

## Non-Operator Owners of South Dakota Land Interested in Conservation, Survey Says

As they began to plan to reach out to non-operator land owners (NOLOs) in South Dakota, one of the first steps South Dakota's conservation districts took was to ask South Dakota State University to conduct a survey of NOLOs in the spring of 2018.

A total of 3,713 randomly selected non-operators responded—2,389 to an email/web-based survey and 1,324 people to a mailed survey. The results were encouraging; three-fourths of those surveyed are either very interested or already working with their tenants to conserve and build healthy soils on their land. Another 12% of those surveyed said

they haven't heard of practices that build soil health but might like to learn more--only 11 percent had no interest in pursuing soil health practices.

About 40% of non-operator owners said they have read about or listened to producers or others talk about practices like no-till, cover crops and rotational grazing. A majority (62%) of non-operator landowners leave most decisions to the tenant, with little or no discussion.

Most (74%) of the non-operator landowners reported that they know where to get the help they may need to plan conservation improvements

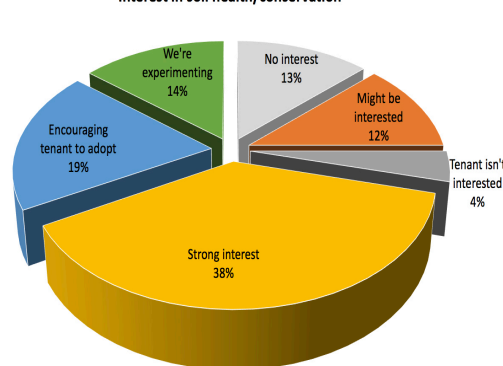
for their land, and to follow up with implementing and managing those practices.

The survey showed confidence in talking to their tenants about soil health was strongly related to landowners' interest and knowledge in soil health practices. "That's one goal of the outreach project to non-operator landowners—more conversations between owners and operators about building soil health." The SDACD received a grant from NRCS to help conservation districts step up communications between conservation districts and non-operator landowners.

### Who the NOLOs are:

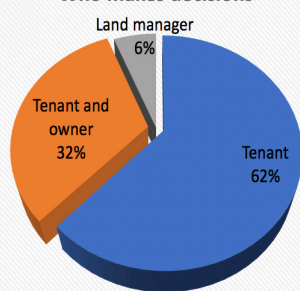
- Most (54%) inherited the land; ~40% purchased it.
- Most (70%) of the land was cropland, or grassland 26%.
- Most (84%) of the owners receive cash rent.
- About 43% have a verbal agreement with their tenant. 20% have an annual written agreement, and 35% have a multi-year written agreement.
- Most (56%) have more than 10 years with their current tenant(s).
- Most (62%) of the decisions are left to the tenant.
- Most (74%) know where to get help for conservation.
- Fewer (43%) know where to get financial help; 25% don't want it.
- About 32% of NOLOs had no contact with their CD/NRCS office; 26% had occasional contact. 13% have land enrolled in EQIP/other 15% visited the CD/NRCS office in person within the last year.
- Most (71%) grew up on a farm/ranch/forestland, while 19% have never farmed, ranched, or operated forestland.
- 67% currently live in South Dakota.
- 53% of respondents were male.
- 16% were < 54 years old, while 26% were 75 or older.

Interest in soil health/conservation



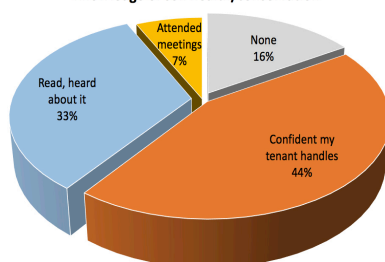
About three-fourths of non-operator landowners have a strong interest in soil health and other conservation practices or are already discussing or working with their tenants on them.

Who makes decisions



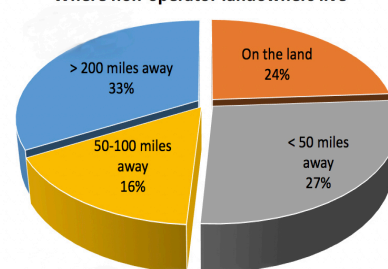
Six of ten NOLOs leave most decisions to their tenant.

Knowledge of soil health/conservation



About 46% of NOLOs have some knowledge of soil health and plan to talk to their tenants, or have already talked to their tenants and are making changes.

Where non-operator landowners live



51% of NOLOs live either on the land they own or within 50 miles; about 33% live more than 200 miles away.