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Waterbirds on Working Lands Recommended Practices for Corn Production

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Corn is an important crop for some waterbirds. The energy found in corn is helpful for migrating waterbirds, as well as over-wintering birds in the South. In addition to grain utilization, farmland that uses corn in rotations can be a good source of terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates (earthworms, larval insects, flying insects etc.).

For most farmers, improvements to wildlife habitats within or near their corn crop will only require minor modifications to current practices. The recommendations fall into five areas of your operation as outlined below.

Please also see [Recommended Practices for All Row Crops](http://www.audubon.org/bird/waterbirds/all_crops.html) (http://www.audubon.org/bird/waterbirds/all_crops.html).

- 1. Nutrient management.** Avoid nutrient management practices that harm earthworm and other soil invertebrate populations; in some cases, anhydrous ammonia applications can harm earthworm populations. Nitrogen rates need to be realistic and based on yield goals. Conduct in-season nutrient testing, if possible. Monitor and manage phosphorus and potassium levels. Conduct manure analysis to determine the true nutrient value of manure. Avoid nutrient applications into ground or surface waters.
- 2. Tillage management.** Use a reduced-tillage or no-till system. These systems will improve soil health, and reduce runoff and sedimentation. Waterbirds will benefit by having less disturbance and better potential nesting habitat. Earthworm and other soil invertebrate populations are generally higher in no-till systems, which will benefit many waterbirds. If tillage needs to be done, conduct it at a time that will minimally impact bird nesting, resting, and foraging.
- 3. Integrated Pest Management.** Use an insect- and weed-management program that has minimal impact on the environment. Reducing use of granular insecticides will benefit waterbirds.
- 4. Harvest Management.** Waste corn is an important food source for many migrating waterbirds. Employ a system that ensures that any harvest losses are available to wildlife, especially waterbirds. Avoid fall tillage to ensure that this food source is available.
- 5. Field Border and Edge Management.** Maintain wetlands, and try to enhance field border effects in and around corn. Filter and buffer strips should be used when feasible. If a farm has temporary wetlands or nonproductive areas, consider enrolling these lands in [conservation programs](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs) (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs>) such as CRP, WRP, or easements. Your state may also have additional programs that may help with conservation.