

## **April 2020 Newsletter**

## Looking into the Future

#### 5/19 6:60-8pm Solar Financing & Grants for Farms &

Small Businesses Webinar If you've been meaning to look into solar energy for your home, farm, or business and live in the Driftless Region of Minnesota, this is the time to learn and invest. The nonprofit Solar United Neighbors (SUN) has information and guidance that will help rural residents understand how solar energy works and what to consider when going solar and co-sponsored by the Land Stewardship Project.

For more information and to register, click here.

If you have any questions, contact Bobby King of <u>Solar</u> <u>United Neighbors</u> at <u>bking@solarunitedneighbors.org</u> or 612-293-7267.

To view the event flier, click here.

5/26 10:00am Aerial Application Soil Health Partnership https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN \_ C\_hgR7WQDSCnJwEHxkyNg

#### 6/2 2-3pm How Regenerative Organic Ag can Improve

**Human Health** The Rodale Institute's newest white paper examines a solution: regenerative organic agriculture. "The Power of the Plate: Regenerative Organic Agriculture & Human Health," to be released on May 27, will unveil the latest research on this pressing issue.

Join us for an expert panel to dive into our newest white paper alongside all of you. Our esteemed panelists will include: Dr. Scott Stoll, Founder & CEO of Plantrician Project, Dr. Zach Bush, Founder, Farmer's Fooprint & Seraphic Group, Dr. Ron Weiss, Founder & CEO of Ethos Health, Dr. Meagan Grega, Co-Founder & Chief Medical Officer of Kellyn Foundation, Dr. Drew Smith, Chief Scientist/Chief Operating Officer of Rodale Institute. Pre-registration is required.

https://rodaleinstitute.org/events/regenerativeagriculture-human-health/

> Find these events on our website https://mnsoilhealth.org/events/

And Facebook https://www.facebook.com/mnsoilhealth/

#### 6/24 Small Grains and Cover Crops Virtual Field Day

The Land Stewardship Project is sponsoring a Practical Farmers of lowa virtual field day on June 24th on Martin Larsen's farm. Larsen is a no-till conventional farmer near Byron, Minn., and raises corn, beans, small grains and cover crops. He will be sharing his knowledge and experience of raising small grains in Southeast Minnesota and the benefits he has seen of including another crop in the rotation. Check back for registration and event details. <u>https://</u> <u>landstewardshipproject.org/events/item/1518</u>

RSVP to Shona Snater, LSP, SSnater@landstewardshipproject.org

#### 6/23-25 Regenerative Farming & Ranching Soil Health Academy

What You Will Learn: Principles of Soil Health & Adaptive Stewardship, Restoring Vibrant Ecosystems Through Adaptive Grazing, Making Grazing Highly Profitable & Desirable, Successful Marketing: Strategies for Enhanced Net Margins, Nutrient Management, Designing Cover Crop Mixes, Farm Economics and Whole Farm Planning

Stoney Creek Farm, Redwood Falls, MN

https://soilhealthacademy.grazecart.com/sha-redwood-falls-mn-june

#### 9/10-11 Soil Health School

A two day training designed to provide an introduction and effective information on how to get started implementing soil health practices as well as a deeper look into management options and integrating regenerative practices. Classroom and field learning will be provided, hear from Minnesota farmers implementing soil health practices as well as technical experts from the state. Discussion sessions will be provided to hear and ask questions from farmers to learn about their successes and challenges as they've implemented soil health practices. Who Should Attend? Farmers, agronomists, technical staff, those interested in learning more. Registration coming soon

#### 11/17-19 Keys to Marketing Success-How to Become a Price Maker and Not a Price Taker Soil Health Academy

Come to this school prepared to discuss your individual marketing and business plan. Instructors will be working with you on customizing marketing plans specific to your situation and operation. Holiday Inn & Suites, Lakeville, MN

https://soilhealthacademy.grazecart.com/sha-marketing

## **Penciling Out Profitability**

We're all figuring ways to improve profitability, reducing inputs, increasing efficiency, while still maintaining excellent yields. A recent study shows that Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certified farms are more profitable than others.

A new report from the Farm Business Management (FBM) program by AgCentric and the Minnesota State Agriculture Centers of Excellence compares data in the FBM database to the MAWQCP-certified farms in the database.

The results of the study include a comprehensive look at financials:

#### **Demographics**

The MN FBM state database included complete financial data from 2167 producers who participate in the Minnesota State Farm Business Management Education (FBM) program. The "Environmental Cohort" consists of 53 of those producers. Below is a comparison of the two groups:

Demographics	Environmental Cohort (EC)	Benchmark Average	
	All Farms	All Farms	
Number of Farms	53	2,167	
Total Crop Acres per farm	666	775	
Total Crop Acres/Cohort	35,298	1,679,425	
Age of Operator	49.0	47.1	
Years Farming	24.8	23.0	



Type of Farm - EC 28% 47% 25% Crop = Dairy = All Other Crop = Dairy = All Other

The environmental cohort has a slightly large average farm size, \$802,995 in Gross Farm Income, compared to \$744,078 for the average farm in the state FBM database. The Net Farm Income comparison is shown on the left.

Crop Enterprises	Corn		Corn Silage		Soybeans		Alfalfa Hay	
Combined	EC	Ave	EC	Ave	EC	Ave	EC	FBM
Number of Farms	37	1,394	16	354	31	1,286	16	294
Yield per Acre	184.2	178.8	20.4	20.5	50.9	46.3	4.7	4.5
Gross Return/Acre	\$796.22	\$753.47	\$692.54	\$748.63	\$532.36	\$477.55	\$664.27	\$679.07
Fertilizer Expense/Acre	\$118.70	\$128.31	\$76.66	\$96.76	\$25.12	\$22.19	\$42.44	\$51.22
Total Direct Exp/Acre	\$570.67	\$573.75	\$531.56	\$516.37	\$379.29	\$341.59	\$284.11	\$297.55
Net Return/Acre	\$60.22	\$51.04	\$40.57	\$96.29	\$43.30	\$51.27	\$273.26	\$259.23
Cost of Prod w Lbr/unit	\$3.59	\$3.61	\$31.04	\$29.91	\$8.49	\$8.09	\$79.24	\$93.19



The source and full report can be found at <u>https://agcentric.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Water-Quality-Sort-2019.pdf</u> More info on the MN Ag Water Quality Certification Program can be found at <u>https://www.mda.state.mn.us/environment-</u> <u>sustainability/minnesota-agricultural-water-quality-certification-program</u>



# **Babe's Country**

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative annually offers a grant opportunity to placing a priority on projects which measure, demonstrate, or establish methodologies to demonstrate, the conservation-related values of SFI-certified forestlands, or such values which result from application of the SFI Fiber Sourcing standard. Ideally such projects will be scalable to a regional, or bio-regional scale (e.g., Ponderosa Pine forests, Boreal Plains, Longleaf Pine ecosystem, the central hardwood forest, etc.). Particular attention will be paid to applications focused on conservation values in the areas of water, climate change (including both carbon attributes and forest resiliency), and biodiversity. Projects which advance communication of these values through the supply chain, and with relevant stakeholders, are also desirable.

Their grant will open in July of 2020, for more information visit <u>https://www.sfiprogram.org/conservation-grant-rfp-process/</u>

## Chairman Brian Pfarr's Soil Health Story

I started on my soil health journey in 2008 with the simple mission of someday offering my children the opportunity to be part of a healthy system that could be easily sustained.

At the time, I had been farming roughly 600 acres consisting of corn, wheat and soybeans with my father since 1991 and our operation was farming the resource to get a crop. Once I knew we had to change things on the farm, I started doing some research and first implemented reduced tillage. After starting this practice, it didn't take long to start seeing results in the soil. By the following spring we found out that the soil was reacting differently when it wasn't being tilled. By reducing the disturbance and not destroying the soil structure, we were able to improve our soil structure and in turn, retain moisture versus having it run off and turn to instant mud.

Another benefit was that we had nightcrawlers that were previously nonexistent. As time went on, we were also able to see the input costs started to drop, making what we were doing more profitable. With less tillage, we saved on fuel cost and time it took in the fall to get all the work done before freezing up. Fewer emissions are being released into our atmosphere with less equipment use.

After having done reduced tillage for a few years and seeing great improvement, I decided it was time we implemented another soil health practice. I started to read more about cover crops and the need to have a living root in the soil profile and keep the ground covered as much as possible. In 2011, we decided we were going to fly a cover crop mix (this mix was turnips, tillage radish, crimson clover, annual rye and rapeseed) onto standing corn to see if this was something that could be work for us and our operation.

That year after the corn was off, we were able to let the 50 head stock cows graze into December. This was a huge benefit to us, as we would normally have to start feeding them in the lot in October. These extra grazing months saved us both time and money.

Once cattle were moved in late December, we left the ground to sit and planned for no-till soybeans the following spring. When we started with cover crops, the soil started acting like a sponge. Our soil was retaining moisture instead of letting it sit on the surface, reducing erosion and allowing the water to replenish our aquifers.

Another benefit was the snow that remained all white during the winter while the neighbors experienced black snow from soil loss through erosion. We were able to significantly reduce erosion, keeping sediment and nutrients out of surface waters.

Come springtime, we were able to start planting several days earlier than the neighbors. This was when we really knew that the practices we were implementing were saving the soil while also benefiting us.

The next thing that became obvious was that organic levels started to increase, which means I didn't need to apply as much nitrogen. Reduction in tillage, along with the use of cover crops allowed us to stop burning up and releasing our soil carbon to the atmosphere, and we began capturing carbon from the air and sequestering it in our soils.

In 2010 I was applying 180 pounds of nitrogen to produce 200-bushel corn. Today it takes 140 pounds of nitrogen to produce the same yields, which is clearly saving me money. On side by side testing, I save on average \$73 per acre on inputs without sacrificing yield. With the cost of \$20 per acre to plant cover crops, I have been profiting roughly \$50 per acre just by the decreased inputs for the past eight years.

Once the soil became healthy again, we noticed so many other benefits that we didn't even know we needed, as well as benefits to wildlife and our surface waters. We continue to look for ways to improve our soil health every year and how to make it better for generations to come.

### **NRCS Financial Assistant for Emergency Livestock Mortality**

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering sign ups for the Emergency Livestock Mortality management including all livestock types to livestock producers for animal mortality disposal resulting from impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several sign up periods to help with timing. The producer is responsible for the proper disposal of animal mortality by following requirements specific to each option. All federal, state and local laws must be followed and it is the responsibility of the producer to secure any necessary permits.

Following are the anticipated scenarios that will be offered in Minnesota for this emergency signup. Additional scenarios may be developed and will be issued as supporting guidance to this bulletin if adopted for Minnesota.

Scenario	Unit	Non-HU Rate	HU Rate
Disposal other than Burial composting)	AU	\$111.53	\$191.20
Burial **	AU	\$74.28	\$89.14
Forced Air Incineration	AU	\$219.88	\$263.86
Disposal at Landfill or Render	LB	\$0.05	\$0.06

\*\*As of the issuing of this bulletin there is no state support for burial, and technical guidance on this option has been rescinded.

Applications will be accepted until June 12th, 2020, find more information on the factsheet at: <u>https://mnsoilhealth.org/</u> wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MN EQIP-Livestock-Mortality-Initiative-Factsheet-4 29 2020.pdf

Contact your local NRCS conservation office for more information <u>https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mn/contact/local/</u>

### **Spring Planting 2020**

Planting in 2020 has been pleasantly better than the previous two years with dryer conditions and warmer conditions. We had fun planting green this spring - soybeans and corn! Here are some pictures from this great season!



Contact Jennifer Hahn **Coalition Coordinator** 651-485-7848 coordinator@mnsoilhealth.org https://mnsoilhealth.org/ FB @mnsoilhealth

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