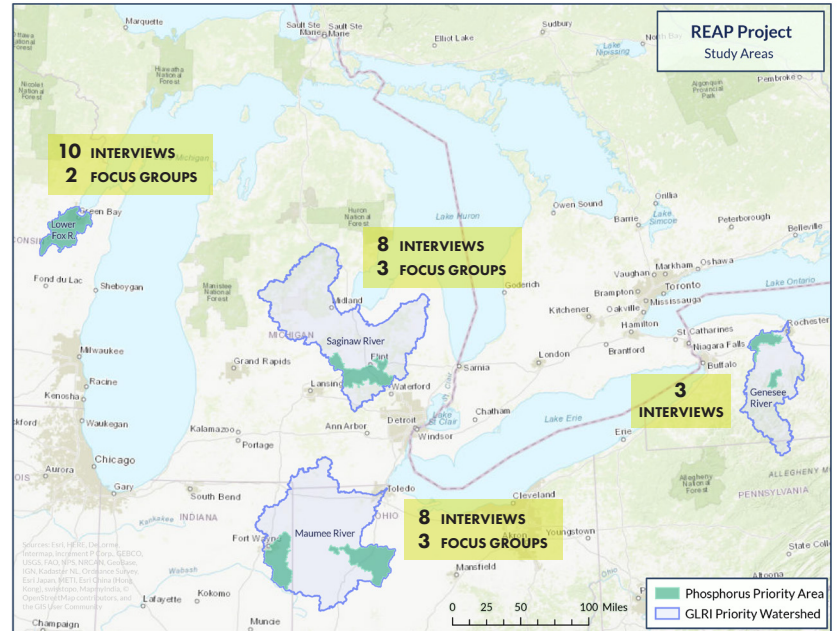
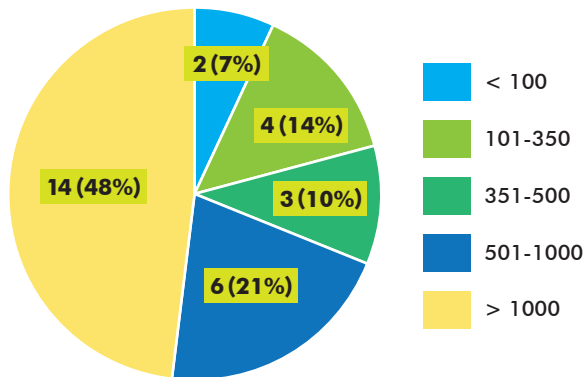


# Summary of Interviews and Focus Groups to Evaluate the Effectiveness of GLRI Focus Area 3

## Who

29 interviews were conducted with managers of GLRI Focus Area 3 projects and programs, and 8 focus groups were convened with farmers from priority watersheds who had received conservation incentives through GLRI.

### Size of Agricultural Operations of Focus Group Participants (Acres)



## What

Questions covered a variety of themes, with a focus on why farmers participate in conservation and incentive-based programs; how program participation changes practices and attitudes about practices in the watershed; how GLRI investments impacted participants; and how to improve future GLRI investments.

## Key finding

**Participating farmers and managers are largely satisfied with GLRI projects and programs, but request even more flexibility in program requirements and timelines and continued investments for success to be maintained.**

“ I’d just like to say thanks for the program. Any time somebody’s putting funds out there that we can grab onto that we can make fit, we appreciate it. And I’m surprised more farmers don’t get on the programs. ”

“ I think it’s one of the better programs I’ve ever run across... you’re actually getting educated. It seems like we’re learning something. It’s interesting. ”

# Reported strengths

- \* “Flexibility” and the local, “grassroots” feel are GLRI’s primary strengths
- \* The “boots on the ground” approach is critical to farmer participation and lasting cultural change
- \* GLRI allows for experimentation with novel or innovative concepts and targeting participants that other incentive programs cannot
- \* Most participants report being better off as a result of participating in GLRI
- \* Most participants felt that participation in GLRI increased their knowledge of agricultural conservation practices and made them feel like their efforts were important
- \* Conservation practices are often implemented or maintained after the incentives stop

“ The GLRI funds have provided opportunities for more kind of grassroots solutions that will fit and work for those local producers and localized watershed and natural resource concerns. ”

“ (GLRI) allows you to think outside the box and come up with innovative ideas to address environmental outcomes that we need to in those specific regions. ”

“ The best salespeople for this program have been the enrollees themselves. Nothing sells this program like a satisfied farmer participant...he has a good experience, he starts talking to his neighbors about it. And that has been by far the greatest outreach mechanism. ”

“ If you get in front of the...right producer that has a good reputation in the community, and someone that people know they do things right on their farm, and you get the attention of them and they spread the word. I think I’ve had more people sign up through referrals than anything else. ”

- \* The localized, grassroots, and flexible nature of the program
- \* Incentivizing innovation and creativity (e.g., pilot programs, equipment rentals)
- \* Emphasis on local-level problem-solving
- \* Clear parameters for program participation
- \* Current payment methods and paperwork structures
- \* Support for interpersonal outreach methods (e.g., field days, demonstration farms, one-on-one education in the field with farmers)

# Aspects to improve

- \* Increase funds for staffing at the local (program manager) level, in order to increase time available for on-farm interaction with farmers and avoid “bottlenecking” of resources.
- \* Offer longer contracts, but not if it would add hurdles for farmers and local program managers.
- \* Expand pay-for-performance options that cover farmers’ basic costs in the event of poor performance, and account for local factors (weather, topography, etc.).
- \* Include allowances for year-to-year adjustments for certain practices (e.g., cover crops) to account for uncertainty in crop rotations.
- \* Increase field days and demonstration farm visits with small groups of farmers.
- \* Consider approving five- to seven-year pilot projects, especially with influential farmers.
- \* Consider funding research to track farmers’ behaviors and perceptions post-GLRI funding.
- \* Improve administrative efficiency by standardizing guidelines for oversight and granting periods, and allowing for mid-project adjustments.

“ To have lasting cultural impacts, you need to have the right people and enough people, boots on the ground, to build the relationships to help make the changes. Without those, we’re going to be putting money out for conservation that’s going to stop when the money stops. ”