about the financial considerations of on-farm conservation practices

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# INTRODUCTION

The financial implications of conservation agricultural practices—such as cover crops, conservation tillage, and managed grazing—weigh heavily in many farmers' decision to implement them. Despite this, few of farmers' key advisors, such as conservation professionals and farm business management educators, are well versed in the topic. While the data on the financial implications are still emerging, there is a need to equip these professionals with the knowledge that is available to help them be more effective partners for farmers who are interested in implementing conservation practices.

This training is intended to increase knowledge of the financial impacts and considerations of conservation agriculture. With two different training paths tailored to the two main target audiences—conservation professionals and farm business management educators—the overarching goal of the training is to help participants feel more confident about having conversations with farmers and answering their questions regarding this important topic.

This Facilitator's Guide is for educators, such as those from university extension services who are interested in delivering this training in their state or local area. The training was designed to be replicated easily, particularly across Midwestern states. The training could be integrated into existing educational programming aimed at capacity building among conservation professionals, farm business management educators, and other farm advisors who play a role in helping farmers achieve sustainable and profitable operations. Its creators also encourage using the training to support existing or emerging local networks of these professionals.

This training is based in audience research with conservation professionals and farm business management educators. The research revealed that, in addition to limited knowledge of the topic, one barrier both groups face when talking about the finances of conservation agricultural practices with farmers is uncertainty about their role in such conversations, such as what guidance should they provide and when they should defer to others. This training aims to address that barrier.

Recognizing there are wide levels of expertise among conservation professionals and farm business management educators, this training attempts to serve its audiences regardless of their expertise level, with an emphasis on reaching those with limited knowledge and confidence about the financial aspects of conservation agriculture specifically. Thus, the training is best suited for conservation professionals with limited understanding of farm finances and for farm business management educators who have limited knowledge or experience with conservation agriculture.



NRCS/SWCS photo by Lynn Betts

## **TARGET AUDIENCES**

This training is targeted at specific key advisors many farmers work with to make their operations sustainable and profitable:

- **Conservation professionals**, such as extension educators, county conservation staff, soil and water conservation district (or equivalent) employees, state government staff, nonprofit professionals, and other professionals whose primary role is to help farmers implement soil and water conservation practices.
- **Farm business management educators**, such as extension educators and technical college instructors whose primary role is to help farmers manage their business operations and finances.
- **Other members of the agricultural finance sector**, such as agricultural lenders, may also benefit from this training.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Ultimately, the desired learning outcome is **when working with farmers, conservation professionals will address financial concerns about conservation practices, and farm business management educators will provide information about conservation programs and their impact on the farm business**. In both cases, these advisors tend to avoid the topic of conservation finance because they feel it is not their expertise, and they don't know the content or where to get reputable information. Below are the course descriptions and learning objectives we used to reflect what learners will get out of the training. Feel free to use these descriptions as is or tailor them to fit your needs.

### **CONSERVATION EDUCATORS: SAMPLE COURSE DESCRIPTION**

You know farmers want to learn how conservation pencils out, but do you find yourself unsure how to answer a farmer's questions related to the costs, benefits, and return on investment? This training will help you talk with farmers about what is known about the ways cover crops, conservation tillage, and managed grazing impact farm profitability. You will leave feeling more knowledgeable and confident about collaborating with farmers on improving soil and water resources profitably.

By the end of the training, learners will—

1. Be able to summarize how conservation practices impact farm profitability.
2. Understand common farm finance principles so learners have more confidence in discussing finance topics with farmers.
3. Understand boundaries between finance topics that conservationists should and should not discuss with farmers.
4. Be able to point farmers to financial information and advisors who can help them talk to lenders about conservation.
5. Know how and when to access and use existing resources, especially tools to compare profitability of conservation options.
6. Be able to identify how finance topics can be incorporated into existing programming and conversations.

## **FARM BUSINESS MANAGEMENT EDUCATORS: SAMPLE COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Soil health, regenerative agriculture, and carbon markets are a big buzz in agriculture these days. Are you prepared to talk with farmers about how practices such as cover crops, conservation tillage, and managed grazing could affect their bottom line? This training will cover the basics of conservation practices, what is known about how they impact farm profitability, and ways to finance them. You will leave feeling more knowledgeable and confident about supporting farmers' interest in making conservation practices work for their operations.

By the end of the training, learners will—

1. Understand what is known about the economics of conservation practices, especially timescale of ROI and cashflow.
  - a. Know where to get this data and how to interpret it.
  - b. Understand the quality of the data.
  - c. Understand how to assess the farm financial impacts of conservation.
  - d. Understand economics of environmental benefits—both on-farm and off-farm.
2. Have increased confidence in how to talk to farmers about conservation.
  - a. Be ready to equip farmers with the financial information needed to present to their lenders.
  - b. Know where to find financial data, agronomic advisors, information on conservation funding programs, and other resources and tools to provide guidance to farmers.



photo by Wisconsin Discovery Farms

## **DELIVERY CONSIDERATIONS**

While originally designed to be delivered virtually, this training could be done either virtually or in person. If using all of the modules, the full training is about three hours long, which could be broken up into two 90-minute chunks. If breaking the training into segments, especially if you are delivering it virtually, we recommend scheduling each session close together (e.g., a couple of days apart) to avoid losing participants and to support knowledge retention between sessions.

To stick to the three hours, speakers will need to adhere to the time limits suggested in the sample agendas. If you anticipate any of your speakers might take longer than the suggested time limit, we recommend building in some buffer time in your agenda. It is possible to omit modules if you feel any are unnecessary for your audience or if you have a limited amount of time to deliver the training. Generally, keeping the training as concise as possible is advised.

Consider opportunities to integrate this training into existing events, such as conferences. Also consider scheduling the training during times of the year when audiences are less busy. According to our audience research, conservation professionals prefer mid-summer or early winter, between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Farm business management educators also prefer a summer time frame.

Another consideration that emerged from the audience research is integrating a farmer's perspective into the training. For example, you could invite a local farmer who is experienced in conservation to speak about the finances of their decision or about how they think conservation professionals and/or farm business management educators might broach the topic in their conversations with farmers.

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR INVITING SPEAKERS**

The topics could be covered by many or few speakers. For a short event, getting two speakers to approach from (a) the finance side and (b) the conservation side will build credibility with both audiences. For a longer training or series of events, you might choose many speakers with expertise in different areas. Speakers should share a little of their own life experience with these topics as well as the technical information. A local speaker may have more relationships with participants and/or local topics as well.

Most speakers are not excited to present slides or materials they did not develop, as it's always difficult to intuit someone else's thought process. However, our slides are available as a template or jumping-off point to build presentations. Getting speakers to present information they're comfortable with is the best recipe for a compelling and authoritative presentation.

## **CURRICULUM COMPONENTS**

This section describes content identified as important for meeting the learning objectives. You will probably not have time to address all of these topics, so set priorities to suit your goals. The content contained in [the PowerPoint slides](#) (see page 13) reflects the expertise and priorities of the presenters we used. We expect that your presenters, too, will have their own judgment about components on which to focus.

### **FARM FINANCE 101 (FOR CONSERVATIONISTS)**

#### **PRESENTATION TOPICS:**

- Farmers' annual financial activities
  - Documents and tools – Balance sheet, Schedule F (Profit or Loss from Farming) tax form, enterprise budgets, cash flow projections.
  - Operating loans – What is the process? What are the constraints and considerations for the lender and the farmer as they make decisions about operating loans?
  - When and how conservation practices impact each of these financial activities (e.g., what a farmer would need to coordinate when signing up for a cost-share program).
- How agricultural lenders work with farmers.
- The basics of crop insurance and how it is yield-based.
  - How do conservation practices impact yield basis?
  - How can conservation options be designed to get along with crop insurance needs?
  - How do insurance agents talk about conservation?
- Approaches to financial management
  - Short-term vs. long-term financial planning and management.
  - Risk management (broadly).
  - Managing uncertainty and variability of climate and markets.
- How does conservation fit in?
  - Identifying and managing the risks of a transition to new practices.
    - Financial constraints to transitioning (e.g., equipment, fuel, and labor).
    - Access to adequate technical assistance.
  - Potential financial benefits of transitioning.
    - Reduce risk over time by increasing resilience/stability.
      - Potential input cost reduction.
      - Mitigation of risk in more volatile climate; and volatile input prices.
      - Less soil degradation.
    - Access to new markets.

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### CURRICULUM COMPONENTS

#### ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Walk through an example of a crop budget without conservation practices and then compare it to one **with** conservation practices. Consider showing a budget for grazing or agroforestry, which have timelines beyond one year.
- Have learners list all of the potential soil health benefits of a practice. Circle those which have a direct line-item cost or income associated with one of the tools, highlighting how most benefits do not directly affect farm budgets.

#### RESOURCES FOR LEARNERS

- *Fearless Farm Finances* by Jody L. Padgham, Paul Dietmann, and Craig Chase.
  - This book includes a useful glossary of farm finance terms.
- “[Developing a Farm Financial Model](#)” explains the basics of farm financial management.
- [Farm Cash Flow template](#).
- *Farming with a Future: Handbook for Farmers* by Flanagan State Bank.

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## CONSERVATION 101 (FOR FARM BUSINESS MANAGEMENT EDUCATORS)

#### PRESENTATION TOPICS:

- Types of conservation practices.
- The logistical and financial differences between (a) in-field practices, (b) edge-of-field or engineered installations, and (c) easements.
- Financial assistance available for conservation.
  - What farmers need to know to navigate the programs.
  - Components of program contracts and what a farmer should be looking for.
  - Local NRCS staff can advise on details of USDA conservation programs and how to implement practices.
- Importance of technical support (and mentoring) for success of practices. Any practice can financially succeed or fail depending on how it is implemented.

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## ECONOMICS OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES: AGGREGATED DATA

This presentation is intended for both audiences, though the presenter can use more financial concepts with the farm business manager.

This is the topic that people often expect when you say you will talk about the “economics of soil health” (i.e., Does it pay off for farmers?). The data is aggregated from many farms and is important for showing the range of possible outcomes. Try to avoid leaving listeners with the impression that cover crops or no-till are worth \$xx/ac. Rather, use it to show what is possible and to lead discussions about what financially successful farmers are doing differently from others.

## BASICS OF CONSERVATION FINANCE: FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

### CURRICULUM COMPONENTS

An important message to convey is the importance of multi-year data and projections for understanding the economic impacts of conservation practices. Single-year, crop-focused budgets aren't a comprehensive way to understand the economic impacts, since the economic and environmental results of conservation practices can take multiple years to manifest.

#### **PRESENTATION TOPICS:**

- Where to find the data.
- For the farm business managers, you can be more technical about cost/benefits, payback/ROI for various conservation practices.
- Data on impact of reduced tillage.
- Data on impact of cover crops.
- Data on agroforestry and grazing.
- Discuss the quality and limitations of the data.
- How to interpret data for localized use (e.g., Do the numbers apply to a particular soil or landscape, and how are they informative to a particular operation?).
- Contrast how to use aggregated data versus case study data.

#### **ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS**

- In small groups, generate a report in FINBIN for parameters of interest. Highlight regional differences and small data sets.

#### **RESOURCES FOR LEARNERS**

Here are a few sources with high-quality data.

- “[The Financial Implications of Conservation Agriculture](#)” is a summary prepared as part of this project in 2023.
- The [FINBIN database](#) allows users to create their own reports based on categories such as farm size and tillage.
  - [Instructions](#) for running cover crop reports in FINBIN are available.
- [The Conservation Economics & Finance Resource Hub](#) is a repository for syntheses of farm-scale economic data.
- [Precision Conservation Management](#) is an organization that integrates conservation practices and financial data.
- EDF [Financial Solutions for Agricultural Resilience](#) has produced several resources that synthesize data on the economics of conservation practices.

## FARM BUDGETING TOOLS

This content will be similar for both audiences. We considered giving people enough time to practice using one or two tools, but decided that would take too much time, and the “best” tool varies by user.

### PRESENTATION TOPICS

- Existing tools for evaluating the on-farm financial impacts of practices.
- Using budget tools to shift the conversation from “Does this practice pay off?” to asking, “Under what conditions can this practice pay off?” and “How do you reduce financial risk of failure and increase probability of success?”
- Budget spreadsheets for grazing and the importance of considering multiple years.
- The importance of picking one tool that is most relevant in one’s area or developing one’s own rough template. Learn it well and then work with farmers to complete it. Don’t expect farmers to use it on their own.
- How can budget spreadsheets be used to think about:
  - Uncertainty and variability?
  - Short-term versus long-term financial assessments?
  - Implementation and transition costs versus ongoing cost/benefit changes?
  - Variable costs versus equipment costs?
- The different “economics of conservation” (i.e., internal on-farm finance), which farm budgeting tools address, versus public (off-farm) economic impacts.

### ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Practice using a spreadsheet. How does the crop budget change when conservation practices are included?

### RESOURCES FOR LEARNERS

- Farm management budget calculators are found on the [MOSH economics page](#)
- [Pasture Project Grass Fed Beef Calculator](#)

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## LANDOWNER-TENANT CONSIDERATIONS

### PRESENTATION TOPICS:

- Landowner-tenant options for carrying financial burdens
- Drafting a lease agreement
- Considerations when the interest in conservation comes from the landowner versus the tenant
- Targeting women landowners

### ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Present a scenario and ask participants to draft a sample lease, or list the main terms that should be included.

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## BASICS OF CONSERVATION FINANCE: FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

### CURRICULUM COMPONENTS

#### RESOURCES FOR LEARNERS

- [Farm Commons: I need help creating a lease](#)
- [Drafting a Farm Lease](#)
- [AgLease 101](#)
- [FairRent](#) – A tool producers can use to evaluate their land rental decisions.
- Flanagan State Bank's [Organic Newsletter](#) – Contains several relevant articles that could be applied to the conservation context, including the following:
  - “What I Look for in an Organic Farm Tenant” by Rob Woodrow – [July 2019 issue](#)
  - “Organic Farm Leases” by Rob Woodrow – [November 2019 issue](#)
  - “Becoming an Organic Farmer Tenant” by Haley Wade – [March 2021 issue](#)
  - “Organic Farm Leases” by Rob Woodrow – [November 2022 issue](#)
  - “Is There a Place for Farm Management in Organic Farming?” by Russ Hiatt – [June 2023 issue](#)

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#### WORKING WITH FARMERS

The intent of this module is to give learners ideas and strategies for conversations with farmers. The content of this module is particularly dependent on the presenter's experience and what messages they have found valuable for working with farmers. Selecting an appropriate presenter is important. Conservationists were especially interested in hearing a fellow conservationist tell their personal story of why they learned farm finance and how that changed their work. Similarly, finance professionals appreciated hearing from a finance educator who had learned about conservation practices and programs.

#### PRESENTATION TOPICS:

- Basic principles of working with farmers; key messages include:
  - Build trust by listening and taking time.
  - Help farmers articulate and refine their goals.
- The conservationist's role in talking about finance; key messages include:
  - While specific financial advice is outside your expertise, you need to know enough to acknowledge the financial considerations farmers are facing.
  - Focus on agronomic advice to help growers manage the financial risk of adopting new practices.
- The farm business management educator's role; key messages include:
  - While you may feel liable for the advice you give, be aware when you are using fear of liability as a reason to avoid providing useful information.
  - Help farmers find the agronomic advisors who will help them be successful.
- How to use the data and tools presented in previous modules, such as:
  - One-on-one versus group settings.
  - Using a partial budget analysis as a learning tool (and the multiple effects of one change in the operation).

## BASICS OF CONSERVATION FINANCE: FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

### CURRICULUM COMPONENTS

- Strategies to get beyond the one-year horizon of an operating loan.
- Distinguish transition costs from the cost-benefit analysis of the future system.
- Interpretation of financial outcomes:
  - Long- versus short-term outcomes, considering resilience.
  - Profitability from cost savings and resilience (not just yield).
- Talking to your agricultural lender; key messages include:
  - Articulate your goals to get better help from financial professionals. This is a way conservationists can be helpful without overstepping a lack of financial expertise.
  - Go beyond the data. Farmers should be able to tell their story and explain why conservation matters to their farm.
  - Identify data that farmers should gather or track.
  - How agricultural lenders might view conservation decisions, particularly in relation to the four C's of credit.
- Consider different messaging for different farmer audiences (e.g., early vs. mid-adopters; landlords vs. renters vs. owner-operators).

### ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Role play discussing finances with a farmer who is (a) very excited about the soil health benefits of cover crops but has a reluctant landlord or (b) a farmer who is sure they'll lose money on corn and soybeans if they add cover crops.
- Group discussions of how to apply the lessons:
  - Where can conservation finance topics be incorporated into existing programming?
  - How can conservationists and finance educators collaborate on their programming?

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### CARBON MARKETS: A SPECIAL CASE

In the pilot training, we chose not to cover carbon markets, given the high level of uncertainty around them. But we acknowledged the topic and explained why we were not covering it. Given the salience of the topic, it might be worth doing similarly in your training.

### PRESENTATION TOPIC:

- How carbon markets are different from other conservation practices and conservation finance options.

### RESOURCES FOR LEARNERS

- [How to Grow and Sell Carbon Credits in US Agriculture](#)
- [Farmers' Guide Carbon Market Contracts in Minnesota](#)

## SLIDE SETS

The following presentations were prepared for the pilot sessions of this training presented in July 2023. You can use these as starting points, but the actual content you use will be driven by the presenters you recruit. [Click here](#) to access the slide sets.

| Slide Set                      | Original Creator(s)   | Notes   |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Farm Finance 101               | Paul Dietmann, Compeer Financial  | Targeted at conservationists to explain what financial records farmers use and how they work with ag lenders  |
| Farm Finance 101 Alternative   | Sarah Hoerner, (formerly) Flanagan State Bank   | Goes into more detail on financial records  |
| Conservation 101               | Serge Koenig, Sauk County Land Resources and Environment  | Targeted at farm business management educators. This training focuses on in-field practices, but we included pictures of edge-of-field practices at the end in case they are useful for your situation. |
| Aggregated Data                | Vincent Gauthier, Environmental Defense Fund  |   |
| Enterprise Budgeting Tools     |   | A single slide for talking about how to use enterprise budget spreadsheets  |
| Landlord-Tenant considerations | Lauren Manning, (formerly) Croatan Institute; Sarah Hoerner, (formerly) Flanagan State Bank             |   |
| Working with Farmers           | Serge Koenig, Sauk County Land Resources and Environment; Sarah Hoerner, (formerly) Flanagan State Bank |   |
| Carbon Markets                 | Anna Cates, University of Minnesota Extension   | Two slides explaining why this training does not address carbon market contracts  |

To see how these slide sets were used in the 2023 pilot training, watch the recordings on the [North Central Region Water Network's YouTube channel](#).

# SAMPLE AGENDAS

## CONSERVATION EDUCATORS: TWO 90-MINUTE WEBINARS

### SESSION 1

| Minutes | Module   | Facilitation Notes   |
|---------|--|--|
| 15      | Welcome and Introductions<br><br><b>Consider Including</b><br>Carbon Markets: Why we aren't talking about this | <p>Networking is useful for this audience. If the group is too large for everyone to introduce themselves, consider asking people to introduce themselves in small groups using breakout rooms.</p> <p><b>SUGGESTED POLLS</b></p> <p><b>What is your professional affiliation?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local government unit</li> <li>• State or Federal government</li> <li>• Research/educational institution</li> <li>• Non-profit</li> <li>• Type "Other" in the chat</li> </ul> <p><b>How confident are you with farm finance topics?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very</li> <li>• Some</li> <li>• A little</li> <li>• Not at all</li> </ul> |
| 40      | Farm Finance 101   | <p><b>SUGGESTED POLL</b></p> <p><b>Which of these people do you know well enough to talk to about conservation finance topics?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm lender from a bank</li> <li>• Farm lender from a credit association</li> <li>• Farm business management educator</li> <li>• Other (type in the chat)</li> <li>• I don't have a good contact for conservation finance information</li> </ul>   |

| Minutes | Module                          | Facilitation Notes  |
|---------|---------------------------------|---|
| 25      | Landowner-Tenant Considerations | <p><b>SUGGESTED POLL AND DISCUSSION QUESTION</b></p> <p><b>Has a land rent contract been a barrier to you completing a government incentive contract with a farmer?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Yes, I was working with a willing landowner.</li><li>• Yes, I was working with a willing renter.</li><li>• No, this hasn't been a barrier.</li></ul> <p><b>As conservationists, what is the key outreach we need to do to address these barriers? (Type answers in the chat.)</b></p> |



NRCS/SWCS photo by Lynn Betts

## SESSION 2

| Minutes | Module   | Facilitation Notes  |
|---------|--|---|
| 5       | Welcome  |   |
| 40      | Economics of Conservation Practices: Aggregated Data | <p><b>SUGGESTED POLLS</b></p> <p><b>[Ask at the beginning]: Which of these systems do you think are fairly likely to be profitable for a farmer in your area?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cover crops</li> <li>• No-till</li> <li>• Rotational grazing</li> <li>• Cover crops with no-till</li> <li>• Cover crops with grazing</li> </ul> <p><b>In your observations of cover crop economics, what is the most important factor for profitability?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equipment fit for system</li> <li>• Good growing season</li> <li>• CC planting or termination timing</li> <li>• Cost-share</li> <li>• Severity of soil degradation</li> <li>• Adjustments in other input costs</li> <li>• Experience or mindset of the farmer</li> <li>• Type "Other" in the chat</li> </ul> <p><b>[Ask at the end]: Now, which of these systems do you think are fairly likely to be profitable for a farmer in your area?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cover crops</li> <li>• No-till</li> <li>• Rotational grazing</li> <li>• Cover crops with no-till</li> <li>• Cover crops with grazing</li> <li>• Other systems (type in the chat)</li> </ul> |

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### SAMPLE AGENDAS

| Minutes | Module               | Facilitation Notes   |
|---------|----------------------|--|
| 30      | Working with Farmers | <p><b>SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTION AND POLL</b></p> <p><b>What's a question you ask farmers to get to know them and build trust? (Type answers in the chat.)</b></p> <p><b>Which farm records have you looked at with a farmer?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial statement</li><li>• Tax returns</li><li>• Accounting records</li><li>• Acres of crops grown</li><li>• Off-farm income records</li><li>• Input expenses</li><li>• Leases</li><li>• Contracts</li><li>• Custom work agreements</li><li>• Insurance policy</li><li>• None of the above</li></ul> |
| 5       | Farm Budgeting Tools | <p><b>SUGGESTED POLL</b></p> <p><b>Which of these tools have you used?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NRCS Cover Crops Economics Tool (Iowa NRCS)</li><li>• Net Returns Calculator for Cover Crops Terminated with Herbicides (ISU)</li><li>• Economics of Cover Crops (ISU)</li><li>• Soil Health Economic Calculator (AFT)</li><li>• Crop budget analyzer (UW)</li><li>• Iowa six-year cover crop and no-till transition budget (EDF, PFI)</li><li>• Cover Crop Economic Decision Tool (UMN)</li><li>• None of the above</li></ul>                                    |
| 10      | Wrap-up              | <p><b>SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTION</b></p> <p><b>What are ways that you could collaborate with finance professionals? (Type answers in the chat.)</b></p>   |

## FARM BUSINESS MANAGEMENT EDUCATORS: TWO 90-MINUTE WEBINARS

### SESSION 1

| Minutes | Module   | Facilitation notes  |
|---------|--|---|
| 15      | Welcome and Introductions<br><br><b>Consider Including</b><br>Carbon Markets: Why we aren't talking about this | <p>Networking is useful for this audience. If the group is too large for everyone to introduce themselves, consider asking people to introduce themselves in small groups in breakout rooms.</p> <p><b>SUGGESTED POLLS</b></p> <p><b>What is your professional affiliation?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local government unit</li> <li>• State or Federal government</li> <li>• Research/educational institution</li> <li>• Non-profit</li> <li>• Type "Other" in the chat</li> </ul> <p><b>How confident are you talking about soil and water conservation topics?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very</li> <li>• Some</li> <li>• A little</li> <li>• Not at all</li> </ul> |
| 40      | Conservation 101   |   |
| 30      | Landowner-Tenant Considerations  | <p><b>SUGGESTED POLL</b></p> <p><b>Has a land rent contract been a barrier to you completing a government incentive contract with a farmer?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, I was working with a willing landowner.</li> <li>• Yes, I was working with a willing renter.</li> <li>• No, this hasn't been a barrier.</li> </ul>  |

## BASICS OF CONSERVATION FINANCE: FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

### SAMPLE AGENDAS

#### SESSION 2

| Minutes | Module   | Facilitation Notes   |
|---------|--|--|
| 5       | Welcome  |  |
| 40      | Economics of Conservation Practices: Aggregated Data | We recommend doing 25 minutes of presentation and 15 minutes of Q&A  |
| 40      | Working with Farmers                                 | <p><b>SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTION AND POLL</b></p> <p><b>What's a question you ask farmers to get to know them and build trust? (Type answers in the chat.)</b></p> <p><b>Which farm records have you looked at with a farmer?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial statement</li><li>• Tax returns</li><li>• Accounting records</li><li>• Acres of crops grown</li><li>• Off-farm income records</li><li>• Input expenses</li><li>• Leases</li><li>• Contracts</li><li>• Custom work agreements</li><li>• Insurance policy</li><li>• None of the above</li></ul> |
| 5       | Farm Budgeting Tools                                 | <p><b>SUGGESTED POLL</b></p> <p><b>Which of these tools have you used?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NRCS Cover Crops Economics Tool (Iowa NRCS)</li><li>• Net Returns Calculator for Cover Crops Terminated with Herbicides (ISU)</li><li>• Economics of Cover Crops (ISU)</li><li>• Soil Health Economic Calculator (AFT)</li><li>• Crop budget analyzer (UW)</li><li>• Iowa six-year cover crop and no-till transition budget (EDF, PFI)</li><li>• Cover Crop Economic Decision Tool (UMN)</li><li>• None of the above</li></ul>                                    |
| 5       | Wrap-up  | <p><b>SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTION</b></p> <p><b>What are ways that you could collaborate with conservation professionals to enhance finance education? (Type answers in the chat.)</b></p>   |

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources, developed in conjunction with this training, could be shared with participants to supplement their learning. The conservation practices both focus on are cover crops, conservation tillage, nutrient management, and managed grazing.

**Conservation Economics & Finance Resource Hub** – This is a collection of case studies, reports, and other research-based materials that have examined the profitability of conservation practices on farms within the North Central Region.

**The Financial Implications of Conservation Agriculture: Insights from Analyses of Farms in the Upper Midwest** – This booklet aims to inform conservation professionals, farm business management educators, and agricultural lenders about the financial costs and benefits of conservation agriculture practices to assist their work with farmers.

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## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This Facilitator's Guide is an outcome of a North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant called "Closing the Financial Information Gap in Conservation Agriculture." The project is a collaboration between the North Central Region Water Network, the University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension, the University of Minnesota Water Resources Center, Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), Compeer Financial, and Croatan Institute. Through training and resource development, the project aimed to increase knowledge about the financial impacts of conservation practices among conservation educators, farm business management educators, and agricultural lenders to enhance their abilities to support farmers' decisions.

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## Basics of Conservation Finance: Facilitator's Guide



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