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*Photo from last year's field day. Manure applied to cover crops using low disturbance manure injection. Read about this year's event on p. 3 Photo by Paige Frautschy*



# THE AG STEWARD NEWS

**LASA's VISION:** A community where farmers and friends of agriculture work together to protect and improve our water quality and environment.

## **Looking forward:** Annual meeting recap

By Mary Hookham for LASA

More than 100 farmers, community members and agribusiness professionals came together this past spring to explore conservation practices and how farmers can make them economically viable.

The topics formed the core of the first annual meeting of the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance (LASA) on March 1. LASA is a nonprofit farmer-led group focused on protecting and improving the quality of water and other natural resources in Lafayette County.

During a panel discussion, a variety

of participants, including The Nature Conservancy, shared their perspectives on current conservation in the region.

"Those of us at The Nature Conservancy realize we need to work with the folks closest to the land in order to increase conservation," said Steve Richter, director of conservation programs for Wisconsin. "We want to do projects that will help farms and local families and customize them to their area."

The panelists said that to foster more conservation, groups like LASA must continue

to encourage open communication between farmers, welcome people with diverse perspectives into the organizations and lead by example when asking farmers to try something new on their farms.

"Farmers are good at farming but not always at advocating. There's a variety of conservation practices, but we have to figure out what we can do to get farmers to try some," said Terry Loeffelholz, manager of the Lafayette County Land Conservation/Planning and Zoning Department.

*(continued on page 2)*



L to R: Chuck Ripp, Terry Loeffelholz, Jim DiGangi, Pat Murphy, Steve Richter and moderator Dennis Frame kept the conversation lively and informative. Photo by Shannon Mumm (continued from page 1)

Dustin Ransom of T-K Ag Works showed technology he and his parents, co-owners of T-K Ag Works, created to help with low-disturbance manure injection. The injector they created has spoons that lift the soil to create an area in which manure can settle. This technology increased pumping capacity, lowered fuel consumption and reduced soil disturbance.

The economics of manure was an important topic in a presentation by Dr. Daniel Andersen, assistant professor of agricultural and biosystems engineering at Iowa State University. Manure must be applied to the right field at the right time to be of any value to future crops, he said.

"We can make money with manure these days," Andersen said. "But not all injection is the same."

Heidi Johnson, crop and soils educator with Dane County UW-Extension, talked about the value of growing cover crops as a conservation practice. She explained how a large emphasis is put on soil health and how

over time, scientists have learned that the living organisms in the soil are very beneficial and should not be killed off. Soil organisms influence soil chemistry and structure as well as pest cycles.

"Cover crops are not a fad; they're here to stay," Johnson said. "We used to think of the soil as dirt, as something we plant seeds in and then take a harvest out, but it's soil, not dirt. And soil health is crucial to your farm."

The positive points of cover crop economics, Johnson said, include erosion reduction, forage alternative, nutrient availability to cash crops like corn and beans, more weed control, requirements met of nutrient management plans, increased organic matter, improved soil structure and health, better water infiltration, reduced soil compaction and great soil resiliency.

Negative points of cover crop economics, she said, include seed costs, custom planting requirements, specialized equipment needs, management time, potential yield drag and termination of the cover crop costs and time.

## LASA member survey: Help us create a baseline

LASA requests members take a brief survey to understand what conservation practices are being done on the land. This survey will help LASA get a better idea of what metrics can best capture desired conservation outcomes.

Many members have completed the survey, and we will be calling, texting and bothering you until we are at 100%.

To fill out the survey, go to [lafayetteagstewardship.org/news](http://lafayetteagstewardship.org/news).

If you have any questions, email [lafayetteagstewardship@gmail.com](mailto:lafayetteagstewardship@gmail.com). Thank you!

# Leadership message: Push through the tough times

By Jim Winn, LASA chairman



Hello LASA members and friends,

Once Mother Nature finally decided to let go of winter, it was well

into the spring season without any crops planted.

Add to that violent storms on Friday night that dampened the spirits of the Lafayette County fair and flattened farm buildings. Somehow crops still look incredible here.

These events reflect the paradigm at the core of LASA. There are challenges that defeat us at times, but seeing the great impact from our efforts overrides the tough times and reminds us why LASA exists today. It also reminds us why it's important to reach out to our members and community to keep them up-to-date on what we are doing. With this in mind, I would like to welcome everyone to our very first newsletter.

On July 6th, we held our first member appreciation picnic at the General Store in Wiota. In addition to the great discussions about conservation, LASA provided a delicious meal for guests to enjoy. There was an excellent turnout and we hope to make it an annual event.

Aug. 23rd is our 2nd annual field day to be held just outside of Gratiot. Our field day committee is busy preparing for an exciting day focusing on soil health. Stay tuned for more news

about the day's activities.

We are especially proud of two LASA member families who have shown their commitment to being great stewards of the land. Back in June, the Mike Berget Family was awarded the Soil Stewardship Innovation Leadership Award by our county land conservation service. I would like to extend congratulations to Mike and his family.

Coming up in August, Jim and Katie DiGangi will welcome friends and guests to their Darlington Ridge Dairy for the 2018 Farm to Table event. This unique experience is designed to bring the public and farmers together to explore agriculture, while focusing on animal care, environmental practices and the safe wholesome food we all enjoy.

Please continue to spread the word about our cost-share program for this fall. To enroll for the program simply go to our website and fill out a form and send it in. As I've said in the past, we have a very unique group of members and we have a good story to tell. It is my hope that we will continue to gain members and show our community what farmers are doing to benefit the environment.

Best of luck to everyone on the rest of the growing season and I look forward to seeing everyone on August 23rd.

*Sincerely, Jim*

## Cost-share program; Enroll by Nov. 15



Cover crops are grasses, brassicas, legumes, small grains or other crops grown between regular grain crop production periods for the purpose of protecting and improving the soil. In this region of Wisconsin, a

significant amount of the tillable acres have sufficient slope and runoff potential to be at risk for erosion if not adequately protected. Eroding soil particles not only fill in wetlands and streams, but they also carry soil bound phosphorus to surface water. Cover crops have a high potential to reduce phosphorus loss on fields being harvested as corn silage with manure incorporated in the late summer or fall. Research has shown that fields with winter cover incorporated in the spring have 55 percent less water runoff and 50 percent less soil loss annually than fields with no winter cover.

LASA is offering farmers in Lafayette County an incentive program to help minimize the risk associated with trying cover-crops in their farming system:

- Farmers must be a LASA member to participate
- The program provides \$20/acre up to 50 acres
- Any cover crop, any type of seed, any planting technique
- All type and size farms are encouraged to enroll
- Enroll no later than Nov. 15

Download the enrollment form at [lafayetteagstewardship.org/cost-share](http://lafayetteagstewardship.org/cost-share)

## Field Day - Aug 23

Our summer field day is fast approaching! The location will be a field on Mike Berget's farm near Gratiot. Watch your email and social media for details.

Topics include:

- Guidance (RTK) demo with no-till planter and strip-till
- Soil pit, water quality
- Cover crop garden, featuring LASA member experiences and management considerations
- LASA membership and cost share information





5741 Springbrook Rd  
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## LASA picnic: Members enjoyed food and fellowship

*Photo by Paige Frautschy*

Thank you to all our members and friends who came out on July 6 to support our first annual LASA Member Appreciation Picnic. It was a great night with good friends and fellow conservation-minded farmers!

More than 50 people attended the event. It was a chance for LASA members, spouses, friends and family to mix and mingle, enjoy a good meal and learn more about LASA programs. Food and beverage were provided by The General Store just outside of Wiota.

LASA is committed to doing the work of conservation, and we want to make sure that we maintain an atmosphere of friendship and fun. We are neighbors after all!