

MANAGING WATERSHEDS TO CHANGE WATER QUALITY: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE NIFA-CEAP WATERSHED STUDIES

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The Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) is an USDA initiative that involves the Agricultural Research Service, the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The overall goal of CEAP is to provide scientifically credible estimates of the environmental benefits obtained from USDA conservation programs. One of the CEAP projects was to determine the effectiveness of water quality change at the watershed scale. Funding for these watershed studies were provided by USDA-NIFA and -NRCS. The 13 watersheds selected for this protocol had minimally five years of water quality and land use data, and a modeling and socioeconomic component. As the 13 NIFA-CEAP watershed studies were finishing, a team led by NC State University began the task of synthesizing lessons learned about managing agricultural landscapes to meet physical, biological, and chemical water quality goals. The NC State team reviewed project documents and conducted site visits and key informant interviews at all 13 NIFA-CEAP watersheds. The objective of the key informant interviews was to ascertain community values relative to water quality and conservation practice adoption. By using all sources of information, lessons learned were synthesized into general categories – water quality, land treatment, modeling, socio-economic, education, and project management. The information was then crystalized into the most critical 15 lessons learned and these will be presented and discussed.

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