



Sheboygan River Sentinel

The newsletter of Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers

Winter 2024

srpfarmers.com



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On-farm field trial compares cover crop interseeded into twin corn rows and single corn rows

By Jamie Fisher, senior project manager, Farmers for Sustainable Food

Nearly 30 farmers, ag businesses and community members attended the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers (SRPF) soil health field event in early September. The attendees learned about an on-farm field trial comparing cover crops interseeded into 45-inch twin rows and 30-inch single corn rows, along with a presentation from Michael Borucke, owner of Black Box Soil Lab.

SRPF members, Mark and Joe Loehr of Loehr Dairy, hosted the event.

Loehr Dairy performs a number of field trials to help achieve their farm goals of finding forages to improve the cow's diet while continuing to conserve the soil. The field trial consisted of two 90-foot strips, 45-inch twin corn rows and 30-inch single corn rows with cover crops

interseeded in between the rows. The field was planted in wheat last year and no-till planted this past spring. Molasses and manure applications were the only fertilizer applied to the field.

The 45-inch twin corn rows strip was planted with a modified four-row corn planter pulled behind a 15-foot no-till drill. This technique provided a one

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Jorgensen hired to support farmer-led groups and climate-smart projects

From Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers and other farmer-led watershed



conservation groups will have more staff support from Farmers for Sustainable Food (FSF) Emma Jorgensen has been hired by Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative as

an assistant project manager to support farmer-led groups through FSF.

Jorgensen has deep roots in agriculture, most recently working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a dairy auditor for Federal Milk Marketing Order 30 in the Upper Midwest. She grew up on a hobby farm in Wisconsin,

was heavily involved in 4-H and FFA, and worked on a dairy farm. She majored in agricultural business at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, where she participated in various ag groups and completed the university's agricultural leadership program.

"I am beyond excited to be a part of the FSF team," Jorgensen said. "I truly believe in the work the organization is doing to empower our farmers on their sustainability journeys."

In her role, Jorgensen provides support for farmer-led groups that work with Farmers for Sustainable Food and will coordinate climate-smart projects designed to assist farmers in determining what practices are most effective for their farms and provide tools to document the environmental and financial effects.

"Emma will be an integral part of our ongoing work to champion farmer-led solutions to environmental challenges," FSF managing director Lauren Brey said. "We are fortunate to have someone with her education, experience and enthusiasm join our team." 🌱

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tractor, one pass opportunity. The 30-inch single corn rows strip was planted and drilled the same day with separate passes. The 97-day corn was planted with a cover crop population range of 28,000 to 32,000.

The dry season this year created a challenge for crop emergence but Loehr believes this field held moisture better than other fields on his farm.

"I think we got more benefit from our cover crop," said Mark Loehr. "We are

excited to chop this field versus our other fields."

The soybean crop remaining in the field after harvest will provide nitrogen for next year's crop along with feeding the microbiology in the soil.

Michael Borucke, owner of Black Box Soil Lab, presented a microscopic view of the micro livestock in the soil. The slides compared a tilled corn field to the field day trial field. Attendees learned the

good guys are the aerobic protozoa and fungi. A brief presentation showed the soil food web involving plants, organic matter, protozoa and bacteria. The take home message showed conservation practices support soil health, along with having the microbiology in the soil work for you. 🌱

Greetings from your president

By Brody Stapel, SRPF president



As we enter 2024, I hope this note finds you well with your harvest complete, your soil covered and your families healthy!

When it comes to weather and farming, my dad has a solid philosophy. “It all averages out in the end.” He said this a few times this past spring when we faced a long 32 days without rain after planting. Additionally, the cover crops pulled moisture down and no-till ground was difficult to plant into. These challenges were clearly visible at our early field day no-tilling corn into mature standing rye on June 8 when we couldn’t get the seed to the correct planting depth.

Despite these early season challenges, timely rains in August provided farmers with surprising yields. We had a great turnout at the field day hosted by Loehr Dairy this summer. Attendees were able to see a corn field with interseeded soybeans that had been planted this spring into a multispecies mix. With this corn receiving only manure in the summer of 2022 and an application of molasses blend at planting at 2 gallons per acre, I would argue these were some of the more profitable corn acres around.

“It all averages out,” Dad says, and he’s proven right again as we wrestled with a wet fall harvest. Delayed emergence in the spring led to a delayed harvest

and more inclement weather to deal with.

Because of this, member Chuck Born called and asked about applying rye into standing corn. Working together, we found CAL Drone Applications to aerial spread 60 pounds of rye with the hope of establishing a living root earlier this fall rather than having to wait until after the harvest.

If you have questions about trying a new practice, please reach out or join us at a future field day. When trying new practices, it is always reassuring to have support in the form of cost share to help cover the cost. I would encourage our members to take full advantage of this opportunity, especially for those just beginning their soil health journey.

Despite all the challenges this growing season has brought, it has been a great year to see the resiliency of the soil and to be reminded that regenerative agriculture is a journey. We have seen significant gains in nutrient uptake, worm populations, erosion control and water carrying capacity.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at our annual meeting coming up on Feb. 9 to share and discuss successes and challenges. Watch your emails and social media for further information about upcoming events.

Cheers,
Brody 🌱

SRPF scholarship program

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers is offering \$1,000 scholarships to graduating high school seniors and current college students who will be enrolled in a two-year tech school or four-year college during the 2024-25 academic year. SRPF offers this scholarship to encourage young people to continue their education in agriculture.

Applicants must be pursuing an agriculture or environmental science related degree.

The scholarship application deadline is March 15, 2024.

Visit srpfarmers.com for the application and more details.

Please mail the completed application to the following address:
Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers
W6431 State Road 67
Plymouth, WI 53073

Any questions, please contact Kara Abraham at 920-838-1066. 🌱

\$1000 Scholarship for 2-year or 4-year program open now
Apply by March 15





Soil moisture creates cover crop challenges from spring of 2023

By Shawn Wesener, data collection specialist

Spring terminated cover crops in 2023 presented a management challenge with the onset of dry soil conditions. Typically, a cover crop has been beneficial in helping to pull moisture out of wet spring soils. This past spring, with dry conditions, a cover crop removing soil moisture made monitoring field conditions and timing cover crop termination critical. If the covers removed too much soil moisture, the germination of the crop was extremely limited.

I met with Brian Larson from Cottonwood Dairy at Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance's summer event and was able to get his perspective on planting this past spring. Brian acknowledged that if the cover crop got away, there was a challenge with soil moisture. Timing the termination of the cover crop was critical. Brian urged anyone newer to the practice to keep trying. He added that there are long-term benefits seen at Cottonwood

Dairy where rye was planted on tougher soils with the benefits of the deep root working through the soil.

Brian uses winter wheat where he seeds alfalfa to avoid any allelopathic effects that may be released into the soil by a rye cover crop. He can establish an alfalfa stand using no-till practices because of the gradual changes to the soil on the farm due to the changes in practices.

In summary, this year was atypical for managing soil moisture on fields with cover crops. Keep in mind that there are long-term benefits that will keep farmers planting cover crops. Through collaboration offered in the farmer-led groups, there are opportunities for farmers to learn from one another how to manage through challenges presented. This mindset continues the advancement and progress of stewardship on farms within a community.

Despite the atypical year 2023 was for managing soil moisture on fields with cover crops, long-term benefits will continue to motivate farmers to plant those crops.

Fortunately, the collaboration among members of farmer-led watershed groups like LASA presents opportunities for farmers to learn from one another how to manage through challenges. This mindset is critical to ensure progress in environmental stewardship on farms. 🏡

SRPF members build confidence through media training

By Farmers for Sustainable Food

Answering questions from a news reporter isn't the most comfortable thing to do. It can be downright terrifying for some people, especially when the topic is controversial. But engaging with the media is important to the mission of farmer-led watershed groups in Wisconsin, whose members want to demonstrate how they're using conservation practices to protect and improve land and water resources.

Sixteen members of eight such groups, including Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers, stepped out of their comfort zones in November for a message and media training workshop. The goals: understand the key points to articulate in describing their watershed efforts, become familiar with how the news media operates and learn how to manage themselves in interviews. The aim was that by the end of the day, participants left feeling confident and capable.

Farmers for Sustainable Food and Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin sponsored the workshop, which was held at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. Two consultants led the training assisted by FSF and DFW staff.

Expectations are high today from neighbors on up to customers that farmers are doing all they can to reduce any negative effects on natural resources. This makes it critical that farmers be willing and able to step up to the microphones and TV cameras, Lauren Brey, FSF's managing director, said.

"It was encouraging to see so many representatives from these groups voluntarily put themselves out there

to learn these skills," Brey said. "The farmers are showing a deep commitment to incorporating new conservation practices, and devoting time and attention to this training demonstrated a commitment as well."

Discussing messaging helped the workshop participants get a grasp on what parts of their stories resonant most with the audience — namely people who are unfamiliar with farming practices and the work of their groups. Insights on how journalists do their jobs gave participants context. And, practice interviews put them to the test. They answered questions in mock interviews of three kinds: TV, iPhone video and print. Facilitators provided feedback on both the messaging and the delivery, and follow-up practice is being conducted in mock phone interviews.

"An important part of what we are trying to accomplish with SRPF is to share our message with the surrounding community and neighbors," said Derek Sippel, a dairy farmer in St. Cloud, Wis., who is a member of SRPF. "After completing this media training, I feel that I now have the confidence and tools to help educate and inform them of our practices and goals."

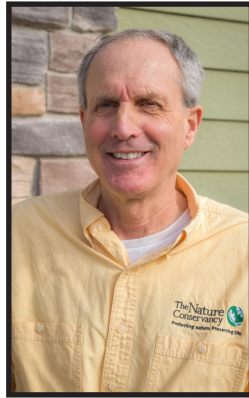
Brey said FSF is looking for additional opportunities for members of the watershed groups to grow in their media and community relations capabilities. 🌱





Unlikely partnership forms lasting relationship

By Lauren Brey, managing director, Farmers for Sustainable Food



Steve Richter recently retired after 32 years as The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin's agriculture team lead. A conversation he had with Tim Trotter, the CEO of Farmers for Sustainable Food, illustrates Steve's trademark curiosity and collaborative approach.

"Steve was my very first interaction with the conservation community in Wisconsin nine years ago," Trotter recalls. "He wanted to learn about the agriculture and dairy communities. In his words, 'Tim, I understand the environment, but I don't know enough about dairy farming and the challenges dairy farmers face.'"

Steve showed genuine interest in farmers and a desire to explore the possibility that TNC could form a productive relationship with the agricultural community. Keep in mind, back then there was a lot of skepticism surrounding the role of conservation groups and their viewpoints on production agriculture. Many farmers were very guarded about working with groups like TNC.

Thankfully, the Dairy Business Association's board of directors agreed to ease into a solutions-based relationship that blossomed into an incredible partnership. Steve was instrumental, along with the DBA and Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative boards, in the formation of what became Farmers for Sustainable Food.

Because of the honest and thoughtful way Steve worked with the local farmer-led watershed conservation groups, he forged many opportunities for TNC and FSF to work side by side with farmers on a voluntary basis. Through his efforts and funding, Steve brought enthusiasm, ideas and vital support to Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance and the other farmer-led groups.

The agriculture community and the environment in our state are in a better place due to TNC's involvement and Steve's leadership. We want to sincerely thank him for his belief in our farmers, his willingness to listen and understand, and his commitment to helping us on a journey of continuous improvement. 🏡

Save the date: SRPF annual meeting Feb. 9

Mark your calendars!

Plan to attend the SRPF annual meeting on Feb. 9. We will discuss our past accomplishments and set goals for 2024!

Come to hear about SRPF's accomplishments from the past year and plans for 2024.

- When: 9:30 a.m. Friday, Feb. 9, 2024
- Where: Amore Banquet Hall, 18 W Mill Street, Plymouth, WI 53073

Learn about the group's progress and updates over the past year, hear about what's coming next for conservation and get inspired by fellow farmers. Food will be provided.

There is no charge to attend, but we ask that you RSVP by Jan. 31. All are welcome. Watch your email, follow along on Facebook and check out the events page at srpfarmers.com for meeting agenda details coming soon!



Scan here to RSVP online



SRPF ANNUAL MEETING

FRIDAY, FEB. 9

Join us at Amore Banquet Hall
18 W Mill St., Plymouth, at 9:30 am



W3653 Hoitink Rd
Cedar Grove, WI 53013

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