

# LESA Fact Sheet

## Land Evaluation and Site Assessment

LESA has been a tremendous asset for us as a tool to review development proposals. We are able to put numbers to applications to make good land use decisions.  
 —Mark Trumbauer, Linn County Planning and Zoning Division Manager

### What is LESA?

The fundamental idea behind a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system is to help local officials make the best land use determinations when considering development. The framework helps to keep the best agriculture land in agriculture. LESA provides a technical framework to numerically rank land parcels based on local resource evaluation and site considerations. This is a ranking locally designed and implemented. When requested, NRCS can and will provide technical assistance. Currently, officials in the following counties are using LESA to help guide development decisions: Black Hawk, Jasper, Johnson, Linn, Marshall, Muscatine, and Story.

### Land Evaluation

In agricultural land evaluation, soils are rated and placed into groups ranging from the best to the least suited for a specific agricultural use, such as cropland, forestland, or pastureland. Then, a relative value is determined for each group. For example, the best group may be assigned a value of 100, while all other groups are assigned lower values. The land evaluation is based on data from the National Cooperative Soil Survey—often called the largest and most valuable natural resource database in the world.

LESA activities, such as measuring land and productivity, assist landowners and others decide whether ag land should be converted to non-agriculture uses.

### Site Assessment

Site assessment involves:

- ¥Non-soil factors related to agricultural use of a site such as proximity to an elevator
- ¥Proximity to existing municipal development
- ¥Other public values of a site such as being near unique areas like the Loess Hills



Photo by Dick Tremain, USDA-NRCS

*Linn County Planning and Zoning Division Manager Mark Trumbauer and NRCS District Conservationist John Bruene rate a proposed development using the LESA rating system. This numbers-based assessment will help tell planners whether or not a proposed development is in the long term best interests of Linn county residents.*

Each factor selected is assigned a range of possible values according to local needs and objectives. Eliminating guesswork, this process provides a rational, consistent, sound basis for making land use decisions.

***For more information about LESA, contact your county USDA-NRCS office, call State NRCS Soil Scientist Mike Sucik at 515-284-4135, or visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/lesa/>.***

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