Prairie Seed Mixes for Contour Buffer Strips: On-Farm Demonstration and Workshops

**Issue:** Research has shown contour prairie strips reduce surface nutrient runoff for about the same cost as cover crops, and do not carry the uncertainty of replanting every year. The effectiveness of this emerging conservation practice will depend on rate of adoption and continued maintenance of the practice. For landowners to consider sacrificing up to 10 percent of a crop field for nutrient reduction, they will need to see excellent examples in fields similar to theirs. A highly successful prairie planting can be achieved when carried out by experienced practitioners using a custom seed mix. Unfortunately, this expertise is not widespread enough to serve all the land that could benefit from prairie strips.

**Objective:** The objective of this project is a clearer understanding by producers, resource managers, landowners and farm managers about establishment costs and benefits of general versus custom-designed seed mixes, as well as best practices for establishing prairie strips.

**Approach:** A prairie strips replicated trial demonstrating the outcomes of general versus customized seed mixes will be established on the Iowa State University Northeast Research and Demonstration Farm near Nashua. In addition, a demonstration site on a private farm in the Middle Cedar Watershed will be established. Combined, these two sites will involve 30 acres of prairie strips treating 300 acres, comparing establishment costs and vegetation attributes of general versus customized prairie seed mixes. By the second year, up to 10 hands-on workshops offering technical training and peer exchange opportunities for landowners, technical service providers and professional farm managers, plus tours and field days, will be held.

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