

THE DIVERSE CORN BELT PROJECT: YEAR 2 RESULTS



The Diverse Corn Belt project is a five-year, multi-disciplinary project that explores the real-world impacts of diversified farming systems. Partners in Indiana, Illinois, Iowa and other states are coordinating research and analysis to understand the agronomic, economic, social, and infrastructure and policy changes that could make diversification in the Corn Belt viable.

Diversity is key to resilience in biological systems, as well as economic and social ones. The hypothesis underlying the Diverse Corn Belt (DCB) project is that diversifying crop production and markets will generate a suite of economic, social and ecosystem services that will benefit more people than the current corn-soybean/confined livestock system does.

DCB team members include experts in the social sciences, agronomy, entomology, soil science, economics, Extension, education and more. The group seeks to understand the opportunities presented by diversification at the farm, market and landscape level, as well as the constraints and challenges that currently make diversification difficult.



“I think corn and soybeans are actually great crops. I don’t think there’s anything bad about those as crops and I think it would be a loss to stop producing them. We just need to stop obsessively focusing on extremely high yields in those crops and integrate them into a more thought-out portfolio.” - **Diversified farmer**



DIVERSITY ON MANY LEVELS

The Diverse Corn Belt project explores diversity on several levels:

Farm-level diversity, including more options for crop rotations, perennial crops for forage or bioenergy, grazing livestock, agroforestry and horticultural food crops.

Market-level diversity, creating channels for processing and marketing a wider variety of agricultural products and meeting the needs of diverse people all along the value chain.

Landscape-level diversity, a wide-scale proliferation of profitable, resilient, climate-smart farming systems that achieve yield, ecosystem and equity goals.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: DCB BY THE NUMBERS

Year 2 of the DCB Project was an exciting one. After spending much of Year 1 on planning, experimental design and coordination, our team members took to the lab, the field, and to kitchen tables, tractor cabs, farm shops and meeting halls to dig into research.

Here's a summary of DCB accomplishments by the numbers:

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT A variety of contacts, from individual interviews to guided group discussions.

- 20 focus groups with 100 diversified and non-diversified farmers
- 18 stakeholders in the first RAD (Reimagining Agricultural Diversity) visioning session
- 759 farmers surveyed
- 26 Corn Belt oat, pea and wheat growers interviewed to explore challenges and opportunities in markets for alternative crops

MARKET EXPLORATION Researchers have identified four key themes in exploring market opportunities and challenges: markets, scale, labor, and support.

- 36 diversified farmers interviewed one-on-one on markets, scale, labor and support
- 4 supply chain surveys drafted
- 7 consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies' executives interviewed in-depth
- 29 interviews with consumers and processors of oat milk to understand consumer motivations and preferences.
- 3 market case studies focusing on oats, peas and wheat.

IN-FIELD RESEARCH Biophysical research on soil fertility analysis, groundwater quantity and quality studies, and biodiversity of insects and weed species.

- 72 farmers hosting on-farm research
- 24 research wells installed on farms across Iowa, Illinois and Indiana

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH Outreach includes publications, presentations, press materials, field days, online communications, and educational resources.

- 45.9% open rate for 3 DCB newsletters
- 3,715,901 impressions via 26 articles, releases and online outreach
- 849 farmers and other stakeholders reached through presentations at Practical Farmers of Iowa meetings
- 347 attendees at 8 field days
- 8 Diversified Rotation Farmer Network calls reached 213 participants
- 3 undergraduate class guest lectures by DCB team members

LOOKING AHEAD Research conducted under DCB sets the stage for further collaboration, future studies and more insights to share.

- \$1.55 million secured by DCB principal investigators through additional grants



"I think if there is a market for whatever we're talking about growing, whatever we're going to diversify to, we'll figure out. We're farmers—we'll figure out a way to make it work."

- Indiana RAD Team participant

GET INVOLVED

The DCB team seeks a wide range of perspectives from stakeholders throughout Indiana, Illinois and Iowa. Please contact Emily Usher (eusher@purdue.edu) if you are willing to help shape the future of the Corn Belt.



For more information on the Diverse Corn Belt project, visit diversecornbelt.org. For detailed annual reports submitted to the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, contact Emily Usher, project manager, at eusher@purdue.edu.