

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers 2020 Conference Recap **March 17, 2020**

Sheboygan area farmers celebrate conservation success, plan for future

By Paige Frautschy for SRPF

Nearly 90 farmers, crop consultants, county conservation staff and agricultural business representatives gathered on Feb. 27 for the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers (SRPF) second annual conference at Amore Banquet Hall in Plymouth, Wis.

SRPF is a farmer-led effort to explore strategies that lessen environmental impact, improve soil health, sustain farm profitability and improve water quality in the Sheboygan River Basin. Membership has grown to include 41 farms of all sizes and types representing 26,000 acres of farmland across the Sheboygan River watershed.

The conference was SRPF's fourth public-facing event and an opportunity to share the group's progress, as well as hear from farmers and other experts about innovative conservation practices.

SRPF President Joe Wagner reviewed the group's mission and accomplishments in 2019. They included significant growth in membership, up from 26 farms in 2018; a considerable increase in cost-share program offerings; increased participation in those programs; and \$75,000 in funding to members to offset the cost of conservation practices.

In an effort to track the impact of those practices, SRPF began a survey to document the acreage involving conservation practices. All members completed the survey. Also, despite an extremely challenging growing season, farmers planted 5,500 acres of cover crops, implemented 8,400 acres of no-till and 4,200 acres of reduced tillage.

The group received its third Producer-Led Watershed Protection grant from the state Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) this year and is in the process of revising their 2020 cost-share program offerings based on available funding.

Ross Bishop, a beef and grain farmer from Washington County, gave a presentation about using cover crops in his no-till system and what he's learned during the past 10 years. His presentation sparked an engaging discussion with the audience.

John Gaska, a research specialist in the University of Wisconsin-Madison Agronomy Department, discussed planting soybeans green into a rye cover crop. Gaska described results from a Wisconsin cover crop termination and timing study that will help farmers get a better sense of how to manage crops and cover crops when planting green.

Aaron Augustian, a farmer who has been implementing practices like no-till and planting green on his dairy farm in Kewaunee County, shared his experiences with the group.

Chris Clark of Ag Source Labs talked to the group about the importance of soil health and how companies like Ag Source are helping farmers managing practices and testing for results.

The event concluded with a look ahead to the coming year, including starting a scholarship program for area high school students interested in pursuing a career in agriculture, and plans for a spring or summer field day.

The event was sponsored by Country Visions Cooperative, Compeer Financial, Sheboygan County Forage Council, The Nature Conservancy and DATCP. UW-Extension Sheboygan County helped plan the event.