



Upper Salt Fork Ditch/Spoon River Watershed –  
UIUC Project Funded by the USDA National  
Integrated Water Quality Program, in  
collaboration with American Farmland Trust

## Partnership with Landowners & Farmers

In order to best serve the landowners and farmers working in the Upper Salt Fork Ditch – Spoon River Watershed, our research team is examining effects of novel tile management practices on water quality, particularly loss of nitrate from farmland. A major part of this study involves assessing farm operator perspectives and how exposure to information via field demonstrations or involvement with water management programs influences perspectives over time. Interviews and surveys with farm landowners and operators are a crucial source of information used to support scientific understanding of agricultural water systems and policy development.

In a survey conducted in the summer of 2010, 62% of farm operator respondents rated the water quality of the Upper Salt Fork watershed as excellent. Interview findings indicate these perceptions are likely linked more to drinking water quality. Just under half of the respondents indicated concern about water quality in their watershed (47%).

The following issues were stated as important for water quality management decisions:

- Improving or maintaining the condition of farms for future generations of family farmers;
- Improving or maintaining the appearance and integrity of farms;
- Improving farm production and bottom line; and
- Improving or maintaining relationships with neighboring farmers.

The following factors were seen to limit farmers' ability to implement water quality conservation practices:

- Personal out-of-pocket expense;
- Lack of government funds for cost share;
- No knowledge of others implementing the practice; and
- Possible interference with flexibility to change land use practices as conditions warrant.

We will continue to monitor farming perspectives on water quality as the project continues, particularly in response to field demonstrations and program participation.

Additional project information is available at <http://saltfork.nres.uiuc.edu/>.