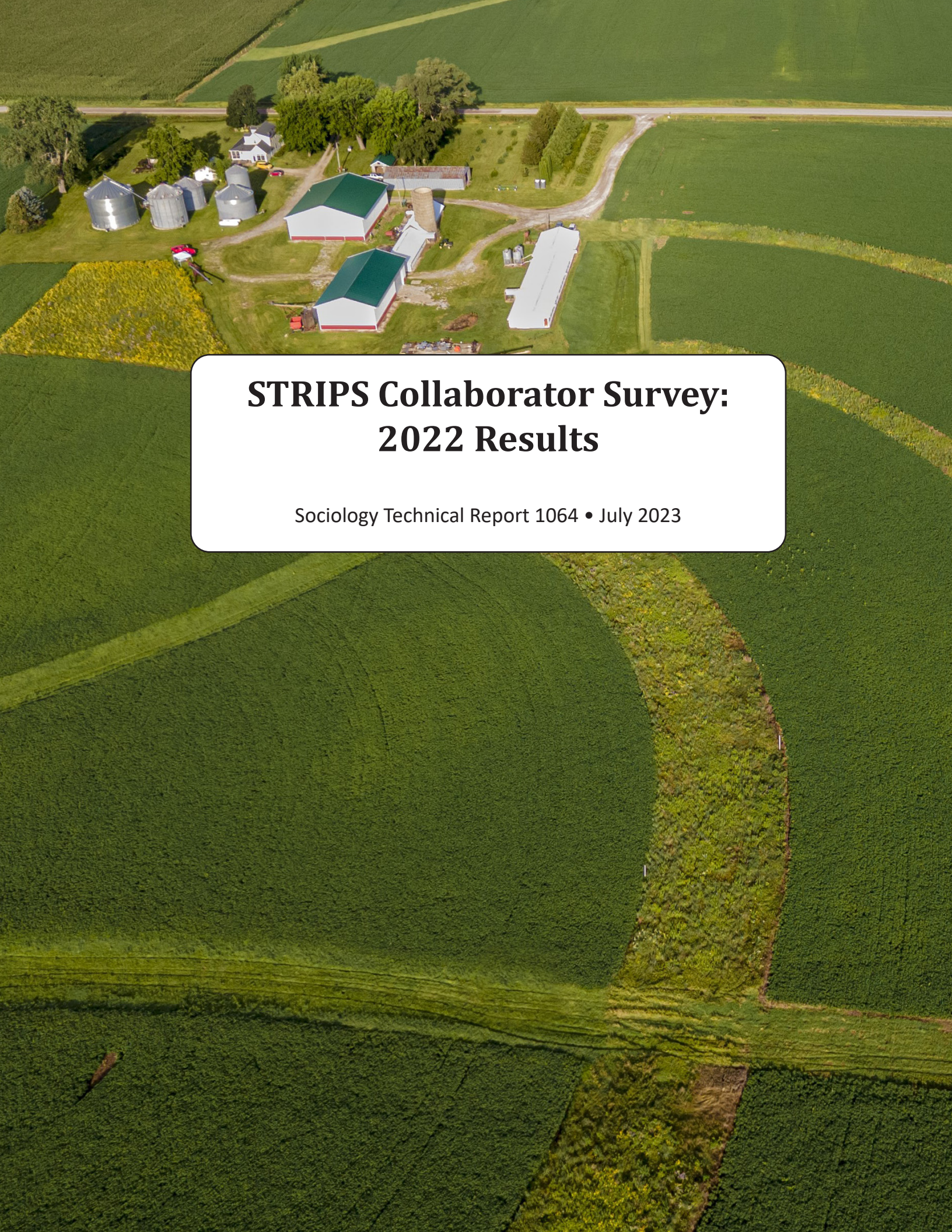

STRIPS Collaborator Survey: 2022 Results

Sociology Technical Report 1064 • July 2023

The research summarized in this report was conducted as part of the STRIPS project. STRIPS stands for Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips. Since 2007, the long-term project has been measuring the impacts of strategically planting prairie strips in crop fields across Iowa. Research has shown that small amounts of prairie can yield disproportionate, multi-functional benefits to soils, water quality, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity.

Find more information about the STRIPS project online at http://www.prairiestrips.org.

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Contact Information

J. Gordon Arbuckle Jr. is a Professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Iowa State University. Contact: 515-294-1497 or arbuckle@iastate.edu.

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Introduction

The STRIPS (Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips) project has developed collaborative partnerships with more than 50 farmers, landowners, and organizations that have integrated prairie strips into their farm landscapes. One of the STRIPS project's guiding principles is to "create and maintain feedback loops for information sharing among team members, farmer/farm landowner adopters, and other stakeholders." A major goal of these feedback loops is to learn from collaborators who have adopted prairie strips so project staff and partners can help current (and future) collaborators to successfully establish and manage prairie strips.

An important part of those feedback loops is an annual, web-based survey of STRIPS collaborators who have established prairie strips. The purpose of the survey is to learn about collaborating landowners' experiences with the establishment and management of prairie strips to help project staff understand (1) what positive and negative experiences they have had, (2) what information and technical assistance needs they may have, and (3) to learn from their ideas about how the STRIPS team can improve outreach and promotional efforts. This year's survey, which asked about collaborators' experiences with their prairie strips in 2022, consisted of 10 open-ended questions and three yes/no questions (Q11-13):

Experiences with prairie strips:

Q1. What have been some of your positive experiences with your prairie strips this past year?

Q2. What have been some of the challenges with your prairie strips this past year?

Q3. What advice would you give someone who is getting ready to plant prairie strips?

Q4. What have people (e.g., neighbors, friends, crop advisers) said to you about your prairie strips, whether positive, negative, or questions?

How else can we help?

Q5. What are some of the questions you have about prairies and prairie management?

Q6. What else can the STRIPS project team do to help?

Q7. What educational events that you attended this past year – formal or informal – have helped you to improve your understanding of prairie strips? In what ways were they helpful?

Prairie Strips Promotion:

Q8. How did you first hear about prairie strips?

Q9. What can the STRIPS project team do to more effectively promote prairie strips with farmers and landowners?

Q10. Have you ever recommended prairie strips to other farmers and/or landowners?

Q11. If you have recommended prairie strips to others, what motivated you to recommend them?

Q12. In 2023 would you be willing to show your prairie strips to potential adopters in your area and share your knowledge and experiences?

Q13. Prairie strips are now eligible for annual rental payments through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Would you be interested in establishing CRP prairie strips?

The web-based survey was sent by email to 50 collaborators in March 2023, and the survey remained open until late April. Twenty-seven collaborators opened the survey, and 20 completed at least some of the survey for a response rate of 40 percent. This report presents the responses to the questions.

Q1. What have been some of your positive experiences with your prairie strips this past year?

ID	
1	More diversity, taller grasses.
2	Wildlife using strips, diverse prairie vegetation, reduced erosion and runoff (although can't quantify how much).
3	Wildlife utilizing the strips and the visual esthetics. Once established they have been fairly easy to manage.
4	Just received photos taken in 2019 of weasel, mink, rabbit, raccoon, deer, coyote in a three-week period within the strips!
5	Introducing friends to our strips and sharing photos of the beautiful flowers.
6	Habitat for wildlife and it seems to help with erosion.
7	No erosion!!
8	Hosting the prairie strips team to my farm in Northeast Iowa, being interviewed by Sand County foundation for a video about my STRIPS, re-enrolling them in another 10-year CRP, seeing clean water run off my field after a 4.5-inch overnight rain.
9	Increasing number of birds and bees in my pollinator strips. Beautiful prairie flowers.
10	Seeing pollinators in the diversity of species in the STRIPS is a positive.
11	Watching it develop.
12	Abundant wildlife protected by excellent habitat.
13	Beneficial insects, birds, and wild life.
14	Good diversity of plants and lots of insects and birds using them. Excellent growth.
15	We continue to see more species emerge and greater biomass in our prairie strips as they mature. Also, love seeing so many native bees and butterflies feeding on the forbs.
16	Good stability of stand this year.
17	Wildlife use of the strips.
18	Grazing, identifying species, appreciating the flowering species, checking soil test data.
19	Walking through the strips and seeing the glorious variety of insects and plants. Hearing from our farm manager of the pheasants he'd observed.
20	Continue to see major increases in pheasant population on the farm. Getting ready to convert last of brome strips to natives this year, about 20 acres. Also starting to convert more and more waterways.

Note: NR = no response

Q2. What have been some of the challenges with your prairie strips this past year?

ID	
1	Thistles.
2	Some woody encroachment, some Canada thistles.
3	Keeping volunteer trees out of the strips which only requires attention periodically.
4	I have begun to see more cottonwood and mulberry trees getting established that I will have to deal with in the coming year.
5	We have a lot of cottonwoods coming up, from a few trees in the roadside. Our operator mowed down saplings the year before, and thousands of sprouts came back. I spent 4 full days last fall with loppers and treating with Roundup; didn't get them all before winter. We'll see what comes back. Need to take the mature trees down before they seed, and treat the stumps I guess. Not sure what's best for cottonwood.
6	As a farmer just trying to keep drift from spraying crops that join them.
7	None, really.
8	
9	The grasses seemed to become more predominant after two dry summers in a row.
10	Canada thistle.
11	Dandelions and red clover.
12	Nothing comes to mind.
13	Canada thistle.
14	Still some invasion of brome and reed canary grass.
15	Biggest challenge was having time to mow our newest prairie strip at the right time in plant growth and when the weather permitted. Also, we continue to battle Canada thistles and brome grass in a few areas.
16	Encroachment of weeds in the edges.
17	Renter gets too close to strips and sprays strips and now they are even narrower. Need to be wider because they fill with snow too quickly. Thistles have been a problem.
18	Competition with the existing bromegrass.
19	None. But I am a landowner in [state]. I have been on site only once this past year.
20	Brome grass....always. Seeing some positive results from using Select Max herbicide.

Q3. What advice would you give someone who is getting ready to plant prairie strips?

ID	
1	Plant into bean stubble at the end of the harvest season, preferably in November or early December.
2	Patience! Use a diverse seed mix. We like frost seeding: ideally late winter on top of snow.
3	The first couple years require significant attention to get strips established, but very rewarding after that.
4	Get the boundaries established properly to last a long time and use a high species mix. It is worth it.
5	Get seeding and mowing advice from experts like Tallgrass Prairie Center. Treat it like a prairie reconstruction, not just a temporary conservation practice. (But do take advantage of funds and support from NRCS.)
6	Plant at least 30 ft strips and lay them out based on the equipment you farm with.
7	Do it quick- one of the best things you can do.
8	Hire a professional? Work with your local NRCS.
9	Be patient and willing to mow several times the first two years after seeding.
10	Expect some weed pressure and have a plan to manage it. Study your native plant species so you know what to expect. Natives can look “weedy” to the untrained eye.
11	Don’t delay.
12	Be patient, be ready to mow when needed. Learn how to burn off the residue the following year.
13	Do it.
14	Do excellent pre plant weed control. Be patient.
15	Several things: 1. make sure to plan placement of your strips and preparation of the site thoroughly; 2. don’t skip any steps in prepping the site. Make sure all existing vegetation is completely terminated; 3. seed as highly diverse a seed mix as you can; try to use seed species that were native to your area originally (the correct eco-types); 4. mow, mow, mow...and hand weed whenever possible, especially mares tail, water hemp, and other seed-prolific weeds.
16	Be patient with the strip it takes a couple of years to really get going.
17	Wider if you can.
18	Just do it. Whatever your situation, you will learn and appreciate the prairie.
19	From the landowner’s point of view, talk to people with the knowledge and skills to help you better see and understand the process.
20	Kill the grass....three times before you plant. Bare ground is best and hand broadcast with wet sand is best. We seed in May and June. As many native species as possible. We use over 100 typically. We do some segregation of seeds based on wet vs dry areas and make our own seed mixes each year.

Note: NR = no response

Q4. What have people (e.g., neighbors, friends, crop advisers) said to you about your prairie strips, whether positive, negative, or questions?

ID	
1	Mostly all positive; like the abundance of wildflowers, hearing and seeing the songbirds, seeing and hearing the pheasants.
2	Tenants like the wildlife benefits, but dislike dealing with point rows on contour strips. Neighbors are curious.
3	NR
4	No real feedback.
5	Friends have been amazed by the beauty. Our tenants enjoy looking at them and exploring them. I'm not aware of neighbor's comments.
6	Not really had much feedback.
7	They like the results.
8	Friends are supportive when I share my experiences on Facebook.
9	Love the beauty of the flowers.
10	I think the Canada thistles have encouraged negative comments. We are managing them, so we'll see how this year looks.
11	Only that they know what they are.
12	That I have excellent bird cover.
13	No comments.
14	N/A
15	Many people that have heard about or seen our prairie strips LOVE them and commend us for planting native prairie on our farm. Since the strips are not visible from the road, we don't get many comments from people "noticing" them on their own, so local publicity and word-of-mouth are valuable ways to build awareness.
16	Asked what weed mix I sowed.
17	NR
18	Some friends have trained their hunting dogs in the strips. I don't allow hunting, though. My operator doesn't like the volunteer mulberry trees.
19	I've heard from the farmer and farm manager about challenges with ragweed and reasons for varying results on different areas of the land.
20	They love seeing flowers and pheasants.

Note: NR = no response

Q5. What are some of the questions you have about prairies and prairie management?

ID	
1	Beyond the first 10 year CRP contract, at what point will the prairie plants overtake/choke out the thistles (if ever)? Any experience with fall spraying to try to eradicate/lessen thistle population?
2	How often and what season to burn? Timing of spot mowing for thistle control?
3	NR
4	None.
5	NR
6	None at this time.
7	Long-run weed maintenance.
8	NR
9	None.
10	None at this point.
11	When and if, and how high, should we mow as they develop?
12	NR
13	None.
14	Every year when we have heavy snows—my strips are flattened—no winter habitat. I think proposed corridors with some shrubs could help.
15	In converting row crop land to rotational grazing pasture, what percent of prairie seeds be included in the pasture seed mix and have it establish successfully. We want to include prairie in our planned pastures but are concerned that non-native turf grasses will out-compete the prairie. Any advice?
16	What is the expected life of a strip?
17	None.
18	I would like to convert my CRP to native prairie, but that would be a big challenge due to trees growing in the CRP and difficulty of burning without harming my saturated control boxes.
19	NR
20	NR

Note: NR = no response

Q6. What else can the STRIPS project team do to help?

ID	
1	Create a thistle management plan.
2	Advice on weed control.
3	NR
4	We will be in the midst of converting our row crops to pasture over the next three years. Is it worth maintaining the strips? How should we manage them? What disadvantages are there to graze them every so often?
5	Keep up the good work. We need even more.
6	NR
7	I have retired from farming, but tenant will keep the strips going. We are electronically marking edges so the sprayer won't damage them.
8	NR
9	Keep promoting so more farmers plant them. Education so farmers know they can be seeded under continuous CRP rules.
10	Nothing that I can think of.
11	Identify what species are missing and get an explanation as to why they are missing.
12	Continue to promote the practice as an excellent conservation tool for landowners.
13	Find a solution for thistles.
14	Keep up good work.
15	Continue to research the effect of herbicides/pesticides that are sprayed on the production row crops adjacent to the prairies. How is this affecting the native birds, bees, butterflies, and other wildlife that are attracted to and feeding on the prairie? I heard a doctoral defense presentation on nesting birds that indicated high cowbird parasitism and poor fledging success in prairie strip nests.
16	How to start a new strip over an old one.
17	We might want to adjust width once current contract is up.
18	I always appreciate having speakers like Tim come out to my field days.
19	NR
20	Next step is research on converting waterways.

Note: NR = no response

Q7. What educational events that you attended this past year—formal or informal—have helped you to improve your understanding of prairie strips? In what ways were they helpful?

ID	
1	I had a field day on my strips, and that helped me immensely.
2	July 28 field day at Independence. Networking, comparing notes with others.
3	NR
4	N/A
5	Last summer's collaborator field trip with researchers was useful. Helpful to see other strips. I also heard Tim talk about the history of STRIPS at Neal Smith which was very interesting.
6	NR
7	Sorry, didn't attend any for medical reasons.
8	Helping on an advisory board with Tallgrass Prairie Center, working on budgets and case studies of prairie on farm, participating in ISU STRIPS team meetings. All educational and good networking experiences. It's good to face economic issues together when promoting prairie to farmers.
9	Saw a virtual one, don't remember who sponsored it, that just helped reinforce my love of them.
10	NR
11	No events attended.
12	None.
13	NR
14	N/A
15	ILF webinars, Climate Land Leader cohort Zoom meetings, and the doctoral defense presentation by one of Lisa Schulte Moore's PhD students. Overall, they just add to my body of knowledge and first-hand experiences with prairies. I also co-presented a Prairie Strips session with the M-STRIPS group from Michigan State University during the WFAN national conference. Learning about the different ways prairie strips are being used in Michigan was very interesting. A blueberry farm is using them to attract pollinators to the blueberries and as a way to combat herbicide/pesticide drift from neighboring, non-organic farms.
16	NR
17	None.
18	I have learned most from observing my own prairie.
19	NR
20	NR

Note: NR = no response

Q8. How did you first hear about prairie strips? (if you have answered this question in previous years, please feel free to skip it)

ID	
1	NR
2	NR
3	NR
4	NR
5	NR
6	Through a working relationship with Iowa state and the owner of Roeslein northern farm.
7	Article in Wallaces Farmer.
8	NR
9	NR
10	NR
11	NR
12	NR
13	NR
14	ISU Scientists.
15	Read an article about Lisa Schulte Moore and the STRIPS research in early 2014.
16	NR
17	NR
18	Not sure, but maybe through a PFI presentation.
19	NR
20	Been doing it before Iowa State so was a really early adopter. :)

Note: NR = no response

Q9. What can the STRIPS project team do to more effectively promote prairie strips with farmers and landowners?

ID	
1	Continue to get the word out via media and field days.
2	Emphasize water quality benefits.
3	NR
4	Highlight the advantages in publications and newspapers more.
5	How much is Extension involved? And 4-H or FFA? Community colleges? Women Caring for the Land? Women, Land and Legacy?
6	NR
7	Just do all kind of things.
8	Educate NRCS to look for opportunities where prairie can help farmers.
9	Education and field days.
10	The Smeltzer Learning Farm south of Otho is a demonstration farm and we are working to host field days every other year. If better promotion at this site makes sense, the Ag committee could be approached about it. Other than that, I don't know.
11	Explain the opportunities once the initial contract runs out.
12	Highlight successfully established prairie strips in different parts of the state
13	NR
14	Articles in Iowa Farmer Today with updates.
15	Getting the USDA to add prairie strips as CP43 CRP practice was a huge win. Now more FSA/NRCS folks need to be more pro-active in recommending and advising farmers/landowners about this conservation practice. Possible create an ag in the classroom module on prairie strips for FFA instructors/sponsors. Get the Conservation Districts of Iowa to include prairie strips in more of its communications; have prairie strips be the topic for the CDO annual poster contest.
16	NR
17	Hold field days and market more toward landowners
18	Remind them about CRP eligibility. Talk with landowners more than farmers.
19	NR
20	Continue with local meetings and field days. Always happy to have researchers or field days at my farm.

Note: NR = no response

Q10. If you have recommended prairie strips to others, what motivated you to recommend them?

ID	
1	Because I see what it does first hand and I believe in it.
2	Our good experience needs to spread to others.
3	Import role they can play in an agroecosystem.
4	I have seen the benefits for the wildlife in our landscape.
5	We need more prairie!
6	Erosion control.
7	They work so well.
8	Wildlife benefits, ecosystem services, cost control.
9	How well they work for me.
10	I believe we should continually strive to improve wildlife habitat and water quality. STRIPS does both.
11	NR
12	It's a valuable conservation tool.
13	Their many benefits.
14	I think erosion control and wildlife habitat are priorities for farmers/landowners.
15	I recommend prairie strips as a great way to convert dilapidated fence lines or unused, weedy areas on a farm. This doesn't eliminate row crop acres, yet enhances the positive impact of the farm. I also advocate for using prairie strips instead of terraces & tile if the farm's slopes aren't too steep.
16	NR
17	Being in conservation field we are always looking at ways to help promote water quality and wildlife habitat.
18	I see the numerous benefits. I tell field day attendees about them. I also show them to my […] students.
19	NR
20	Habitat development.

Note: NR = no response

Additional comments

ID	
1	NR
2	THANKS!
3	NR
4	Keep up the good work
5	NR
6	NR
7	Thank you for all your help.
8	NR
9	no
10	I assist with education on this learning farm owned by the Smeltzer Trust. My goal is to enhance the land and educate people. I'm open to more STRIPS on the land so perhaps that will be discussed with the ag committee. Thanks for your partnership.
11	No.
12	NR
13	NR
14	Congrats to Lisa with her awards
15	I would like to know more about how prairie strips are being adopted/used in states beyond Iowa. How successful are the efforts to expand beyond Iowa?
16	NR
17	NR
18	Keep up the good work!
19	NR
20	Check survey since one question still says 2022 instead of 2023.

Note: NR = no response

Q11. Have you ever recommended prairie strips to other farmers and/or landowners?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	18	94.7
No	1	5.3

Q12. In 2023, would you be willing to show your prairie strips to potential adopters in your area and share your knowledge and experiences?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	78.9
No	1	5.3
Maybe	3	15.8

Q13. Prairie strips are now eligible for annual rental payments through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Would you be interested in establishing CRP prairie strips?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	11.1
No	1	5.6
Maybe	6	33.3
I already enrolled prairie strips in CRP	9	50.0

Sociology Technical Report 1064 by J. Gordon Arbuckle Jr. with design and layout by Renea Miller.

The Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips (STRIPS) has many project partners. These presently include Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Flood Center, Iowa Soybean Association, Prairie Rivers of Iowa, The Eastern Iowa Airport, The McKnight Foundation, Trees Forever, University of Iowa Biomass Fuel Project, University of Northern Iowa Tallgrass Prairie Center, USDA-ARS National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment, USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Forest Service, USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA North Central SARE, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Walton Family Foundation, Whiterock Conservancy, as well as over 35 private farmers and farmland owners. Our partner list is updated over time at www.nrem.iastate.edu/research/STRIPs/content/partners.