

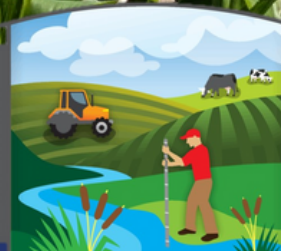
BETWEEN THE LAKES DEMONSTRATION FARM NETWORK

REPORT



Between the Lakes
Demonstration Farm Network

Conservation Agriculture for Clean Water & Healthy Soils



Year 5 (2024)
Annual Report



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ABOUT THE DEMONSTRATION FARMS

The Between the Lakes Demonstration Farm Network, a collaboration between U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS) and Calumet County Land & Water Conservation Department, in partnership with Fond du Lac, Sheboygan and Manitowoc counties, was formed in 2020 to test and demonstrate conservation practices to reduce phosphorus, nitrates, and sediment entering the Great Lakes basin. This collaborative effort is funded in part by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), NRCS, County partners, lake associations, and others.

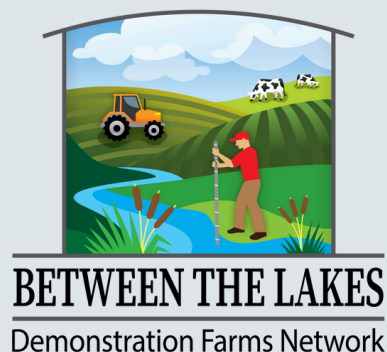
The four demonstration farms, Nick Kleiber Grain Farm LLC, Greendale Farm, Dallmann East River Dairy, and Libertyland Farms, represent a wide range of farm types, but all have a common goal – to share the knowledge learned on their farms about innovative techniques to improve soil health. These farmers, with technical support from the project management team, voluntarily implement agricultural conservation



practices in their operations. They also host educational field days and share their soil health journeys with other farmers and the public with the goal of helping others implement soil health practices in their operations. In this way, the Network tests and demonstrates the best conservation practices to reduce non-point source pollution entering the Great Lakes basin.

CONTACT OUR TEAM

- **Jodie Weyland** (Project Manager)
◦ jodie@tilthag.com 920-253-9197
- **Derrick Raspor** (NRCS Coordinator)
◦ derrick.raspor@usda.gov 920-740-5810
- **Tony Real** (Calumet County Conservationist)
◦ anthony.real@calumetcounty.org 920-849-1442
- **Maranda Miller** (Outreach Specialist)
◦ maranda.miller@wisc.edu 608-590-5758



FARM SUMMARIES

GREENDALE FARM



Dale Theel

Dale Theel demonstrates a corn interseeding plot using both 30-inch and twin rows. He collaborated with the University of Wisconsin to demonstrate their “Green Carpet” mix alongside his own. The corn was interseeded at V5 growth stage on June 18 at a rate of 20 pounds per acre. Cover crop and weed biomass were evaluated by each row width. Dale also continued experimenting with interseeding several species into soybeans, including flax, plantain, buckwheat, and phacelia. Throughout the year, many species of pollinator insects were common in Dale’s interseeding plots. On October 2, Greendale Farm hosted a field day in collaboration with the Fond du Lac Soil Health Alliance to showcase these demonstrations, and a cover crop plot replicated across three demonstration farms. Dale’s cover crop trial includes 18 species, including cereal grains, brassicas, and legumes.

Greendale Farm was a stop on the WI Farm Tour, which was sponsored by NAICC and WSSA with special guests from EPA-OPP, FWS, and NRCS. The focus of the tour was how the Endangered Species Act may impact farms, and the role conservation practices could play in the future of agriculture. Dale spoke about the conservation practices he is implementing, including the management of pollinator buffer strips.

LIBERTYLAND FARM



Greg Gries

Libertyland Farm planted 100% of their corn and soybeans using no-till into green covers. On June 4, they interseeded “Touchdown Interseeding Mix” from Short Lane Ag Supply LLC. This mix was interseeded on three different fields—one corn grain field, and two corn silage fields—via drone by Poplar Farms. The farm showcased the interseeding trial on June 27 during a field day in collaboration with Seven Rivers Soil Cooperative. In November, Zak filmed two Soil Health Stories videos for social media to provide a plot update. This fall, Libertyland received a weather station through WiscoNet. You can find the map of the Wisconsin weather station at <https://wisconet.wisc.edu/maps.html>. Libertyland also planted covers on all their corn silage and soybean acres. The farm will continue to monitor and compare their interseeded cover crop to their fall-seeded barley and winter wheat cover crop mix.

Libertyland’s planted a cover crop plot on August 23, which is replicated on three different demonstration farms. Their cover crop plot includes 17 species represented in a 2x and 3x species interaction. Soil and biomass samples will be analyzed across all three demonstration farm cover crop plots.

FARM SUMMARIES

DALLMANN EAST RIVER DAIRY



Nick Dallmann

In 2024, Dallmann East River Dairy continued to plant corn no-till. Dallmanns trialed a drone application for cover crop termination on April 22. Poplar Farms performed the drone application, which included Roundup Powermax III, Atrazine, and Masterlock. A pop-up field day was held on May 1 to showcase no-till planting into the drone-terminated cover crop.

The farm utilizes a 360 RAIN irrigation unit to apply liquid manure and feed area runoff water to a 210-acre field several times throughout the growing season. In the last year, the farm modified the machine to apply through 20-inch corn rows and updated pumps to allow them to apply nutrients better throughout the growing season. On August 21 a field day was held to demonstrate the unit and highlight other water management tools, such as Dallmanns weather station. Dallmanns weather station can be found at <https://wisconet.wisc.edu/maps.html>.

This spring Nick wanted to look at nutrient stratification in a long-term no-till field with new seeding alfalfa. Soil samples were pulled at 0-2", 2-4", 4-6", and 6-8" depths in the field, and on the fence line for evaluating natural stratification. These samples were analyzed for pH, organic matter, phosphorus, and potassium. Looking ahead, Dallmans planted all their 2025 corn fields to a winter rye cover crop, and aims to have all acres green with soil covers in the fall, including fields going into alfalfa.

NICK KLEIBER GRAIN FARM LLC



Nick Kleiber

In Spring, Kleiber Grain Farm was part of a demonstration network project collecting data for determining the variables and decisions that growers make for timing the termination of cover crops for Spring planting. As part of the project, weekly monitoring was completed on a winter rye cover crop with soybeans no-till planted. From May 1 to August 27 photos, plant development, and weather events were recorded at the field.

Klieber utilized a weather station this year to monitor soil temperature and moisture at 0-12" depths under heavy residue and bare soil cover. The data confirmed that soil moisture was consistent with heavy residue, despite variable rain events. In September, the data was shared on the demonstration pages social media.

This year Klieber implemented a Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program (NOPP) plot offered by DATCP. The main goals highlighted by NOPP are to answer producer-specific N research questions, improve commercial nitrogen management efficiency across Wisconsin, reduce nitrates in surface- and groundwater, and improve farm profitability. Kleibers NOPP plot includes 4 blocks with strips of 0-, 60-, 120-, and 180-pounds Nitrogen/acre.

Nick hosted a twilight conservation talk on August 6 at the Kohler Center for Marsh Education. During the event producers gathered to address current agronomic challenges and how to face them. Discussions included how slugs prevailed across many farms this spring, including at Kleiber's. The impact slugs had this growing season has started ongoing farmer conversations with UW Extension specialists.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES



In-Person Outreach

Farmers learn best from other farmers and when the information they receive is locally-based and relevant to them. For this reason, one of our main outreach strategies is in-person field days. Farmers, agency personnel, and county conservation professionals attend in-person field days where they are shown local soil health practices our demonstration farmers are using.

Participants can ask questions of demonstration farmers, and can see on-the-ground practices that are working. They may also find practices that aren't working so well, and can explore ways to adapt these practices to work better in their systems.

At a Glance

This year, in conjunction with our county partners and with the support of the demonstration farmers we hosted 5 large field days and one pop-up field day. We also partnered with farmer-led groups to assist with field days.

Pop-Up Events

No-Till into Drone Terminated Rye

- Dallmann East River Dairy - Nick Dallmann
- May 1

Field Day Events

Step into Soil Health Through Conservation and Innovation

- Libertyland Farms + Orthland Dairy
- June 27
- Partners:
 - Seven Rivers Soil Cooperative

Emergency Forages Meeting

- August 2
- Partners:
 - Ozaukee County Demo Farms

Twilight Conservation Talk

- Nick Kleiber Grain Farm
- August 6
- Partners:
 - Sheboygan County Planning & Conservation

Managing Water in a Soil Health System

- Dallmann East River Dairy - Nick Dallmann
- August 21
- Partners:
 - Calumet County Land and Water Conservation Department
 - Calumet County Ag Stewardship Alliance

Protecting Our Watershed Together

- Dale Theel & Bruce Peterson
- October 2
- Partners:
 - Fond Du Lac Soil Health Alliance
 - Fond Du Lac County Land And Water Conservation

FIELD DAY

Dallmann East River Dairy
May 1, 2024

This pop-up style field day was hosted at Dallmann's East River Dairy, which borders both Calumet and Manitowoc Counties.

The field day highlighted the dairy's trialing a drone for terminating a 12-16" winter rye cover crop. The rye was planted last fall on September 16, and terminated the week of the pop-up field day with Roundup Powermax III (30oz/ac), Atrazine (1pt/ac), and Masterlock (4oz/ac). This drone application allowed the farm to maximize soil covers and minimize soil disturbance and therefore, support soil health.

The intent of this day was to allow participants to explore another area farmer's soil health practices, and ask questions of that farm. The idea was to work towards the demo farm's mission and demonstrate that Through the right combination of traditional conservation practices and innovative technologies functioning on our landscape, Between the Lakes Demonstration Network strives to demonstrate viable and sustainable economic and environmental benefits for our Great Lakes Region.



FIELD DAY

Libertyland Farm + Orthland Dairy - June 27, 2024

This field day featured a drone demonstration on corn interseeding by Trevor Wittmus of Poplar Farms LLC, with comments from Zak Kennke of Libertyland Farms. Lunch was available, providing a break for participants to network and refuel.

Following lunch, Adam Kolb, an agronomist from Seven Rivers Soil Cooperative, and Steven Orth a farmer from the same cooperative, led a Q&A discussion. They shared their experiences with no-till corn planting, cover crops, and low disturbance manure application.

From this field day we created a 5-minute interview of Zak describing Libertyland's experience interseeding into standing corn. This allowed people who could not attend the field day, or who attended and wanted to review information, to hear Zak's recommendations around establishing a protective living cover before corn harvest, even on a wet field, to prevent soil erosion and nutrient loss.

Overall, 45 people attended this field day in person. The video created from this field day also received 305 views on Facebook.



FIELD DAY

Dallmann East River Dairy
August 21, 2024

Autum Gomez-Tagle and John VandenBoom welcomed attendees, setting the stage for a series of informative sessions. Joe Smedberg and Vicki Miller provided updates on Calumet County FSA/NRCS programs, followed by a climate presentation from Kristin Foehringer, the State Working Land Climate Smart Specialist. The event continued with a segment on tools for fall planning, including an introduction to Wisconet by Chris Vagasky and a rain simulator demonstration by Derrick Raspor.

Later, John Schwan discussed the 360 Rain system, explaining how to utilize the machine without sourcing your own manure. Nick Dallmann then covered in-season moisture management using the

360 Rain and Center Pivot systems with manure and leachate applications. In all, 29 people attended.

From this field day we created a Facebook post sharing Nick Dallmann's main takeaways from this practice. These included:

- "I have seen significant improvements to soil structure and its ability to grab and move water through the soil profile with adding cover crops and using more no-till."
- "With our leachate/bunker runoff system, pivots, and 360 Rain, we are able to take a product that is a drain for many dairy farmers and turn it into a benefit for our crops by giving them water at times during the growing season when they need it."



FIELD DAY

Fond du Lac Soil Health Alliance + Greendale Farms - October 2, 2024

This event focused on 'Protecting Our Watershed Together, and was created as 'a Community and Farmer Event.' The day began with a scenic wagon ride to a streambank restoration project on Bruce Peterson's farm. This project, funded by a \$364,000 grant, aims to stabilize eroding streambanks, reduce sediment and phosphorus runoff into Lake Winnebago, and improve local water quality. Bruce Peterson and John Jenkins shared insights on the efforts underway in the Pipe Creek watershed, highlighting the positive impact on the ecosystem.

Following this, Chad Tasch discussed low disturbance

manure injection, an innovative method that reduces runoff and nutrient loss, keeps nutrients in the soil, and minimizes odor.

At Greendale Farm, the focus shifted to upland practices. Dale Theel, François Anglade, Derrick Raspor, and Jodie Weyland covered topics such as pollinator strips, cover crops, no-till farming, and a rainfall simulator demonstration. These practices promote soil health, reduce erosion, and enhance biodiversity, contributing to sustainable farming and improved water quality. About 33 people attended this event.



TWILIGHT CONSERVATION TALK

EVENING DISCUSSIONS FOR FARMERS TO CONNECT

NICK KLEIBER GRAIN FARM

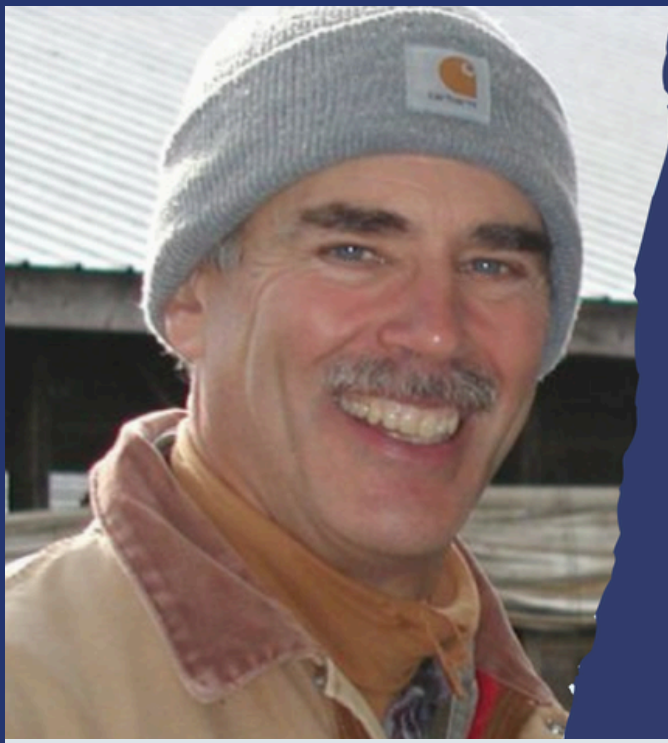
at Kohler Center for Marsh Education

August 6th, 2024

This year the Between the Lakes Demonstration Farm Network tried a new way of connecting farmers. Modeled after Upper Fox-Wolf Demonstration Farm Network's "Soil Conversations Social Hours" events, we hosted a "Twilight Conservation Talk." This event was a farmer-focused event aimed at generating farmer-to-farmer conversation about water quality and soil protection practices that are working or explore things that need to be adapted locally.

The first of these talks occurred at the Kohler Center for Marsh Education and was hosted by Nick Kleiber. He, as well as members from BTL's project management team invited farmers from the Sheboygan County area. This way the topics discussed at the twilight talk would be locally relevant and relationship building could happen amongst farmers who would be likely to come in contact with one another. This approach resulted in 10 participants attending this evening.

The evening began with dinner, followed by a welcome address from the host famer, Nick. Next, a few short presentations covered NRCS' program updates with Mike Patin the Sheboygan County District Conservationist followed by local agronomic updates and discussions with Ted Hoffman, of InDepth Agronomy. We plan to continue this style of connection opportunity in the future as it was a helpful tool to encourage farmers to connect to their neighbor farmers, discuss locally relevant issues, and brainstorm solutions.



WISCONSIN
DEMONSTRATION FARM NETWORKS



Featuring:

Tom Kilcer

Emergency Forage Meeting

August 2, 2024 - 9:30 A - 12:30 p

Farm Wisconsin Discovery Center
7001 Gass Lake Rd
Manitowoc, WI 54220

At this event, Tom Kilcer, with 33 years of agronomy experience, led a discussion on Emergency Summer Forage, Fall Planted Spring Forages, Prevent Plant, and Crop Insurance. Given the record rainfall this year, many farmers were seeking alternative feed options for their livestock. Tom shared several practical suggestions. There were 15 people in attendance at this day.

From this event, we created an educational posts to reach additional people digitally. We highlighted 5 key takeaways, and paid to boost the post. This led to 316 engagements, and reached 1,238 people.

1. For Cool Season Grass Fields - apply nitrogen in the fall and spring, and avoid cutting shorter than 4 inches.
2. Plant 60 Day Mature BMR Master Graze Corn in 15-inch rows at 55,000 plants per acre, using homolactic bacteria.
3. BMR Sudangrass is recommended for high fiber digestibility, especially for dairy cows. Harvest at the boot stage and follow with no-till winter triticale
4. Oats are another viable option. Plant at the beginning of August at 100 lbs/acre and harvest by the end of September, opting for rust-resistant varieties
5. Winter Triticale is highlighted as the best option due to its benefits for soil structure and improved milk production.



DIGITAL OUTREACH



Digital Outreach

This year we continued to utilize and expand our digital outreach. Aside from in-person events, our main outreach tactics have been to create digital materials that are available online for farmers to access at their convenience. This has included educational Facebook posts and videos around soil health topics. We share these videos via our Facebook page and YouTube channel.

This year we focused on a video series, "Soil Health Stories." In this series, our soil health professionals interviewed farmers using questions we developed with our Video Pre-Production Planning Sheet (see page 13). The goal was to facilitate peer-to-peer learning by helping farmers tell their stories.

Digital Outreach at a Glance

Educational Materials Created:

- Facebook posts
 - Our materials
 - 14 posts
 - Sharing Others' Materials
 - 14 posts

Event Promotion, Thank You's, and Photos

- 14 posts

Communication Platforms Utilized

- EZ Text - contact list grew by 28 this year
- Google Forms
- Facebook
- Youtube

Video thumbnails from our "Soil Health Stories" series show how we're applying the concepts of peer-to-peer learning to our digital outreach. At a glance, farmers can see that in each video they can learn from another farmer via the image, accompanying description, and included farm name.



SOCIAL SCIENCE DRIVEN OUTREACH

Social Science in Our Outreach

Outreach strategies are tied to behavior change; done intentionally, they can drive soil health-supporting behaviors, but done carelessly, they can reinforce destructive soil management practices and social norms. For this reason, our outreach specialist and natural resources educator, Maranda Miller, integrates social science, visual media, and environmental education to promote soil health practices. Using social science strategies, she identifies the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for behavior change and applies them to our Demonstration Farm Network outreach to promote the adoption of soil health practices among farmers. Our strategies evolve as we build capacity and understanding, with Maranda focusing on these key areas this year:



Outreach Specialist, and Natural Resources Educator, Maranda Miller photographing a field day.

Social Norms	Social norms are behaviors considered normal or acceptable within a social group. Descriptive norms describe what most people do, while injunctive norms are the perceived rules about approved or disapproved behaviors (Isaac, 2019). Social norms influence behavior, affecting the adoption or resistance of soil health practices. We apply this to the demonstration farms' visuals: Highlight Positive Descriptive Norms: Show many farmers adopting conservation practices, creating an environment where conservation is seen as normal and approved. Avoid Negative Descriptive Norms: Avoid suggesting harmful practices are widespread by not showing images of degraded farmland, which could imply these issues are common and acceptable.
Peer-to-Peer Learning	Peer-to-peer learning involves collaborative knowledge sharing and exchanging insights among peers. It's crucial in agriculture as farmers often rely on other farmers for information and ideas (Oreszczyn et al., 2010; Rogers, 2003). Peer-to-peer learning supports the adoption of new practices by leveraging the practical, experiential knowledge of farmers. We apply this to the demonstration farms' visuals: Highlight Farmers as Information Sources: Farmers share their experiences directly through facilitated interviews with our agronomists. Video Thumbnails Feature Farmers: Thumbnails include the farmer's name and farm, ensuring viewers know they're learning from peers.
Technology Acceptance Model	The technology acceptance model describes how attitudes towards technology are shaped by perceived usefulness and ease of use (Davis, 1986; James and Bewsell, 2023). If technology is seen as useful and easy to use, adoption rates increase, supporting soil health practices. We apply this to the demonstration farms' visuals: Highlight Ease of Use and Usefulness: Emphasize the benefits of soil health practices and ease of use through how-to's, describing machinery, and providing additional resources. Cultivate Understanding with Visual Media: Tailor visuals to fill knowledge gaps, considering the target audience's existing knowledge and needs.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION EFFORTS

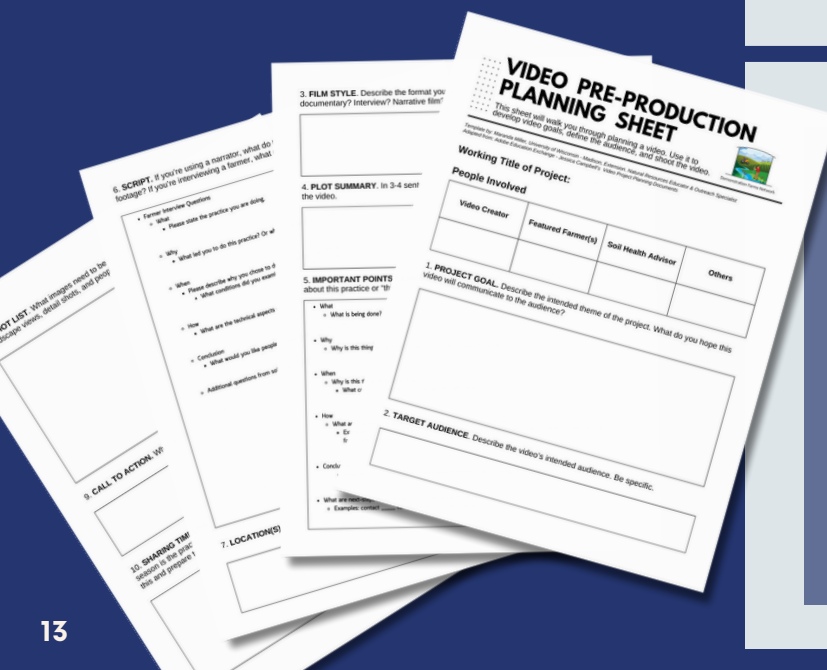
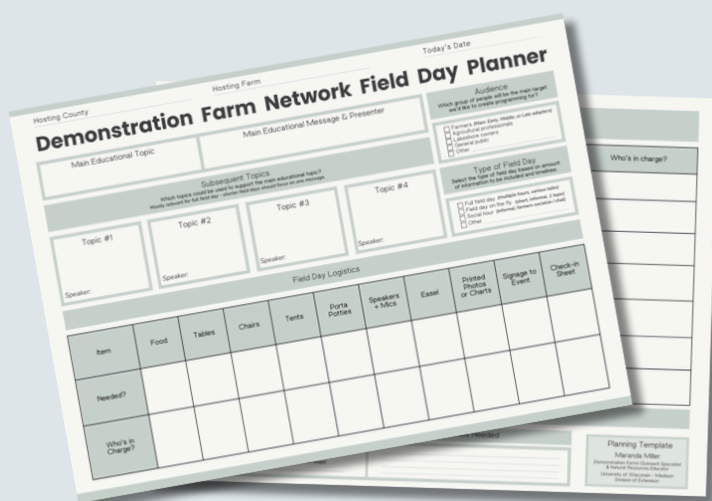
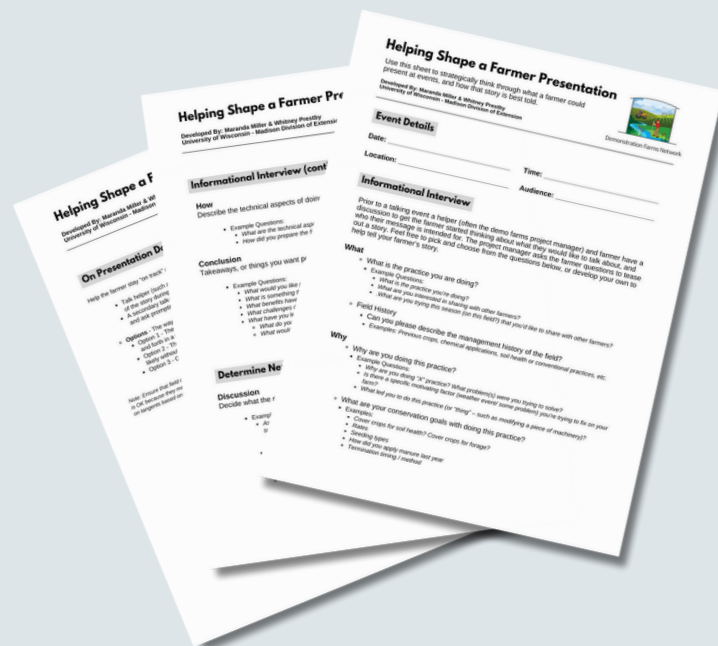
Communication Tools

The demonstration farm networks aim to accelerate and encourage the adoption of sustainable farming practices across northeastern Wisconsin. Effective outreach is crucial to support this goal, as it bridges the gap between information and action. The purpose of outreach is to educate, engage, and empower farmers to implement these practices.

To achieve effective outreach, it is essential to understand the target audience, set clear goals, and use a structured approach to planning and execution. However, this can be challenging for anyone not trained in communication and outreach strategies.

To help with this, Maranda developed three guiding documents: Demo Farm Field Day Planner, Shaping a Farmer Presentation, and Video Pre-Production Planning Sheet. These documents provide a structured approach for project teams to plan and execute outreach efforts effectively.

This year, we used these documents to plan field days, assist farmer presenters in telling their stories succinctly, and conduct video interviews to capture farmers' messages for their peers. These resources are available to anyone interested in them and we will continue to adapt them as we learn more.



Shaping a Farmer Presentation (top) - a guide to help project partners assist farmers in creating effective and educational presentations, ensuring clear messaging and audience engagement.

Demo Farm Field Day Planner (middle) - a guide to help project partners organize and execute successful field days, ensuring well-organized and engaging events.

Video Pre-Production Planning Sheet (bottom) - a guide to help project partners plan and create video content that effectively draws out and communicates educational messages from a farmer's experience.

ART + SCIENCE COLLABORATION

BRINGING THE DEMO FARMS' WORK TO THE PUBLIC

Healthy Soil: A Sustainable Agriculture Series

The demo farm's work reached new public audiences via a partnership with UW student artist, Megan Strautman and Demo Farm's outreach specialist, Maranda Miller. The pieces created depict important aspects of sustainable farming in Wisconsin. Megan used acrylic paints on canvases. This collaborative project works to depict and bring awareness to sustainable agricultural practices to improve soil and water quality on farms in Wisconsin.

Megan's work was displayed at UW-Madison's School of Education Gallery summer 2024, was presented at the Water@UW-Madison's virtual Spring Symposium, and is available for viewing at Water@UW-Madison's website. Megan's full artist statement describing the pieces can be found at: Water.wisc.edu/the-flow-project/cohort-2024



In The Soil

"The first painting shows a cross-section of diverse vegetation, rich soil, the groundwater below, and a nearby stream. Diversity in plant life helps maintain soil health in farm fields. Water can be seen traveling through the soil and roots, making its way to the groundwater below and into the stream. Farming practices that contribute to water quality as well as plant health are essential."



Communication

"The second painting shows three people in a growing farm field. When farmers and nonfarmers share sustainable farming practices, it becomes just as important as implementing these practices. Communication and outreach are important in helping farmers take care of their crops, soil, and water quality. Outreach and communication efforts are seen throughout demo farms in Wisconsin."



On the Farm

"The third painting shows cows grazing in a pasture beside a farm field with a tractor. Through grazing techniques, livestock can revitalize nutrients in the soil below them, creating a cycle of nutrients through the plants and livestock. Farming techniques like covering the soil in non-growing seasons with crop residue and no-till farming allow for better soil quality and health on the farm."

Student Artist

"I am studying art and geosciences. I focus on two-dimensional mediums such as charcoals and pastels, with a love for impressionistic and realistic art styles. I aspire to connect my passions for geosciences and the environment in my art."

-Megan Strautman



Water Partner

"Art is a powerful interpreter of abstract concepts, such as how water quality can be influenced by how we manage the soil. I'm grateful for the opportunity to work with Megan, to bring the positive message of the demo farms to the public."

-Maranda Miller



Wisconet Involvement

The Wisconsin Environmental Mesonet (Wisconet), is an expanding network of weather and soil monitoring stations across Wisconsin, aimed at providing high-quality, real-time data.

The network plans to install at least one station in each of the state's 72 counties. These stations, which take over a dozen measurements every five minutes, are hosted by several demonstration farmers as well as other local farms. The data collected, including air and soil temperature, rainfall, soil moisture, and evapotranspiration rates, helps farmers make informed decisions about crop



management. This localized information fills gaps left by traditional weather data sources, such as nearby airports, and enhances the ability of farmers to monitor and respond to field conditions effectively. By leveraging this detailed and timely data, farmers can optimize irrigation, improve crop yields, and contribute to more sustainable agricultural practices. The initiative also aims to foster a collaborative environment where farmers can share insights and strategies based on the data, ultimately benefiting the broader agricultural community. This program will extend to additional demonstration farms in the following years.



Endangered Species Act Farm Tours

Our demonstration farm network's teams took part in a tour and discussions with EPA, US Fish & Wildlife and NRCS at Greendale Farms. The focus was on how the Endangered Species Act may impact farmers and the role conservation practices could play in the future of agriculture. We were grateful for the opportunity to discuss these issues with our fellow participants and thank the National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants (NAICC) and Weed Science Society of America (WSSA) for putting the tour together.

Financial Tools Development

Shae Ruppert is a graduate student at the University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign working on her Master's of Science in Agriculture and Consumer Economics. She was hired for the summer to help the network develop some tools that can be used to collect financial information on participating farms, and to help improve how that information is presented. The collaboration will help us collect much needed information on farm financial decisions that can be used to further reinforce the efforts the demonstration farms are making.

Project Partners



Report Credits

Report Created by - Maranda Miller

Farm Summaries Written by - Jodie Weyland

Photos from Nick Dallmann's Field Days - Jodie Weyland

Photos from Tom Kilcer Forage Event - Sarah Jaeger

Endangered Species Tour Photos - National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants

All Other Images - Maranda Miller

Social Science Sources

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WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO 2025

BETWEEN THE LAKES DEMONSTRATION FARM NETWORK
Conservation Agriculture for Clean Water & Healthy Soil

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.