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A message from the president



Jim Winn,
LASA president

Hello fellow farmers, members and supporters,

I continue to be impressed by the progress in our watershed. By working together and being open to new ideas, we continue to improve and demonstrate that sustainable farming does work. We should all be proud of the positive impact we're making in our communities and on the farm.

We had a fantastic turnout at our annual meeting in March, which made me happy to see. This year, we had some new faces in the crowd, including a few small farmers and several county employees who are beginning to engage with us. Their participation is incredibly encouraging and speaks volumes about our growing collaboration.

If you know a neighbor or fellow farmer interested in learning more about conservation, please encourage them to join us! We welcome new ideas, perspectives and the opportunity to gain insights from one another. LASA is all

about learning from each other through field events and other networking opportunities. Together, in our shared vision of sustainability, we continue to improve through partnerships and collaboration.

I hope everyone is having a great summer season, and I look forward to seeing everyone at our annual membership appreciation picnic. Mark your calendars for Friday, August 21. Kind regards,

Jim Winn
President, Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance

Scan the code for
more information on
LASA or to see all of
our events.



Meet new LASA board member: Dakota Meier



Dakota Meier is a third-generation farmer working on his family's farm in South Wayne, Wis. His grandfather and father both milked dairy cows, but they eventually transitioned away from dairy farming. Today, the farm is home to 50 beef cattle and encompasses 300 acres of cropland, where they grow corn, soybeans, hay, and alfalfa.

When Meier joined LASA over six years ago, they had been practicing no-till for quite

some time. Now, they've implemented new sustainable practices, including cover crops, low-disturbance manure application, split nitrogen application and increased soil sampling.

"I've gained a lot of new information about sustainable farming since joining this group," Meier said. "It offers a great opportunity to get together and learn new things that I didn't even realize were out there."

Meier was elected to the board during the group's annual meeting this past March.

"As a board member, I'm eager to get more people involved and share ideas on other sustainable practices that can benefit both our community and the environment," he said.

Farmer Spotlight – Mike Berget, Berget Family Farms



Mike Berget is one of the founding members of the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance in southwestern Wisconsin. He farms with his son, Matt Berget, and his daughter, Meghan Saunders, along with their families.

The Berget family takes pride in being good stewards of the land, prioritizing soil health for future generations. Mike has always been passionate about conservation, having learned about sustainable practices from his father, who used minimal tillage. Today, their farm utilizes strip-till, no-till and cover cropping methods.

Being involved with the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance allows the Berget family to share their knowledge, network with others and learn new sustainable farming techniques. They have been involved with the farmer-led group since it first formed over eight years ago.

Mike enjoys sharing his enthusiasm for sustainability and is also a board member of Farmers for Sustainable Food and the Wisconsin Corn Growers Association. Additionally, he's a part of the National Corn Growers Association committee for research and innovation.

"I've always felt it's important to be actively involved with sustainable solutions on the farm and in our communities," Mike said. "Our goal is to care for the land and leave it in good condition for many generations to come."



Share our vision - join LASA today!

LASA is a community where farmers and friends of agriculture work together to protect and improve our water quality and environment.

Membership:

Joining LASA connects you with innovative farmers dedicated to learning and implementing impactful conservation practices. Members enjoy educational events, field days and networking opportunities. LASA welcomes all farmers who share a commitment to sustainable agriculture.

Sponsorship:

Businesses and individuals can support sustainable farming by sponsoring LASA. Sponsorships fund educational programs, conservation initiatives and outreach efforts that address agricultural and environmental challenges. Your support helps build partnerships among farmers, agribusinesses and community stakeholders.

Whether as a member or a sponsor, your involvement promotes a vision of improved water quality, environmental stewardship and a sustainable agricultural future for generations. Together, we can leverage innovation and collaboration that benefits farms, communities and our natural resources.

Scan the code if you
would like to support
the Lafayette Ag
Stewardship Alliance!



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Updates from The Nature Conservancy

Written by Ricardo Costa, Associate Director of Ag Strategies, WI



*Ricardo Costa,
Associate Director of
Ag Strategies*

The Nature Conservancy supports conservation work in more than 80 countries and territories, with staff working closely alongside local partners. One of the clearest examples of how these partnerships deliver meaningful conservation outcomes and advance our mission to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends is our work with Wisconsin Producer-Led Watershed Protection Groups, including the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance (LASA).

Our partnership with LASA has grown over time and now spans several initiatives. This includes their incentive program, which has supported members in adopting conservation practices such as cover crops, no till, and planting green. It also includes collaborative efforts like the Wisconsin Cover Crop Citizen Science Project, a statewide effort that gathers on-farm data from farmers, including LASA members, to better understand how cover crops perform under real-world conditions across Wisconsin.

These opportunities matter because they help lower financial barriers and make it more feasible for farmers to try to adopt conservation practices. Through the incentive program, farmers can implement practices

that improve soil health and water quality on their operations. At the same time, the Cover Crop Citizen Science Project is helping identify trends and generate practical insights that farmers can use. By learning from nearby farmers, producers are better equipped to make decisions that fit their operations and goals.

This long-standing partnership with LASA, established nearly a decade ago, has also played an important role in shaping TNC's Challenge Grant program. The TNC Challenge Grant provides competitive funding of up to \$10,000 to producer-led groups across Wisconsin. These funds support incentive programs focused on edge-of-field and perennial practices, as well as on-farm research that addresses real challenges while improving soil health, enhancing water quality, and contributing to climate resilience.

The Challenge Grant is now in its third year, and the 2027 request for proposals will be released in early July 2026. While applications open this summer, the funding is intended for work that will take place in 2027, with awards expected to be announced this November. The opportunity will once again be open to all producer-led watershed groups in Wisconsin. Thanks to early collaboration with groups like LASA, we have been able to refine this program over time and keep it relevant and responsive to partners' needs across the state.

Important Dates

- **August 21**
Berget Family Farm Field Event and Membership Picnic
- **September**
Cost-share program and member conservation practice survey launches
- **December 1**
Cost-share program and member conservation practice survey deadline



Lafayette County farmers evaluate sustainability progress at annual meeting



More than 50 attendees, including farmers, community members and industry partners, attended the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance's annual meeting on March 4. The event focused on discussing sustainable initiatives and featured a variety of guest speakers.

"The farmers in our group demonstrate that conservation is for everyone, whether you have a few hundred acres or a few thousand acres; everyone can do their part," said LASA President Jim Winn.

John Gaska, a Fields of Sinsinawa board member, shared details on an ongoing carbon benchmarking project and encouraged LASA members to participate.

Dani Heisler from the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection shared an update on the impact farmer-led watershed groups are having around the state. With over 50 farmer-led groups across the state, the agency continues to support farmer-led conservation efforts to improve Wisconsin's soil health and water quality.

Because conservation practices vary from farm to farm, what works well on one farm might not work on another. Myles Elsen of Steward Link shared how his team helps

connect farmers with funding sources for their own unique needs.

Dr. Harkirat Kaur, a UW-Madison corn agronomist, presented on corn studies, outlining economically and environmentally sustainable methods for corn production. One study evaluated stalk height, with a focus on short corn. The results were variable based on management and weather events, and showed less reduction in silage yield compared to tall corn. He noted that additional corn performance trials are taking place, and more data will be available soon.

Farmers for Sustainable Food Strategic Account Manager, Marti Viste, shared results from LASA's 2025 Member

Conservation Survey. With eight years of data, the 2025 survey shows the group's use of various conservation practices, including soil sampling, planting cover crops, utilizing no-till and reduced-till methods, split nitrogen application, low disturbance manure application and planting directly into cover crops, also known as "planting green." In 2025, LASA members planted 12,773 acres of cover crops and 37,120 acres using no-till or strip-till.

During the business portion of the meeting, the group recognized outgoing board member Jason Rowe and elected new board member Dakota Meier. Ryan Temperly and Steve Carpenter (vice president) were re-elected.

Other board members include President Jim Winn, Treasurer Ken Norgard, Secretary Jean Stauffacher, Jim DiGangi, Mike Berget and Chris Wison. Steve Fleming and Dennis Busch are board advisers.

Lafayette County farmers showcase sustainable farming achievements in 2025 annual report

Cooper Family Farms, a beef and crop farm in South Wayne, Wis., is farmed by three generations who work together, combining new, innovative practices with tried-and-true traditional methods.

Bobby Jr. farms alongside his dad, Robert (Bob), and his son, Ben. The three of them manage 320 acres of crop land.

"With three generations on the farm and lots of cattle to feed, it's important that our cropland is as productive as it can be, which means having good soil health is key," Bobby said.

The Coopers began planting cover crops about 6 years ago, when they joined the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance. Not only has implementing cover crops improved soil health and reduced soil erosion, but it's also been economically beneficial for their farm.

The family has gained valuable insights through LASA, connecting with other like-minded farmers in the area. They have also shared their own ideas by hosting field events.

"A few years ago, we purchased a drone and had the opportunity to host a field day to share our experiences with it," he said. "We've been experimenting with aerial seeding and see a lot of great potential with it."

The Cooper family says embracing new technology, like drones, is made possible because of the younger generation's involvement on the farm.

"We've found a great balance between leaning into what's worked for my dad for many years, but also being open to trying new things," Bobby said.

Ensuring the farm is sustainable and successful for future generations motivates them to continue improving.

"We're a generational farm, and we want to keep it going for more generations to come," Bob said. "Because of that, it's so important to take care of the land and protect our natural resources."

Annual survey results

As part of their membership, the Cooper family participated in the group's 2025 annual Member Conservation Practice Survey, which tracks the collective conservation efforts among farmers in the group. Results demonstrate continued progress and potential environmental benefits to the region.

This is the eighth consecutive year the group has documented their sustainable practices, signifying their commitment to continuous improvement and enhancing the surrounding soil and water quality.

The group, comprised of 31 farmers, implemented various conservation practices including: planting 12,773 acres of cover crops and planting into cover crops (otherwise known as "planting green") on 1,030 acres. They also measured nutrient management plans on 33,867 acres.

The potential environmental benefits of these practices:

- Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 9,744 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents, which is equal to greenhouse gas emissions produced by 2,320 cars driven in a year.
- Prevention of sediment loss from farm fields by 57,432 tons, equivalent to 5,743 dump trucks worth of soil.
- Reduction of phosphorus runoff by 94,019 pounds, potentially preventing 47 million pounds of algae growth in local water bodies.

Data was analyzed by Houston Engineering, Inc., and Farmers for Sustainable Food.

Scan the code to learn more about Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance and the group's ongoing sustainability efforts.





Fields of Sinsinawa: Rooted in soil, growing together

Written by Julia Gerlach, Fields of Sinsinawa Project Manager

In 1938, Charles E. Kellogg of the USDA said, “Essentially, all life depends upon the soil ... There can be no life without soil and no soil without life; they have evolved together.”

That statement, made in the context of the Dust Bowl, feels just as relevant today as farmers grapple with increasingly erratic weather, rising input costs, and the challenge of building resilient operations for the next generation.

Quietly performing countless functions that sustain life, soil is easy to overlook. Yet it is a living system, shaped by unseen physical, biological, and chemical relationships that govern how nutrients cycle, carbon is stored, water is filtered and biodiversity flourishes.

At Fields of Sinsinawa, we believe regenerative farming is rooted in these relationships.



From the microscopic interactions among carbon, nitrogen, bacteria, fungi and plants to the human connections among farmers, neighbors and organizations

working to support resilient agriculture across our region, this living system depends on relationships whose complexity continues to surprise and inspire us.

Located at the historic Sinsinawa Mound in southwest Wisconsin, Fields of Sinsinawa was created to inspire the informed adoption of holistic soil care practices through collaborative learning, on-farm demonstrations and community connections. Our work is grounded in the five principles of soil care: maintaining living roots, maximizing biodiversity, reducing soil disturbance, protecting the soil surface and integrating livestock.

These principles are simple in concept but profound in their ability to restore soil function, improve water

infiltration, build resilience and strengthen farm profitability. Yet adopting them requires curiosity, trust and opportunities to learn together. That belief shapes everything we do.

The past year has been one of growth and momentum at Fields of Sinsinawa. This spring alone, we hosted classroom programs, field tours, community breakfasts and gatherings that brought together farmers, researchers, conservation professionals and community members. Whether discussing soil carbon and farm profitability, learning about soil aggregation in the field, or simply sharing coffee and pancakes at our monthly Grounded Gatherings, the goal has been the same: creating spaces where people can learn from one another and build trust.

We look to the land itself as a living classroom. Current demonstrations and research include wheat-soybean relay cropping, fenceless grazing with virtual collars and investigations into how diverse cover crop species influence weed pressure and soil biology. By asking questions in the field and learning alongside farmers, we hope to contribute to a future where productive agriculture and ecological health go hand in hand.

After all, if Charles Kellogg was right—and we believe he was—then caring for soil is ultimately about caring for life itself.

Going forward, Fields of Sinsinawa will continue hosting field days and educational events throughout the summer, including the third annual Soul of the Soil Conference on August 25–26, 2026. The conference will bring together diverse voices—from farmers to researchers to storytellers and educators—to explore how functioning soils support resilient farms, thriving communities, and a deeper sense of stewardship. We hope you'll join us in the conversation.

To learn more about upcoming events and programs, visit Fields of Sinsinawa at www.FieldsofSinsinawa.org/projects-events.



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lafayetteagstewardship.org



Scan here to
RSVP!



LASA FIELD DAY & MEMBERSHIP PICNIC

Friday, August 21

4:00 p.m. - Berget Family Farms field event

6:00 p.m. - The General Store

7765 Cherry Rd, Gratiot

Food and refreshments will be provided.