

# I-Farm predicts returns

By CAROL BROWN

**B**EING able to predict the future is impossible, but with specific tools, you can predict the outcomes of specific farming practices on your land. The Web-based tool, I-FARM, can help farmers see the possible outcomes of their farm management choices before they implement them.

I-FARM is a database-driven simulation model that predicts economic returns and impacts of farm operations, integrating both crop and livestock components. Farmers can input statistics based on their landforms, tillage practices, fertilization rates, livestock feed needs and crop residue removal, just to name a few. Then I-FARM computes economic indicators, nutrient needs and other management answers.

I-FARM, part of a three-state, USDA-funded project, was developed by Eduard van Ouwerkerk in the Iowa State University department of ag and biosystems engineering. The Web site *i-farm tools.org* has been live since 2004.

"I'm working on a new module for multiple cropping and cover cropping," says van Ouwerkerk. "And I'm working on a new GIS application for field identification that will replace the current GIS application in place for Iowa right

### Key Points

- I-FARM is a Web-based tool that can help with many farm management decisions.
- Agronomist Jim Penney will help out with the No-till/Strip-Till Initiative.
- Goal is improving conservation methods while helping farmers remain profitable.

now." I-FARM is free to use, and after individual farm information is input, it can be saved and revisited whenever additional situations arise.



### One-on-one instruction

Jim Penney is working with the Iowa Learning Farm and the No-till/Strip-Till Initiative in northwest Iowa, meeting with farmers involved in this program and introducing them to I-FARM. Penney, who has been manager of Heart of Iowa Co-op for years, recently retired, but he's not ready to stop working completely. "I've always been interested in soil conservation," he says. "I hope to be able to influence farmers to use conservation methods and educate them about various applicable conservation programs."

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Field Services Bureau Chief Jim Gillespie contacted Penney to see if he was interested in

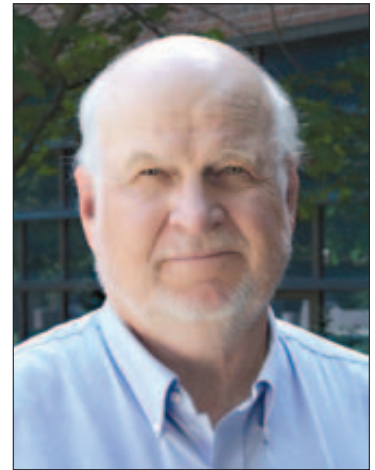
helping with the initiative. Penney, an Ames resident, spends a lot of time at his lake home in Palo Alto County, so he knows the area well. He'll be spending his days getting to know farmers who are participating in the No-till/Strip-Till Initiative, learning their practices and teaching interested farmers the finer points of the I-FARM program.

Penney is a certified professional agronomist, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in farm operations and agronomy, respectively, from ISU. He is a native Iowan and was raised on a farm. After working in the ag industry since 1968, Penney can relate to about any farming situation. He has no immediate plans to slow down.

"I hope to do this for a number of years, knowing that it will take time to build relationships and measure the results. I want to do my part to improve the environment and conservation for future generations," he says.

### No-till/Strip-till Initiative

The No-till/Strip-Till Initiative, through IDALS division of soil conservation, was started in spring 2008 to offer incentives for farmers to try no-till or strip till who don't already use these methods. The three-year initiative provides a small payment for up to 200 acres of farmland to be strip tilled or no-tilled. The program focuses on the northwest Iowa



JIM PENNEY

counties of Clay, Dickinson, Emmet, Kossuth, Palo Alto and Pocahontas.

ILF offers learning opportunities for the No-till/Strip-Till Initiative and I-FARM through field days and workshops, where farmers can get answers and feedback from other farmers who've been using these practices.

ILF is helping to build a culture of conservation throughout the state, educating farmers about conservation farming practices and structures that improve soil and water quality while remaining profitable. The No-till/Strip-Till Initiative and I-FARM are two tools being used to achieve this goal.

*Brown is communications specialist for the Iowa Learning Farm.*



**INTRODUCING THE NEW MK FLEX**

**MK Flex**

Westfield's new MK Flex portable auger is designed to address the harvest needs of today's largest farms.

With a hopper that covers up to 287% more surface area than a conventional swing away and patented double joint design to reach and retract further, you're able to unload double hopper bottom trailers without moving the truck. A built in hydraulic hopper mover and swing cylinder takes all the work out of positioning the intake and offers maximum flexibility.

Call your authorized Westfield dealer today, or visit us online!



**WESTFIELD®**

1-866-467-7207

www.grainaugers.com



**Arts & Crafts**



10' x 10' booth spaces available at the  
**2009 Farm Progress Show**  
September 1 - 3  
Decatur, IL

Only handmade craft items  
and original works of art accepted

Please contact Dottie Rovner  
toll-free at 1-866-264-7469  
or [drovner@farmprogress.com](mailto:drovner@farmprogress.com)  
for more information or for  
an application.

