

**Attitudes Toward Soil Erosion and Surface Water Quality  
in the Spring Lake Watershed, McDonough County, Illinois**

**An Abstract of**

**A Thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

Landowner participation in Soil Conservation Service (SCS) Public Law 566 cost share projects is necessary to reduce nonpoint source soil erosion and maintain water quality. The thesis focused on the single most important reason for participation in the Spring Lake Watershed Public Law 566 project in McDonough County, Illinois. A number of previous studies indicated that cost share incentives were often an important factor for participation in government soil erosion control projects.

The hypothesis of the thesis was that cost shares were the single most important reason for participation. The participants identified the most important reason for participation from among five categories: soil erosion control, cost share funds, water quality improvement, influence of neighbors, and other. Thirty-nine of the 40 landowners provided the necessary data by completing a personal or mail questionnaire. The hypothesis was rejected after 26 of the landowners (66%) stated that soil erosion control was the major reason why they participated in the project. However, 56 percent of the 39 individuals felt that they would not have participated in the program without cost share incentives. The funds that the SCS provided initially attracted the landowners, but soil erosion control was their primary concern and reason why they signed a project contract.

The thesis also examined the age, experience, education, and farm size characteristics of the landowners, their level of satisfaction, and willingness to participate in a future watershed project. The average participant was 58 years old, had 27 years of farm experience, owned 175 acres of land, and completed a high

school diploma. Only seven landowners indicated that cost share incentives were their most important reason for participation. The low cost share response did not make it possible to use a chi-square to identify if a relationship existed between cost share incentives and age, education, farm experience, and farm size characteristics. However, a Fisher exact probability test indicated that landowners who participated for cost share incentives had higher levels of education.

Nearly 95 percent of the participants were satisfied or very satisfied with their cost share contracts, structure designs, and technical assistance that the SCS provided. Finally, the 37 landowners who expressed satisfaction with the program were all willing to participate in a future watershed project if the SCS or other government agencies identified soil erosion problems on their land.