

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers Annual Conference Recap

For Media Release

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More than 70 farmers, crop consultants, county conservation staff and ag business representatives gathered at Amore Banquet Hall in Plymouth, Wisconsin on Tuesday, February 26th for the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers (SRPF) first annual conference. The SRPF are a producer-led watershed group representing 26 farms of all sizes and types who have come together to explore farming strategies that reduce environmental impacts, improve soil health, sustain farm profitability and improve water quality in the Sheboygan River Basin. The conference was the group's second public event and an opportunity to share the group's progress, as well as hear from farmer and industry experts on topics of interest to farmers in the watershed.

The day started off with SRPF President Joe Wagner welcoming guests and giving a brief overview of the SRPF's mission and 2018 accomplishments. The group was proud to share that membership had grown to 26 farms in 2018, up from the 10 farms that initially founded SRPF. They also completed their first comprehensive cost-share program in 2018, which resulted in the planting of more than 3,000 acres of cover crops and 4,500 acres of reduced tillage practices. The group plans to offer additional cost-share programs in 2019, thanks in part to another year of funding from DATCP's Producer Led Watershed Protection Grant program.

Following the group updates, event emcee and SRPF board member Travis Luedke introduced Nick Miller, of Miller Farms in Oconomowoc, as the keynote speaker. Nick's presentation, "Going Old School on a Large Scale" included practical information and visuals showing his transition toward a regenerative farm using cover crops and minimum tillage. His presentation sparked an engaging discussion with the audience during the Q&A session that followed.

After Nick's presentation concluded, he was joined on stage by SRPF farmers and board members Warren DeMunck of Ridgeland Farms in Glenbeulah, Clint Hodorff of Second Look Holsteins in Eden, Dan Roehrborn of Roehrborn Farms in Plymouth, and Mike Mulder of Higher Ground Ranch in Plymouth. Together the five farmers served on a farmer panel entitled "Real Talk: Transitioning to Cover Crops and Reduced Tillage" that was moderated by Mike Ballweg of UW Extension Sheboygan Co. The panel represented a wide range of farming systems and expertise with soil conservation practices and provided valuable insights to the audience.

The panel was followed by a delicious lunch catered by Amore Banquet Hall. Attendees enjoyed food and socializing with their neighbors, colleagues and new acquaintances. After lunch, the final presentation of the day "Succeeding with Aerially Seeded Cover Crops" was given by Damon Reabe of Dairyland Aviation and Heidi Johnson of UW Extension Dane Co. Darren and Heidi went over important considerations for farmers who are thinking about aerial seeding, like whether or not slugs are present in a field and how much rain is necessary to help the cover crop take off. Their presentation included lots of photos from the field to help the audience understand the concepts that were discussed, as well as a few jokes and jibes among presenters.

The event concluded with Joe Wagner returning to the stage to thank the speakers, audience and to briefly describe a few of SRPF's plans for 2019. Of note are a scholarship program for area high school students interested in pursuing a career in agriculture and a second spring or summer field day. Interested parties can stay up to date with group happenings and initiatives via the SRPF website, Facebook page or Twitter.

The event was free thanks to support from The Nature Conservancy, the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative.

Please visit the [SRPF website](#) for additional information.