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Program #4,797 of the Earth & Sky Radio Series
 Hosts Deborah Byrd and Joel Block
 February 21, 2006

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DB: This is Earth & Sky. When you look at a farm or a ranch, you might think to yourself, that's where corn or dairy products come from.

JB: You might see cotton that goes into clothing, or wood for paper, construction or fuel. But Scott Swinton - agricultural economist from Michigan State University - sees more. He knows that agricultural lands filter air and water - store greenhouse gases - and provide habitat for wild plants and animals.

Scott Swinton: These extra benefits are ones that some ecologists have called ecosystem services. And ecosystem services are really just things ecosystems provide that humans care about and that we like.

DB: Ecosystem services may not be bought and sold in the marketplace. But they have value. Swinton is planning a survey of Michigan citizens to ask what they'd pay for ecosystem services such as reduced erosion or runoff or more greenhouse gas storage. It's part of an effort to understand the value of ecosystem services. Swinton also wants to understand how specific farming practices affect the ecosystem services that a piece of land provides.

Scott Swinton: And then finally with those kinds of things understood, we can . . . think about designing policy incentives for farmers to produce more of these ecosystem services.

JB: That's our show. With thanks to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, we're Block and Byrd for Earth & Sky.

Author(s): Marc Airhart

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More Information

Read the [abstract](#) of Swinton's paper on today's radio topic, presented Saturday, February 18 at a session on [Cost-effective Ecosystem Service Production from Row-crop Agriculture](#) at the annual [AAAS meeting](#).



When you drive across a rural landscape, you might or might not picture the many consumables that come from these lands: food, clothing, fuel, building materials and so on. But Scott Swinton also sees rural lands as sources of "ecosystem services." An ecosystem service might not yet have a value in a traditional market. It's simply something that benefits people. For example, rural lands might provide for reduced erosion or more greenhouse gas storage. Swinton is among many scientists now trying to place a value on these sorts of ecosystem services. (USDA Photo by: Joe Larson)

Thanks to:
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