Discovery Farms are privately owned farms that have volunteered to help with on-farm research regarding farming’s impact on the environment. They evaluate various management practices’ impact on the environment and the most economical and effective ways to reduce negative impact. Activities on the farms involve monitoring environmental indicators for five to seven years, beginning with the collection of baseline data generated under current management practices, along with field days and demonstrations. On each of our Discovery Farms, the farmer decided which management situation or concern he or she wanted more information on; this ranged from crop rotation and water use efficiency, benefits of no-till, nutrient runoff from poultry production areas to the use of cover crops. Should management adjustments be indicated, monitoring will evaluate the changes.

What is the goal of Discovery Farms?

The goal of the Arkansas Discovery Farm Program is to promote and document sustainable and viable farming systems that remain cost-effective in an environmentally sound manner.

Objectives:

- Conduct on-farm research and monitoring to assess the need for and effectiveness of best management practices.
- Provide on-farm verification and documentation of practices that ensure sound environmental farm stewardship.
- Develop and deliver educational programs from on-farm data that will assist farmers in achieving both production and environmental goals in support of sustainable farming.
Background

In 2008, a delegation of Arkansas Farm Bureau leaders, agricultural producers, state agency personnel and University of Arkansas faculty observed a similar University of Wisconsin effort, which had been operating for several years. The Discovery Farm program is real and functioning collaboration among agricultural producer groups and natural resource conservation organizations, to assist farmers find realistic means of addressing environmental pressures. The delegation members were so impressed with the ideals of the program that a coalition of agricultural stakeholders in Arkansas formed in late 2009 and led by University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture faculty, has grown into a nationally recognized research, extension and education program monitoring and documenting the benefits of agricultural conservation practices on water quality. We currently have ten Discovery Farms in operation across the state of Arkansas.