

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN ETHANOL CROP PRODUCTION: A BRAZIL-U.S. COMPARISON

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Brazil and the United States are the two largest ethanol producers, and in both countries where the majority of ethanol crops are grown are areas of fragmented ecosystems: the Atlantic Forest in Brazil and Prairie Pothole region of the United States. How the farmers use their land and their conservation choices will determine the future state of these natural regions. Additionally, Brazil and the United States will act as a guide to other countries if their ethanol production techniques are reproduced elsewhere. In this study, I interviewed 11 farmers in the state of Paraná and 11 farmers in Iowa on issues of land tenure, labor, and biodiversity, and soil conservation management. Most farmers described their way of life in terms of dollars and cents, but they considered conservation issues as well. At least 7 of 11 Brazilian farms failed to meet a threshold legally mandating 20 percent of farmland be dedicated to its natural state. Almost all Iowa farmers used various USDA retired and working lands conservation programs, and planned on re-enrolling rather than switching to crop production despite currently high commodity prices. However, in 2007, the year of the interviews, nearly all of the corn growers experimented with corn-on-corn rotation on subplots, which removes the nitrogen fixing soybean crop from rotation, and increases inputs. About 25 percent of both Brazilian and American farmers espoused a progressive worldview of farmland management, which included novel soil contouring, no-till techniques, and the need for bottom-up holistic agricultural policy.

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