

# WORKING WITH NON-OPERATING LANDOWNERS & FARMERS TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY IN THE GREAT LAKES

January 2017

**Goal:** To expand the use of conservation practices that improve soil health and reduce run-off on leased farmland in the Great Lakes region.

**Project:** This three-year project launched in January 2017 to develop a model for the Great Lakes region that increases the use of conservation practices to improve soil health and reduce run-off from leased farmland. Specifically, the project seeks to help women non-operating landowners who rent out their land—and the farmers who lease farmland from them—to increase the use of conservation practices on this land. The project focuses on these women landowners because they now own a significant portion of leased farmland.

The pilot program will:

- 1) Launch a communication campaign to improve awareness of the importance of leased land for agriculture and protecting water quality
- 2) Create a toolkit of informational materials. Uniquely, the project is also working with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to test its new Resource Stewardship Evaluation Tool, which compares existing land management with stewardship thresholds for soil management, water quality and quantity, air quality and habitat health
- 3) Empower women landowners and farmers to develop stronger relationships that accelerate the adoption of conservation practices
- 4) Engage the agricultural retailer community in providing support and encouragement
- 5) Engage and train state and local agency and NGO staff to start forming supporting infrastructures that expand outreach and education

## Location

Ohio: Portage and Toussaint river basins (the main focus is Wood and Ottawa counties)

New York: Genesee River Basin

## Partners

American Farmland Trust (project lead), Utah State University, The IPM Institute of North America, Agren, Cornell Cooperative Extension (New York) and Wood County Soil and Water Conservation District (Ohio)

## Funding

The Great Lakes Protection Fund provides primary financial support. NRCS gives additional support in the form of training and the time of conservation district personnel and NRCS state personnel who use the new NRCS Resource Stewardship Tool with women non-operating landowners and farmers.

