



INTEGRATED STRATEGIES TO REDUCE NUTRIENT LOSS AND REGENERATE SOILS IN ILLINOIS

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Part 1: Market Drivers Overview

Part 2: Policy Briefs

Part 3: Soil Carbon Strategy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nutrient losses and soil degradation are symptomatic of the current state of agricultural systems that define much of the Illinois landscape. Excessive nutrients in waterways are currently the leading cause of water quality impairments in the Midwest and across the globe. Furthermore, the loss of soil and its carbon-rich organic matter is detrimental to crop cultivation, water quality and infiltration, nutrient cycling, pest moderation, as well as the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Though federal and state agencies have developed strategies to combat these issues, it is apparent that their success will require extensive new collaborations, innovation in tools and approaches, and significant financial resources. This report examines a range of approaches to drive improvements in agricultural systems that rebuild soil health and reduce nutrient losses in Illinois. The findings and recommendations are broken into a three-part series, described below:

The first part outlines market drivers that could provide mechanisms to advance the plans proposed in the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRs), in addition to various policy and social drivers that could be leveraged in Illinois. These range from initiatives that are already in place to ideas that build on existing programs to new approaches that have not yet been implemented at a large scale or in the agricultural sector. These include low-cost financing through the state revolving fund, pay-for-performance incentive programs, supply chain initiatives, emerging mechanisms for investors, and risk mitigation.

The second part focuses on the role of Illinois state agencies in advancing the NLRs and highlights the opportunities to leverage resources that support its implementation. The three areas of attention include: realigning the state revolving fund program, piloting a pay-for-performance conservation approach, and incentivizing long-term conservation by providing for land tenure security.

The third part identifies opportunities for broader programmatic alignment between the NLRs and soil health to move toward a recarbonized rural landscape that provides water quality, climate and community benefits. This section also provides a snapshot of available models and tools highlighting the gaps and opportunities in utilizing those tools to support successful development and adoption of market drivers, reducing pollution, and strengthening the sustainability of agricultural systems in Illinois.

About Delta Institute

Established in 1998, Delta Institute is a Chicago-based nonprofit organization that collaborates with communities to solve complex environmental challenges across the Midwest. Delta Institute works to achieve landscape-level impacts through its agriculture and water quality programs by working in partnership with farmers, agricultural retailers, local and national nonprofits, conservation districts, and state and federal partners.

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