Land Use Change and Policy in Iowa’s Loess Hills

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Working Paper 15-WP 558
August 2015

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Land Use Change and Policy in Iowa’s Loess Hills

Abstract: We consider land use change in Iowa’s Loess Hills, which contain much of the state’s remaining prairie grassland. Although crop production has expanded on the landform since 2005, much of this expansion has been from soybean into corn with a clear trend toward more intensive corn rotations. Forest land has expanded in the area while we do not find evidence of extensive conversion to development. Data indicate that crop production has moved away from more heavily sloped land, but the increase in cropping does not appear to be occurring on land with high crop productivity.

Keywords: Agro-environmental policy, erodibility, hill terrain, monoculture, land quality.
LAND USE CHANGE AND POLICY IN IOWA’S LOESS HILLS

This paper seeks to describe land use change in the Iowa Loess Hills landform (ILHL). The Missouri Valley’s Loess Hills (figure 1) are comprised of wind-deposited silt hills just east of the Missouri River in Southeast Iowa and Northeast Missouri. Cut through by river tributaries and generally steepest on the west side, hill elevation seldom exceeds 259 feet above the river plain.1 No wider than 15 miles, the landform extends about 320 km from Plymouth County, IA, south through Woodbury, Monona, Harrison, Pottawattamie, Mills and Fremont counties in Iowa as well as Atchison and Holt counties in Missouri. We focus on Iowa’s 2,800 km² portion of the landform, which comprises more than 80% of its total area. The ILHL contains more than 50% of Iowa’s remnant prairie (Loess Hills Alliance 2011).

Mostly under private ownership and largely grass-covered until the 20th Century, row crop production now dominates large patches of this fragmented and erosion-prone landscape (NRI 2013, p.11). Maize, soybeans and grass are the major land uses while the area also straddles two Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) from which demand for non-agricultural land uses, such as residences with scenic river overviews, are to be expected. These MSAs are Sioux City to the north and Omaha-Council Bluffs to the south, with respective populations of about 170,000 and 900,000 circa 2014. In addition, fire suppression has led to encroachment by tree species, especially the fire intolerant Eastern Red Cedar, threatening rare native plant species and leaving the loose soil more vulnerable to erosion.

The literature on land use change in western Iowa’s Cornbelt is extensive and diverse in direction of inquiry. Secchi et al. (2008) addressed how high commodity prices can confound conservation efforts, thus placing greater emphasis on the need for targeted practices to obtain

1 Source: http://iowa.sierraclub.org/LoessHills/LoessHillsHome.htm.
highest benefit per unit cost. Secchi et al. (2010) used the Cropland Data Layer (CDL) to simulate the extent to which biofuels-related expansion may tilt Iowa crop rotations toward more corn intensive rotations. Brown and Schulte (2011) studied aerial photographs to document the decline of small grains and grass agriculture in three Iowa townships between 1937 and 2002. Miller (2006) commented on the roles of urban pressure, topography, erodibility constraints and agro-economic incentives on assembling a remnant prairie, the Broken Kettle Grassland Preserve, at the ILHL’s north end. Many technical contributions to our understanding of soil and water conservation on the landform have also been published (e.g., Tomer et al. 2007).

Most relevant to our study, Farnsworth et al. (2010) connected privately obtained, remotely sensed data on land cover with crop productivity information to develop a conservation priority index that also seeks to account for benefits from tract connectivity. Their inquiry was static with 2006 land uses, just before major changes in United States cropping activities. Arora et al. (2015) used CDL data to quantify land use transitions in the ILHL between 2001 and 2013. They found that grass acres had declined during this period in the ILHL, having moved into wooded categories, and also that corn acres had expanded largely at the expense of soybean acres. They expressed surprise, however, at the limited expansion of row-crop production in the region.

This study seeks to provide a more detailed scrutiny of recent land use change across the ILHL. We provide an overview of relevant policies and the evolving market environment, followed by an explanation of our materials and methods; primarily different land use data sources and data processing procedures. After analyzing results, we summarize land use conversion trends with a brief discussion.
Policy and Market Environment

The past thirty years has seen a shift in the emphasis of United States agricultural policy away from food and feed production toward energy outputs and also toward environmental outputs that are not generally supported through market incentives. The main agricultural policies of relevance have been those regarding conservation, biofuels and crop insurance.

Although antecedents existed, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was established under the 1985 Farm Bill to incentivize voluntary retirement of environmentally sensitive land from crop production, at least temporarily. Rental contracts with the federal government are typically for ten or more years. The program has proved popular among many land owners and environment advocates, but less popular among agribusinesses and crop producing tenants who identify competition for land and have concerns about lost support for local cropping infrastructure. The program has been renewed in each farm bill through to 2014 although enrollment criteria and maximum enrolled acres have changed over the years. The enrollment cap has declined in recent years and with it enrolled acres. National enrollment peaked at about 146,000 km² in 2007 and declined to about 101,000 km² in 2014 (Lubbins and Pease 2014), largely because offered rental rates did not compete with returns from cropping.

Public funding of conservation easements is another government policy. Easements are legal agreements between a land owner and another party to attenuate owner property rights. Typically the owner obtains monetary compensation and estate tax benefits while the easement has indefinite duration. The Loess Hills Alliance seeks to use easements to preserve designated Special Landscape Areas. Other conservation organizations active in the area include The Nature Conservancy and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. The limited funds available for easement purchases in the ILHL come from private and State of Iowa sources as well as U.S.
Department of Transportation’s National Scenic Byways Program. In 2014, an initiative to seek National Reserve designation for parts of ILHL, and thus open opportunities for additional easement funds from the federal government, failed to gain adequate support among Loess Hills Alliance Board members, where opposition emerged from local land owners.  

The 1985 Farm Bill also saw the introduction of conservation compliance provisions whereby those who farm highly erodible lands may be ineligible for some forms of agricultural income support. Growers planting on highly erodible land commit to a conservation plan in order to become compliant. Between 1996 and 2014, eligibility for crop insurance premiums was not conditioned on conservation compliance, but linkage was re-established under the 2014 Farm Bill. Recent trends in cropping systems, to be discussed later, have made compliance easier than was the case before the mid-1990s.

For decades preceding the 1996 Farm Bill, the commodity-specific income support that growers received depended in large part on cropping choices (Novak et al. 2015). Some crops, collectively labeled ‘program’ crops, received support in proportion to acres and yields. Corn was a program crop but soybeans and grass/hay were not. The de-linking of cropping choices and subsidies in the 1996 Farm Bill was motivated by the costs of inflexibility in marketplace response (as growers would lose non-market support upon adapting to market prices) and by International Trade Agreement commitments.

Crop insurance has had at least some federal support since the 1930s, but was not seen as an integral component of income support until the 1990s (Glauber 2013). In an effort to promote program performance by expanding participation, commencing in 1994 a series of legislative

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2 See ‘National Park Reserve designation causes controversy in western Iowa's Loess Hills’ by Brianna Clark, posted at KTIV News Channel, February 18, 2014, [http://www.ktiv.com/story/24755375/2014/02/18/controversy-surrounding-the-national-park-reserve-designation-of-the-loess-hills](http://www.ktiv.com/story/24755375/2014/02/18/controversy-surrounding-the-national-park-reserve-designation-of-the-loess-hills), last visited 8/7/2015.
enactments increased premium subsidies and expanded contract choices. Upon passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, crop insurance support had become a firmly established primary pillar of agricultural income support. Although pre-subsidy rates are required to be actuarially fair, as far as is practical, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (U.S. GAO 2015) has discerned underpricing in production-riskier counties, however, none of these are in Iowa. Nonetheless, the growth of crop insurance subsidies, unavailable or less generous for grass-based activities, is likely to promote crop production (Claassen et al. 2011; Feng et al. 2012; Miao et al. 2014).

Corn-based ethanol has been, indirectly or directly, promoted by the U.S. federal government since the 1970s. Direct support for ethanol production as a renewable fuel came through federal laws passed in 2005 and 2007, which mandated that minimum quantities of certain fuel types be blended with gasoline. As of 2015, more than 200 ethanol plants exist in the United States. Most use corn as feedstock and are located in the Midwest. April 2015 data in Ethanol Producer Magazine identify several plants around the ILHL, including in Council Bluffs (125 mill. gal. capacity), Shenandoah (65 mill. gal.) and Denison (55 mill. gal.) to the south as well as Jackson, Nebraska (50 mill. gal.) and Merrill, Iowa, (50 mill. gal.) to the north. See figure 2 for local cropping infrastructure.

Apart from weather-stressed years, Cornbelt commodity market prices traded in a historically narrow range between 1980 and 2006. A gradual decline in real prices occurred due to technology-driven growth in supplies when compared with slower growth in demands. The aforementioned 2005 and 2007 energy acts changed the output price environment in several ways. The mandates instantly generated higher demand for corn. The corn price range increased from $2–$3 in 2004–2007 to $3–$7 in 2007–2014. Other commodities also saw price increases so that they remain a

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3 See [www.ethanolproducer.com/plants/listplants/US/Existing/Sugar-Starch/](http://www.ethanolproducer.com/plants/listplants/US/Existing/Sugar-Starch/)
competitive use of land resources. A secondary effect was through beef markets. Farm-level beef 
prices rose in part because feedlot owners needed to cover higher corn input costs or go out of 
business. The U.S. national beef herd has declined over the 1996–2014 period in the face of higher 
feed input prices and also adverse weather conditions, with a sharp decline after 2008. Even so, 
grassland rental prices also increased as they provide an alternative to corn-based cattle feed. 

Marked technological change has occurred in crop production during recent decades. Perhaps 
most relevant to this study are expanded use of conservation tillage and the advent of genetically 
modified corn and soybean seeds. Conservation tillage can reduce production costs and can also 
preserve moisture as a risk management strategy against drought. The Loess Hills area, though 
far from arid, is among the driest in Iowa. Conservation tillage also protects against soil erosion 
and is viewed as an acceptable strategy for conservation compliance. However, tillage also 
provides weed control (Carpenter and Gianessi 1999), such that growers had been reluctant to 
adopt conservation tillage. The advent of glyphosate tolerant seeds allowed for cost-effective 
weed control by use of a single chemical after planting. There is substantial evidence that 
glyphosate tolerant seed complements less intensive tillage (Perry et al. 2015). In reducing the 
cost of conservation compliance, these seeds may facilitate corn and soybean production on 
erodible land. Growers in the SCA have been early and extensive adopters of both conservation 
tillage and glyphosate tolerant seed.⁴

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⁴ Over the 1998–2001 period 47% of soybean growers in the SCA adopted both conservation tillage and glyphosate 
tolerant soybean seed, when compared with 37.4% nationwide. For the 2007–2011 period the comparable figures 
were 72.5% and 65.3%. See table 1 and supporting text in Perry et al. (2015) for explanations of data. Ed Perry 
kindly made SCA summary data available to us.
Materials and Methods

To address land use changes in Iowa’s Loess Hills and related policy implications, we conducted a comprehensive data analysis at two levels of aggregation: SCA and ILHL. We used two data sources: National Resource Inventory (NRI) data and CDL data. NRI data allow for evaluation of historical land use changes at the county level of aggregation in the SCA (1982–2010), where CDL data are only available for recent years (2000–2014). On the other hand, and in contrast with NRI data, CDL data are spatially-delineated and so allow us to evaluate changes specific to ILHL.

National Resource Inventory Data

We utilized National Resource Inventory (NRI 2013) data to evaluate land use/land cover (LULC) trends for the SCA encompassing the ILHL. Focusing on point-level data, the NRI is a survey-based longitudinal database that provides comprehensive information on land characteristics as well as historical uses. In order to conform with USDA confidentiality protocols, and unlike the CDL, NRI data suppress spatial geo-coordinates (NRI 2013) although county location is provided. NRI data collection is based on a robust survey methodology that assures reliable and temporally-consistent estimates of land use and land quality parameters. Specifically, the included sample points are intended to represent the overall geographic spread and heterogeneity of natural resources at national and regional levels (Nusser et al. 1998). Each sample point is accompanied by its representative weight measured in 100 acre (0.405 km²) units that differ across sample points. A total of 2,600 NRI points span the SCA’s 12,985 km² area. Data range from 1982 to 2010, where each NRI point was observed every five years from 1982 to 1997 but annually commencing 2000.

The NRI dataset provides land quality parameters such as land capability classification (LCC) and erodibility index (EI). LCC groups soils into eight classes with regards to limitations
for cropping, with higher class codes referring to more severe limitations. LCC classes I and II are most suitable for cropping whereas classes III and IV are more limited in use. Higher LCC classes have severe limitations and are considered to be unsuitable for cultivation (Helms 1992, p.65). EI measures soil’s erosion potential, whereby soils with higher index values are costlier for cropping, as they entail pertinent management costs to limit erosion and preserve crop productivity (NRI 2013). About 1% of NRI points had non-constant LCC and/or EI values during the 1982–2010 period. These points were excluded when assessing land use by LCC and/or EI status. Within this domain of constant LCC lands; 6.6% of points have missing LCC for all years, 40.2% were in classes I-II, 48.3% were in classes III-IV, and 4.9% were assigned higher classes.

Locations with EI values that were either missing or temporally varying accounted for 31.1% of NRI points, with a disproportionate fraction in the urban category. Among the non-missing, constant EI points, the index ranges from 0.8 to 160.2 where 32.2% had EI ≥ 8. The USDA’s Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) defines soils with EI ≥ 8 as highly erodible. Since the 1996 Farm Bill, soils with EI ≥ 8 have been eligible for CRP regardless of other attributes.

Cropland Data Layers

Pre-processing: Spatially explicit raster CDL data were downloaded from the CropScape portal of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA NASS 2012) and clipped by the SCA encompassing the ILHL (figure 1). These CDL data are produced annually for the 48 contiguous states (since 2000 for Iowa) using a combination of (1) multiple satellite imagery dates each year to capture crop phenology differences, (2) concurrent USDA FSA training/validation data, and (3) augmented versions of the raster-based National Land Cover Data (NLCD) from 2001 and
2006 (Fry et al. 2009; Boryan et al. 2011). Landsat-based CDL data (30 m pixels) from 2001, 2005, 2010, and 2013 were selected to quantify LULC change trends for the ILHL. Advanced Wide Field Sensor-based (AWiFS) CDL data (56 m pixels) from 2006 to 2009 were excluded since differences in spatial resolution are known to negatively affect area estimation precision in remote sensing-based studies (Lunetta et al. 2006; Wright and Wimberly 2013).

Downloaded CDL data could not be analyzed directly due to inherent differences in (1) classes from 2001 to 2013 (table 1); (2) missing classes (e.g., roads in 2001 and 2005); (3) class confusion between dominant crop types and non-crop types (figure 3); and, (4) because later improvements in the CDL processing stream reduced spatial errors due to single-pixel salt-and-pepper effects (D.M. Johnson [NASS], personal communication) that remain in earlier CDL years (figure 3). Similar preprocessing was necessary for early versions of NLCD (1992 and 2001) so that class structure and pixel-wise effects were equivalent (Wolter et al. 2006). For instance, the 2001 and 2005 CDLs did not specifically include a ‘developed’ class that contained roads as did later years (figure 3). Also, spatial inconsistencies within the ‘Fallow/Idle Cropland’ class through time have been identified in prior studies (Kline et al. 2013). Laingen (2015) has recommended that all data be treated with circumspection, placing emphasis on the data generation processes.

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) warns against the use of non-agricultural classes such as Grass/Pasture and Fallow/Idle as these classes have low classification accuracy (USDA NASS 2013). Rather, NASS suggests substituting NLCD’s non-agricultural classes. Hence, non-agricultural classes from the 2001 CDL were used to clip the recently improved 2001 NLCD layer. Resulting NLCD classes were recoded to fit the CDL class structure and then overlain back on the 2001 CDL. We also used the 2001 CDL agricultural classes to clip the 2001

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5 Land assigned to the ‘Fallow/Idle’ is considered to be cropped but is not currently under a discernible crop. Much of this land may be in CRP.
NLCD under the suspicion that 2001 CDL agricultural classes were being confused with the non-agricultural classes, especially ‘Forest’ (figure 3). Again, resulting NLCD classes were recoded and overlain in the 2001 CDL. A similar approach, using 2006 NLCD, was used to reconcile such errors in the 2005 CDL (figure 4).

Once CDL classes were equivalent among the \{2001, 2005, 2010, 2013\} time steps, we then used a matrix union function to combine the information into one physical image. This matrix union function, when applied to two consecutive CDL years (e.g., Y\textsubscript{1}-Y\textsubscript{2}), provides a “from-to” attribute in the resulting thematic output attribute table with which one may track land cover changes between those years. Here, we simply applied this function three consecutive times (Y\textsubscript{1} - Y\textsubscript{2}, Y\textsubscript{1-2} - Y\textsubscript{3}, and finally Y\textsubscript{1-2-3} - Y\textsubscript{4}) to achieve the four-year (Y\textsubscript{1-2-3-4}) “from-to” vector of change for each pixel. A 3x3 pixel majority despeckling function was then applied to this resulting image to simultaneously weed out spurious and illogical single pixels of changes through time (e.g., water-corn-forest-soy). After the multi-temporal despeckling operation was complete, the four-year “from-to” change vector attribute was then used to guide recoding of the single, thematic image back into the four respective CDL years as separate, thematic, image layers.

To allow for further consideration on the sorts of land that have seen changing use, we have linked CDL data to land quality. Corn Suitability Ratings (CSR, Miller 2005)\textsuperscript{6} and slope data were obtained from the SSURGO database maintained by USDA NRCS, available at [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/survey/geo/?cid=nrcs142p2_053627](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/survey/geo/?cid=nrcs142p2_053627).\textsuperscript{6} Farnsworth et al. (2010) also used CSR data to measure productivity. They use the original rating whereas we use CSR2, as made available in 2013 and 2014 by the USDA NRCS.

**Quantifying Land Use/Land Cover Change:** Quantifying change among CDL crop types and other land uses for the four selected years was performed within the SCA and the ILHL. We considered four slope percent classes [0-5, 6-10, 11-15, ≥16] and four CSR classes [1-69, 70-79,
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80-89, >90] across the SCA and within the ILHL. Given that CDL and NRI are two distinct data sources with different data generating processes, we did not expect the comparable land use numbers to match exactly. We did expect to see reasonably similar trends for the SCA among the common land use categories and this is largely true. Surprisingly though, while table 2 NRI data show an increase in corn acreage and decrease in hay and pasture over the 2001–2005 interval, CDL data in table 3 show the reverse.

**Analysis of Land Use Change**

We present land use trends and land use transition matrices to characterize conditional (on land quality) and unconditional land use changes for SCA and ILHL. We seek comparisons among the two independent datasets, as well as among the two aggregation levels using unconditional land use trends. Last, but not least, to facilitate further scrutiny we empirically specify the structure of rotations for corn over the 2000–2010 period to assess whether cropping in this region is moving toward monoculture. We present our findings below.

**Unconditional Land Use Trends**

To utilize the full extent of NRI data while emphasizing more recent available data, table 2 provides summary data on cultivated area under crops, hayland and pastureland for 1982, 1992, 2001, 2005 and 2010 (NRI 2013). It is evident that area under crop cultivation, at about 70% of total area in the SCA, dominates ‘other’ land uses. Corn and soybeans account for almost all land under tilled crops. Area under corn fell by 734 km² from 1982 to 2001, before returning to 1982 levels in 2010, trends that are broadly consistent with the nation as a whole. Soybean area has largely counterbalanced corn area where total acres under either crop increased by 5% over 1982–2010 and by 3% over 2001–2010. Soybean acres did decline in area between 2005 and
2010 whereas they increased by 7.5% nationally over the same period. This contrast may have been due to limited opportunities to substitute other crops out in favor of corn in the SCA. ‘Other crops’ declined over the interval but mainly before the 1996 Farm Bill. Area allocated to pasture saw a declining trend over the three decades, losing 551 km$^2$ between 1982 and 2010, whereas the decline in area under hay was more modest.

NRI records acreage under the CRP general sign-up scheme,\textsuperscript{7} introduced in the 1985 Food Security Act. Acreage under such CRP sign-ups had fallen substantially (83%) by 2010, when compared to 1992. Table 2 also shows a 60% decline in the CRP general-sign up acreage in the SCA between 2001 and 2010. Note that acres reported by the USDA Farm Service Agency (USDA FSA) under continuous sign-up in Iowa almost doubled in this period and their contribution towards total CRP acres also grew substantially from 16.7% in 2001 to 42.5% in 2013. However, as much of the ILHL landform is characterized as highly erodible, we expect continuous sign-ups to be a small fraction of all sign-ups for this region. In addition, at 1.1% growth per year, land under urban uses grew at a definite but modest rate during 1982–2010.\textsuperscript{8}

Turning to CDL data, corn acres have increased by about 75 km$^2$ in the ILHL between 2001 and 2013, see bottom right panel in table 3. Soybean acres have declined over the period by about 100 km$^2$ so that, perhaps surprisingly, there has been no net change in total acres devoted to row crops over the period. There has been expansion of the forest (+67 km$^2$) and fallow/idle cropland (+70 km$^2$) categories. The ILHL is topographically variable, especially in regard to slope and land quality. Within the region there have been some subtle changes. Crop production

\textsuperscript{7} High erodibility is the only eligibility criterion for the CRP general sign-up. The continuous sign-up, introduced in the 1996 Farm Bill, also targets land that adopt certain conservation practices, such as wetland restoration and conserving riparian buffers. Continuous sign-up contracts with high priority conservation practices can be enrolled any time during the year. The NRI records CRP lands under continuous sign-up in their respective categories like cropland, forest, grassland, etc. (NRI 2013, p.12).

\textsuperscript{8} Perceptions among concerned observers in the area are that developed areas are expanding more rapidly than these data would suggest (personal correspondence with Susan Hickey, The Nature Conservancy).
has expanded toward the north, especially in Woodbury and Monona counties where cropping is extensive. Crop production has declined in the more southerly counties where the landform is thin and cropping is limited. Crop production has generally moved from soybeans and toward corn overall along the hills but corn has not expanded in Plymouth County to the north or Pottawattamie, Mills and Fremont counties along the landform’s narrowing tail. Forests have expanded uniformly over the area.

Land use in marginal growing areas should, by definition, be more sensitive to price movements than should other areas. Over 2005–2010, Iowa’s planted corn acres increased by 4.7% while planted soybean acres decreased by 2.5%. Over 2010–2013 Iowa’s planted corn acres increased by 1.5% while planted soybean acres decreased by 4.1%. Table 3 shows that over 2005–2010 the ILHL’s planted corn acres increased by 62% while planted soybean acres declined by 2%. Over 2010–2013 the ILHL’s planted corn acres decreased by 8% while planted soybean acres decreased by 20%. The area does appear to have had more variable responses to external conditions than the state as a whole, likely due to the challenging production environment that it poses for growers.

Because CDL classification protocols for developed acres have evolved substantially through these years, CDL data do not directly allow for an assessment of change to this category. In a separate query that appropriately adjusted for the redefinitions, we found a 2.6% increase in ILHL development acres (from 103 km² acres to 106 km²) over the 2001–3.13 period. We had expected a larger increase.

**Conditional Land Use Trends**

*Seven-County-Area:* Table 4 presents land use trends conditional on being in LCC classes I-II and on being in classes III-IV. Classes I-IV contain almost all corn and soybean acres in this
region. Furthermore, 75% or more of hay and pasture acres also lie in LCC classes I-IV. However, relatively higher hay, pasture, forests and CRP land use shares are found on LCC classes III-IV. Corn acres have seen a slight migration to better land, perhaps because of incentives that the CRP provides to more limited land, while hay and pasture acres have shifted away from LCC classes I-II.

Table 5 provides trends for the EI <8 and EI ≥ 8 categories. Although almost 40% of land in the SCA had to be excluded from evaluating the trend statistics, due to missing and transitioning EI values, 88%–91% of cropped acres lie within the land parcels that had constant, non-missing EI values for all years. Only 40% of cropped acres with reported, constant EI values were on land with EI ≥ 8. Also, only 13%–23% of total hayland and pastureland were present over the years considered for analysis. Acres under hay, pasture and CRP categories generally had higher erodibility index values. It is noteworthy that corn acres on EI ≥ 8 land was lower in 2010 when compared with its 1982 counterpart. This outcome may be due in part to the advent of CRP, and in part to conservation compliance constraints.

**ILHL**: Table 6 shows that corn presence and recent corn expansion have been concentrated on less steeply sloped river valley tracts that cut through the landform, see figure 5. Total acres to corn and soybeans on slopes >10% has changed minimally over the period. The moderate decline in the hay/pasture/grass category over 2001–2013 occurred mainly on shallow slopes while expansion in forest occurred throughout. Expansion in the fallow/idle cropland category occurred mainly on lower (≤ 5%) and higher slopes (> 15%) where the highest proportional expansion of this category has been on higher slopes, a notable observation given that overall CRP acres on the landform likely declined over the 2001–2013 period.

Table 7 reports land use change by four corn suitability rating (CSR) categories. These are ≤
69, or least suitable, 70–79, 80–89 and ≥90, see Miller (2005). Corn expanded and soybean contracted in each category over the 2001–2013 period. Total land in either corn or soybeans increased slightly on lower quality land but decreased slightly on better quality land, a perplexing finding that also applies for the SCA (table not shown). Land area under forest has expanded or trended sideways for all land quality categories while the data indicate that area in the hay/pasture/grass category has declined slightly for better land categories. Fallow/idle cropland is found to have expanded on higher quality land and to have contracted on lower quality land, perhaps due to high error in the category (as previously mentioned) or forest encroachment.

**Temporal Transition Matrices**

We also present temporal transition matrices for the SCA using NRI data as well as CDL land cover data. Pivot tables such as table 8 provide a matrix of land use transitions over time. They allow us to identify interesting transitions among the land use categories under study, which may have important policy implications for this region. We analyze pivot tables using NRI data for 2001–2005, 2005–2010 and using CDL data for 2001–2005, 2005–2010, and 2010–2013 periods. Whereas CDL data allows us to capture the most recent transitions, NRI data helps in quantifying conversions into urbanization.

Table 8 provides further perspective on cropping pressure in the ILHL. The table is a transition matrix that categorizes CDL data to be broadly consistent with NRI categories.\(^9\) Net movement from corn and soybeans into hay/pasture/grass was large during 2001–2005, a period of stable corn planted acres in the United States, at about 324,000 km\(^2\), and of comparatively low commodity prices. Strong net movement in the other direction occurred between 2005 and 2010,

\(^9\) Numbers are somewhat smaller than in table 3 as minor categories have been removed.
consistent with the national movement toward more cropland to meet growing demand for commodities. The shift back to hay/pasture/grass and fallow/idle cropland over 2010–2013 as well as contraction in both corn and soybean acres is not consistent with national trends. In 2013, corn and soybean area planted in the United States were, respectively, 384,000 km² and 308,000 km². In 2010 the corresponding numbers were 348,000 km² and 312,000 km². Many of the additional corn acres have come from outside the traditional Cornbelt, especially from Great Plains states such as North Dakota and Kansas.

Table 8 shows that much of the corn acreage that moved out of cropping between 2001 and 2005 in the ILHL likely went into grass and fallow cropland, a pattern that was reversed in the subsequent five years so that corn acres were 138 km² larger in 2010 than in 2001. High corn acreage was sustained in the 2010–2013 period through declining soybean acres. While shifts occurred into grass and fallow cropland categories, net grass acres have declined due to outward transitions into the forests category (not included here) where invasive eastern red cedar is a problem in the area.

Table 9 reveals that corn and soybean areas are sources of urbanized land in the SCA with 10 km² converted during 2001–2005 and 15 km² converted during 2005–2010. CRP in 2001–2005 (6 km²) and pasture in 2005–2010 periods (7 km²) are other sources of conversion. Also, CRP lands transitioned into corn and soybean production (116 km²) at a very high rate during 2005–2010, relative to the 2001–2005 period (6 km² CRP lands into corn and soybean). Hay and pasture have also lost considerable areas to corn and soybean production (i.e., 176 km² in 2001–2005 and 133 km² in 2005–2010).

**Structure of Rotations**

As all indicators hold that corn acreage has expanded in the region dominated by corn-soybean
rotations while cropped acreage has seen very limited change, it is certain that more corn intensive rotations are being used. Table 10 provides confirmation using CDL data for the ILHL. The table shows that the percent of all corn land in a given year that returns to corn the next year has trended upward over the years. The pattern is more obvious when three and four year corn sequences are viewed. Figure 6 depicts CDL data that provide evidence of more intensive corn rotations toward the landforms thick north end. Our finding corroborates Plourde et al. (2013), who used CDL data across much of the Greater Mississippi watershed to discern an intensification of corn in rotations during 2003–2010.

**Discussion**

Several factors have led to growth in tilled acres across the United States since 2006. In the Loess Hills we conclude that corn production has increased where much of the expansion has been through displacement of soybeans. The evidence does point to grassland loss in the area where we remind the reader that pixel-level misclassification rates is very high for CDL data on grass and fallow/idle categories. Tables 2 and 3 show that the hay/pasture/grass category declined by about 12% and 17%, respectively, over 2005–2013 while the respective figures for the fallow/idle category are declines of about 15% and 21%. Even if evidence on grassland loss is discarded, there are adverse implications for environmental services as corn production in rotation is believed to improve soil quality (Karlen et al. 2006) as well as reduce demand for chemicals that improve fertility (Stanger and Lauer 2008) and manage pests (Gassmann et al. 2014).

Some parts of the ecoregion have seen cropland expansion, most notably southeast of Sioux City, while crop production has declined toward the less heavily cropped south. Both corn and forest acres have expanded everywhere in the hills over 2005–2013 but it should be noted that
separating forested land and grass cover is problematic, especially in the presence of invasive shrubs. There is little evidence that cropping has moved to better quality land although there is some evidence that it has moved away from steeper slopes. The limited evidence available does not point to urban development as a major factor in the area but our view is that the matter warrants further inquiry. Land identified as fallow/idle has declined, likely due to a net decline in CRP acres.

Given the various forces that have aligned in recent years to incentivize row crop production and given national trends, why row cropping has not expanded by more along the hills is unclear. Perhaps, for some reason, trends toward mechanization have favored less hilly land. Perhaps too, notwithstanding the growth in reduced tillage methods throughout the United States, conservation compliance regulations and targeted CRP sign-ups have proven to be more effective in protecting grass and wooded land in the area than elsewhere? Whether the Loess Hills are distinctive or our finding reflects a more general pattern of comparative constraint in row crop activity on hill terrain in recent years is a matter that warrants further inquiry.
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**Table 1:** CDL cover type classes pertinent to Iowa and the disparity between years. An ‘X’ denotes that the class existed and was adequately represented, while 'U' denotes that the class existed but was grossly under-represented. No value ‘-’ indicates that the class did not exist or had zero total area.

| CDL Cover Type                  | 2001 | 2005 | 2010 | 2013 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Corn                            | X    | X    | X    | X    |
| Soybeans                        | X    | X    | X    | X    |
| Barley                          | -    | -    | X    | X    |
| Oats                            | X    | X    | X    | X    |
| Rye                             | -    | -    | X    | X    |
| Flaxseed                        | -    | -    | X    | -    |
| Spring Wheat                    | -    | -    | X    | -    |
| Winter Wheat                    | -    | X    | X    | X    |
| Other Small Grains              | X    | X    | -    | -    |
| Other Crops                     | X    | X    | U    | -    |
| Alfalfa                         | X    | X    | X    | X    |
| Other Hay/Non-alfalfa           | -    | -    | X    | X    |
| Fallow/Idle Cropland            | X    | X    | U    | U    |
| Forest                          |      |      | X    | -    |
| Deciduous Forest                | -    | -    | X    | X    |
| Evergreen Forest                | -    | -    | X    | X    |
| Mixed Forest                    | -    | -    | X    | X    |
| Developed                       | U    | X    | -    | -    |
| Dev/Open Space                  | -    | -    | X    | X    |
| Dev/Low intensity               | -    | -    | X    | X    |
| Dev/Med Intensity               | -    | -    | X    | X    |
| Dev/High Intensity              | -    | -    | X    | X    |
| Grass Pasture                   | X    | X    | X    | X    |
| Non-Ag/Undefined                | -    | X    | -    | -    |
|                |   |   | U | U |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|
| Shrubland      | - | - | U | U |
| Barren         | - | - | X | X |
| Wetlands       | - | X | X | - |
| Herbaceous Wetland | - | - | X | X |
| Woody Wetlands | - | - | X | X |
| Water          | X | X | X | X |
Table 2: Land use trends for Seven County Area (in km²).

| Land Use Category | 1982 | 1992 | 2001 | 2005 | 2010 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Corn              | 5,372| 5,077| 4,638| 4,858| 5,655|
| Soybeans          | 3,527| 3,475| 4,472| 4,449| 3,727|
| Other Crops       | 402  | 109  | 102  | 26   | 62   |
| Hay               | 392  | 280  | 413  | 358  | 358  |
| Pasture           | 1,544| 1,369| 1,140| 1,022| 993  |
| Forest            | 563  | 591  | 640  | 657  | 645  |
| CRP               | 0    | 746  | 331  | 316  | 130  |
| Urban             | 297  | 309  | 353  | 379  | 405  |

Source: National Resource Inventory data.
Table 3: County level and aggregate changes on Loess Hills landform (in km²).

|                | Plymouth 2001 | Plymouth 2005 | Plymouth 2010 | Plymouth 2013 | Woodbury 2001 | Woodbury 2005 | Woodbury 2010 | Woodbury 2013 |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Corn           | 42.5          | 28.3          | 53.2          | 41.8          | 235.0         | 191.7         | 287.0         | 278.2         |
| Soybeans       | 27.7          | 33.4          | 35.4          | 27.5          | 196.4         | 211.3         | 219.7         | 182.0         |
| Fallow/Idle Cropland | 26.6      | 17.2          | 8.0           | 14.8          | 77.7          | 77.8          | 32.1          | 53.4          |
| Hay/Pasture/Grass | 115.4       | 127.3         | 125.7         | 137.0         | 158.6         | 184.9         | 132.6         | 156.9         |
| Forest         | 41.7          | 48.2          | 40.1          | 42.3          | 47.1          | 55.1          | 53.9          | 52.3          |
| Developed (all years) | 19.4        | 19.4          | 19.4          | 19.4          | 135.4         | 135.4         | 135.4         | 135.4         |

|                | Monona 2001  | Monona 2005  | Monona 2010  | Monona 2013  | Harrison 2001 | Harrison 2005 | Harrison 2010 | Harrison 2013 |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Corn           | 102.4        | 88.4         | 150.4        | 138.9        | 121.0         | 88.1          | 144.3         | 130.1         |
| Soybeans       | 95.6         | 92.2         | 88.7         | 71.5         | 104.4         | 104.9         | 82.4          | 64.2          |
| Fallow/Idle Cropland | 24.9    | 28.8         | 18.7         | 31.5         | 25.2          | 40.3          | 26.5          | 44.7          |
| Hay/Pasture/Grass | 129.9      | 134.7        | 86.2         | 99.1         | 69.6          | 80.1          | 62.4          | 73.5          |
| Forest         | 120.5        | 129.2        | 132.0        | 133.0        | 97.3          | 104.4         | 102.6         | 106.9         |
| Developed (all years) | 38.3        | 38.3         | 38.3         | 38.3         | 40.7          | 40.7          | 40.7          | 40.7          |

|                | Pottawattamie 2001 | Pottawattamie 2005 | Pottawattamie 2010 | Pottawattamie 2013 | Mills 2001 | Mills 2005 | Mills 2010 | Mills 2013 |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Corn           | 74.5                | 50.7                | 79.8                | 74.0                | 25.0       | 11.7       | 20.5       | 18.8       |
| Soybeans       | 52.5                | 50.6                | 52.8                | 37.4                | 17.6       | 17.1       | 20.5       | 14.9       |
| Fallow/Idle Cropland | 14.7           | 31.6                | 17.6                | 27.3                | 9.3        | 17.9       | 9.3        | 12.5       |
| Hay/Pasture/Grass | 72.0            | 77.0                | 57.9                | 67.0                | 46.7       | 49.4       | 41.7       | 46.9       |
| Forest         | 62.2                | 66.6                | 67.3                | 69.4                | 45.9       | 49.0       | 51.0       | 51.2       |
| Developed (all years) | 68.3             | 68.3                | 68.3                | 68.3                | 19.7       | 19.7       | 19.7       | 19.7       |

|                | Fremont 2001 | Fremont 2005 | Fremont 2010 | Fremont 2013 | Loess Hills Polygon 2001 | Loess Hills Polygon 2005 | Loess Hills Polygon 2010 | Loess Hills Polygon 2013 |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Corn           | 11.4        | 3.7         | 11.6        | 5.5         | 611.7                   | 462.4                   | 746.8                   | 687.4                   |
| Soybeans       | 9.3         | 8.8         | 7.4         | 8.5         | 503.4                   | 518.2                   | 506.9                   | 406.1                   |
| Fallow/Idle Cropland | 2.4        | 11.2        | 5.7         | 7.7         | 180.7                   | 224.8                   | 118.0                   | 192.0                   |
| Hay/Pasture/Grass | 28.8       | 30.8        | 26.6        | 29.0        | 621.1                   | 684.1                   | 533.1                   | 609.4                   |
| Forest         | 51.9        | 52.8        | 55.4        | 55.0        | 476.6                   | 515.7                   | 507.3                   | 517.1                   |
| Developed (all years) | 9.6        | 9.6         | 9.6         | 9.6         | 331.2                   | 331.2                   | 331.2                   | 331.2                   |

Source: Cropland Data Layer data.
Note: Acres in the ‘Developed’ category were fixed at 2001 levels.
Table 4: Land use trends for Seven County Area (in km²), conditional on Land Capability Class. Percent of all land in that use is in parentheses.

| LCC I, II Land Use Categories | 1982    | 1992    | 2001    | 2005    | 2010    |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Corn                          | 2,500 (46.5) | 2,472 (48.7) | 2,253 (48.6) | 2,447 (50.4) | 2,750 (48.6) |
| Soybeans                      | 1,712 (48.5) | 1,841 (53.0) | 2,207 (49.4) | 2,172 (48.8) | 1,812 (48.6) |
| Other Crops                   | 120 (29.9) | 30 (27.5) | 26 (25.5) | 9 (34.6) | 19 (30.6) |
| Hay                           | 117 (29.8) | 56 (20.0) | 88 (21.3) | 33 (9.2) | 53 (14.8) |
| Pasture                       | 443 (28.7) | 391 (28.6) | 324 (28.4) | 251 (24.6) | 245 (24.7) |
| Forest                        | 105 (18.7) | 93 (15.7) | 103 (16.1) | 102 (15.5) | 105 (16.3) |
| CRP                           | 0 (-)    | 81 (10.9) | 13 (3.9) | 13 (4.1) | 1 (0.8) |

| LCC III, IV Land Use Categories | 1982    | 1992    | 2001    | 2005    | 2010    |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Corn                            | 2,790 (52) | 2,558 (50.4) | 2,330 (50.2) | 2,355 (48.5) | 2,866 (50.7) |
| Soybeans                        | 1,747 (49.5) | 1,563 (45.0) | 2,245 (50.2) | 2,258 (50.8) | 1,895 (50.8) |
| Other Crops                     | 263 (65.4) | 79 (72.5) | 77 (75.5) | 17 (65.4) | 43 (69.4) |
| Hay                             | 268 (68.4) | 213 (76.1) | 304 (73.6) | 311 (86.9) | 294 (82.1) |
| Pasture                         | 777 (50.3) | 693 (50.6) | 548 (48.1) | 516 (50.5) | 499 (50.3) |
| Forest                          | 196 (34.8) | 200 (33.8) | 227 (35.5) | 247 (37.6) | 234 (36.3) |
| CRP                             | 0 (-)    | 629 (84.3) | 302 (91.2) | 294 (93.0) | 119 (91.5) |

Source: National Resource Inventory data.
### Table 5: Land use trends for Seven County Area (in km²), conditional on Erodibility Index.

| Land Use Category | EI < 8  |  |  |  |  |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                   | 1982    | 1992    | 2001    | 2005    | 2010    |
| Corn              | 2,799   | 2,732   | 2,431   | 2,568   | 3,211   |
| Soybeans          | 2,178   | 2,251   | 2,660   | 2,613   | 1,857   |
| Other Crops       | 134     | 35      | 26      | 9       | 19      |
| Hay               | 114     | 78      | 86      | 40      | 56      |
| Pasture           | 10      | 6       | 17      | 17      | 0       |
| CRP               | 0       | 51      | 4       | 4       | 0       |

| Land Use Category | EI ≥ 8 |  |  |  |  |
|-------------------|--------| | | | |
|                   | 1982    | 1992   | 2001   | 2005   | 2010   |
| Corn              | 2,151   | 1,761  | 1,615  | 1,679  | 1,789  |
| Soybeans          | 944     | 962    | 1,319  | 1,351  | 1,397  |
| Other Crops       | 227     | 73     | 77     | 17     | 43     |
| Hay               | 224     | 120    | 243    | 212    | 215    |
| Pasture           | 0       | 11     | 5      | 5      | 0      |
| CRP               | 0       | 593    | 294    | 288    | 108    |

Source: National Resource Inventory data.

Note: Urban land and forest land are generally not assigned EI values.
Table 6: Change in crop and other land use/cover areas on the ILHL, by four slope categories (km²).

|                    | 0-5 % Slope | 6-10 % Slope | 11-15 % Slope | >15 % Slope |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
|                    | 2001 2005 2010 2013 | 2001 2005 2010 2013 | 2001 2005 2010 2013 | 2001 2005 2010 2013 |
| Corn               | 257 216 317 298 | 206 152 252 236 | 43 60 113 101 | 43 22 49 36 |
| Soybeans           | 233 235 219 181 | 167 176 177 142 | 67 70 74 57 | 24 24 25 17 |
| Other Crops        | 1 2 0 0 | 1 3 0 0 | 0 2 0 0 | 0 1 0 0 |
| Alfalfa            | 6 4 6 5 | 9 7 8 6 | 6 5 4 3 | 3 2 2 1 |
| Fallow/Idle Cropland | 49 66 34 62 | 68 85 42 65 | 42 48 25 37 | 20 24 16 25 |
| Hay/Pasture/Grass  | 136 151 107 129 | 215 238 184 210 | 160 176 144 161 | 106 116 96 106 |
| Forest             | 71 81 78 80 | 116 128 126 129 | 117 126 127 128 | 159 168 169 171 |
| Developed (all years) | 124 124 124 124 | 110 110 110 110 | 55 55 55 55 | 36 36 36 36 |

Source: Cropland Data Layer data.
Note: Acres in the ‘Developed’ category were fixed at 2001 levels.
Table 7: Change in crop and other land use/cover areas within the ILHL, by four CSR categories (km²).

|                | 1-69 CSR2     | 70-79 CSR2     | 80-89 CSR2     | 90-100 CSR2    |
|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
|                | 2001 | 2005 | 2010 | 2013 | 2001 | 2005 | 2010 | 2013 | 2001 | 2005 | 2010 | 2013 | 2001 | 2005 | 2010 | 2013 |
| **Corn**       | 309  | 211  | 371  | 342  | 38   | 36   | 52   | 47   | 158  | 128  | 197  | 178  | 99   | 79   | 117  | 111  |
| **Soybeans**   | 227  | 243  | 256  | 201  | 39   | 37   | 30   | 26   | 139  | 141  | 131  | 106  | 91   | 91   | 83   | 68   |
| **Other Crops**| 14   | 6    | 1    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 2    | 2    | 0    | 0    | 10   | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| **Alfalfa**    | 17   | 14   | 12   | 9    | 1    | 0    | 1    | 1    | 4    | 3    | 5    | 4    | 2    | 1    | 2    | 2    |
| **Fallow/Idle Cropland** | 127  | 146  | 73   | 108  | 5    | 5    | 4    | 8    | 34   | 44   | 26   | 49   | 14   | 28   | 15   | 25   |
| **Hay/Pasture/Grass** | 455  | 504  | 410  | 456  | 13   | 14   | 11   | 14   | 104  | 114  | 79   | 97   | 44   | 47   | 32   | 39   |
| **Forest**     | 390  | 415  | 417  | 422  | 6    | 8    | 6    | 7    | 45   | 54   | 50   | 51   | 22   | 26   | 25   | 26   |
| **Developed (all years)** | 194  | 194  | 194  | 194  | 14   | 14   | 14   | 14   | 64   | 64   | 64   | 64   | 53   | 53   | 53   | 53   |

Source: Cropland Data Layer data.
Note: Acres in the ‘Developed’ category were fixed at 2001 levels.
Table 8: Pivot table for ILHL using CDL data but NRI specific land use categories (in km²), 2001-’05, 2005-’10 & 2010-’13.

|       | 2005 |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|       | Corn | Soy   | Hay/Pasture | Fallow/Idle Crop | Grand Total |
| Corn  | 335  | 129   | 53    | 70    | 588   |
| Soy   | 106  | 349   | 1     | 42    | 498   |
| Hay/Pasture/Grass | 1   | 16    | 559   | 18    | 594   |
| Fallow/Idle Crop | 16   | 17    | 50    | 83    | 167   |
| Grand Total | 457 | 512   | 663   | 213   | 1,846 |

|       | 2010 |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|       | Corn | Soy   | Hay/Pasture | Fallow/Idle Crop | Grand Total |
| Corn | 168  | 262   | 4     | 18    | 452   |
| Soy  | 362  | 113   | 12    | 20    | 506   |
| Hay/Pasture/Grass | 113  | 69    | 415   | 17    | 613   |
| Fallow/Idle Crop | 68   | 48    | 49    | 47    | 213   |
| Grand Total | 710 | 492   | 480   | 102   | 1,784 |

|       | 2013 |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|       | Corn | Soy   | Hay/Pasture | Fallow/Idle Crop | Grand Total |
| Corn | 255  | 341   | 68    | 61    | 726   |
| Soy  | 397  | 50    | 22    | 31    | 501   |
| Hay/Pasture/Grass | 15  | 5     | 494   | 0     | 514   |
| Fallow/Idle Crop | 12   | 7     | 1     | 89    | 110   |
| Grand Total | 680 | 404   | 585   | 181   | 1,850 |

Source: Cropland Data Layer data.
Table 9: Pivot table for Seven County Area using NRI specific land use categories, 2001-'05 & 2005-'10.

| Specific Land Use 2005 (km²) | Corn | Soy | Hay | Pasture | CRP | Urban | Grand Total |
|------------------------------|------|-----|-----|---------|-----|-------|-------------|
| Corn                         | 3,904| 680 | 20  | 0       | 0   | 7     | 4,611       |
| Soybeans                     | 741  | 3,677| 15  | 0       | 0   | 3     | 4,435       |
| Hay                          | 74   | 15  | 324 | 0       | 0   | 0     | 413         |
| Pasture                      | 57   | 30  | 1,020| 0       | 5   | 1,113 |
| CRP                          | 6    | 0   | 2   | 316     | 6   | 331   |
| Urban                        | 0    | 0   | 0   | 0       | 353 | 353   |
| Grand Total                  | 4,782| 4,402| 358 | 1,022   | 361 | 11,272|

| Specific Land Use 2010 (km²) | Corn | Soy | Hay | Pasture | CRP | Urban | Grand Total |
|------------------------------|------|-----|-----|---------|-----|-------|-------------|
| Corn                         | 1,448| 3,263| 42  | 0       | 0   | 14    | 4,766       |
| Soybeans                     | 3,974| 398 | 7   | 0       | 0   | 1     | 4,379       |
| Hay                          | 53   | 58  | 243 | 0       | 0   | 0     | 354         |
| Pasture                      | 22   | 0   | 0   | 993     | 7   | 1,022 |
| CRP                          | 107  | 9   | 66  | 0       | 379 | 379   |
| Urban                        | 0    | 0   | 0   | 0       | 379 | 379   |
| Grand Total                  | 5,605| 3,727| 358 | 993     | 130 | 383   | 11,230      |

Source: National Resource Inventory data.

Table 10: Cropping sequence as evidence on narrowing cropping patterns on the ILHL, 2000-2010. The sequences are characterized as acreages, measured in km².

| Year | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| C₀   | 668  | 773  | 545  | 614  | 522  | 529  | 628  | 582  | 571  | 642  |
| C₀/C₀+1 | 172 | 115  | 111  | 109  | 113  | 191  | 259  | 184  | 180  | 197  |
| % CC sequence | 26 | 15   | 20   | 18   | 22   | 36   | 41   | 32   | 31   | 31   |
| C₀/C₀+1C₀+2 | 46 | 50   | 37   | 45   | 59   | 135  | 107  | 108  | 108  | -    |
| % CCC sequence | 7 | 6    | 7    | 11   | 26   | 17   | 19   | 19   | -    | -    |
| C₀/C₀+1C₀+2C₀+3 | 19 | 14   | 16   | 26   | 39   | 49   | 66   | 72   | -    | -    |
| % CCCC sequence | 3 | 2    | 3    | 4    | 7    | 9    | 11   | 12   | -    | -    |

Source: Cropland Data Layers.
Notes: For 2000, ‘C₀’ gives the are in corn that year, ‘C₀/C₀+1’ gives the area in corn both that and the following year, while ‘% CC sequence’ gives (C₀/C₀+1/C₀)×100. To compute the above statistics we apply multi-temporal despeckling and re-coding operations, as discussed under ‘Materials and Methods’, on CDL years 2000-’10.
Figure 1: Iowa’s Loess Hills landform study area (inside red boundaries, 2,797 km²) and the seven counties in Western Iowa that contain it.
Figure 2: Crop production infrastructure in Iowa’s Loess Hills landform study area.
Figure 3: Speckling and misclassifications between old (top) and newer (bottom) CDL data processing for a 127 km$^2$ area in western Iowa. Soybeans (dark green), Corn (orange), Alfalfa (magenta), Grass/Pasture (light green), and Forest (intermediate green) are shown. Soybeans and Corn are confused with Grass/Pasture in 2001, while Corn, Forest, and Alfalfa are confused with Grass/Pasture in 2005. Also note that roads (gray) are missing from 2001 and 2005.
Figure 4: Results of class parity correction using 2001 and 2006 NLCD and subsequent, simultaneous, despeckling of the 2001, 2005, 2010, and 2013 CDLs. Despeckling was achieved via a $3 \times 3$ majority filter applied to the union of the four respective CDLs into one thematic image with a four-year, change vector, attribute assigned to each pixel. This change vector attribute was used afterward to recreate the individual CDLs shown above. (Compare with figure 3.)
Figure 5: Landscape stratification classes for the seven-county study area. Corn suitability rating (CSR) on the left side and percent slope of terrain classes on the right side.
Figure 6: Evidence of trend toward more intensive corn rotations in landform’s thick North middle.