Summer 2026

Sheboygan River Sentinel

the newsletter of Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers

srpfarmers.com

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A message from the president

Derek Sippel & family, SRPF president

In my first letter as president, I want to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to every member and collaborator of the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers.

Whether you've been with us since the beginning or just joined this year, your presence, ideas, and commitment matter. Every farm tour we've hosted, every field day, every conversation at meetings, and every bit of knowledge shared has helped strengthen not only our individual operations but our entire community.

What continues to impress me most is how we are proving that real change is possible when farmers work together. We are showing that soil health, clean water, profitable farms, and progressive practices can all exist at the same time. From cover crop innovation and no-till systems to better nutrient management and watershed protection, our members are leading by example.

None of this would happen without your willingness to try new things, share your successes and challenges, and support one another. This group has become a true community of forward-thinking stewards of the land, and I am genuinely proud to be a part of it. I am thankful for each one of you because together, we are making a real, visible, and lasting difference for our farms and future generations.

This year has already had its fair share of hurdles, from one of the wettest Aprils on record to less than an inch of rainfall in May. Despite this, the cover crops held the ground and increased water infiltration, and no-till methods retained that moisture through the dry weather. We have a long growing season to go, but witnessing this was very reassuring that we're on the right track.

In closing, I'd like to highlight the upcoming Soil Health Haney Testing Incentive Program. Through efforts made by board member Brian Huenink and the Lakeshore Natural Resource Partnership, we were able to secure a grant through Fund for Lake Michigan to provide cost share for Haney testing. If you attended our last two annual meetings

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President's message

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and heard from agronomist Joe Alits, you learned that this can be a powerful tool to determine how our soil is performing and how it can inform fertilizer application. Farms enrolled in the program will learn to interpret these test results to set a baseline for our soil health and make in-season management decisions. I am looking forward to implementing this resource together and having some great data to share with our members at this year's fall wrap up meeting.

Sincerely,

Derek Sippel
President, Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers

Upcoming Events

September
Cost-share program and member conservation practice survey launches

November 15
Cost-share program and member conservation practice survey deadline

Scan the code for more information about Sheboygan River Progessive Farmers or for upcoming events.

SRPF invests in the future of farming with $2,500 in secondary education scholarships

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers is committed to investing in the future of the next generation through its annual scholarship program. This year, the program awarded three scholarships to students pursuing higher education: two $1,000 scholarships and one $500 scholarship.

This year's recipients include:

Alison Gartman of Sheboygan plans to attend the University of Minnesota Twin Cities to study animal science with a dairy emphasis. She intends to pursue a career related to bovine reproduction or dairy cattle genetics.

Macie Abraham of Plymouth will be attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison to study dairy and food animal management. She aspires to become a dairy cattle nutritionist.

Zoey Reysen of Kewaskum plans to attend Fox Valley Technical College's Natural Resources Technician program as she prepares for a career as a Conservation Warden.

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Each award recipient has shown a commitment to advancing the future of farming. They understand the importance of adopting sustainable practices to conserve and protect natural resources, which is essential for the long-term sustainability of farms and local communities. Their dedication aligns with the mission of the SRPF.

The students have demonstrated outstanding leadership skills, participation in school and community activities, involvement in agricultural organizations and academic honors. Because the scholarship is designed to encourage young people to continue their education in agriculture, recipients must be pursuing an agriculture or environmental science-related degree.

SRPF is honored to present these scholarships to three exceptional students who recognize the value of sustainable farming and are continuing their education in the agricultural field.

Check out our new website

We're excited to announce the launch of our revamped website for the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers at srpfarmers.com. The updated site features a modern design, improved navigation and enhanced functionality to provide a more streamlined and user-friendly experience. We invite you to explore the new and interactive features now available!

Scan here to visit the new site!

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The Nature Conservancy

Updates from The Nature Conservancy

Ricardo Costa, Associate Director of Ag Strategies, Wis.

Ricardo Costa, TNC Associate Director of Agricultural 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 Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers (SRPF).

Our partnership with SRPF 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 buffer strips. It also includes collaborative efforts like the Wisconsin Cover Crop Citizen Science Project, a statewide effort that gathers on-farm data from farmers, including SRPF 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 SRPF, 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 SRPF, we have been able to refine this program over time and keep it relevant and responsive to partners' needs across the state.

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers highlight conservation research at annual meeting

On Feb. 13, the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers, a farmer-led conservation group in the Sheboygan River watershed, gathered over 50 farmer members, industry partners and community members for its annual meeting. Programming featured updates about the group's conservation projects and other ongoing sustainability projects in the area.

Brody Stapel opened the meeting by sharing key achievements from the previous year and outlining future goals.

> **"I'm always amazed by the significant impact of our efforts that the survey indicates."**
>
> *-Brody Stapel*

"In 2025, our group hosted six events, giving members and others in the community opportunities to learn and network," Stapel said. "We participated in our eighth year of the Member Conservation Practice Survey, documenting our sustainability progress. I'm always amazed by the significant impact of our efforts that the survey indicates."

Farmers for Sustainable Food Strategic Account Manager Marti Viste provided an update on SRPF's 2025 survey results. There were 35 members involved in the survey encompassing 20,217 cropped acres, of which 40% had cover crops, 58% were no-till and 14% were planted green.

Tricia Verville from the Sand County Foundation provided an update on the Johnsonville project, which involved four SRPF farm members. The project aims to improve water quality in the Sheboygan River Basin and has demonstrated positive outcomes this past year.

Joe Ailts of Ailts Agronomy discussed the advantages of using a Haney Soil Test to measure nitrogen and encouraged farmers to run the test in their fields.

"You can't manage what you can't measure," Ailts said. "Running more Haney Tests provides additional data points to help farmers identify soil trends."

He encouraged all SRPF members to participate in a new Haney Testing Incentive Program, made possible with funding from the Fund for Lake Michigan. Members interested in participating in the program signed up at the annual meeting. More details will be released soon.

John Gaska, a board member for the Fields of Sinsinawa, shared an update on a carbon benchmarking project aimed at providing insights into soil health and how it is influenced by various management practices. Gaska encouraged the Sheboygan-area farmers to participate.

Gaska led a robust question-and-answer session focused on important factors to consider regarding soil sampling, including consistency in depth and timing of sampling throughout the year.

During the business portion of the meeting, Jim Webb of Byron Seeds was elected to the board. The following members were reelected: Brody Stapel, Double Dutch Dairy; Mark Loehr, Loehr Dairy, vice president; and Mike Mulder, Higher Ground Ranch.

Other board members include: Derek Sippel, Airy Point Dairy, president; Brian Huenink, Huenink's Seed and Dairy, treasurer; Mark Breunig, A-OK Farms, secretary; Ken Strack, Strack-View Farms and Chuck Born.

The SRPF board from L to R: Jim Webb, Mike Mulder, Mark Breunig, Derek Sippel, Mark Loehr, Chuck Born, Brian Huenink, Ken Strack Jr, Brody Stapel.

2025 annual report showcases conservation improvements in Sheboygan River Basin through sustainable farming practices

Mark Loehr is dedicated to improving his farm's soil health and enhancing sustainable practices. He's motivated to create a better environment for his children to one day join the farm and for his community to thrive.

Loehr farms alongside his brother, Joe, on their family farm in Mt. Calvary, Wis. Loehr Dairy has been operating for nearly 150 years and four generations.

"Our kids are young, but we're motivated to make our farm more productive, efficient and sustainable for their future families," Loehr said. "We're continuously working to solve problems and try new things, so that our farm can be in good shape for the fifth generation in the future."

The Loehrs have been no-till planting since 2016. They have learned through some challenges along the way that no-till planting is most successful on their farm when combined with planting cover crops.

"For us, no-till has only been successful when we're also planting cover crops," Loehr said. "Having root mass in the soil is beneficial for supporting earthworm activity and life in the soil. Our goal is to maintain a living crop in the soil throughout the entire year."

Loehr has been part of the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers since the group's founding. The farmer-led watershed conservation group provides opportunities to network with other local farmers and learn about current sustainable farming research.

Annual survey results

As part of SRPF membership, Loehr participated in the 2025 Annual Member Conservation Practice Survey. This is the eighth year the group has documented and publicly shared members' collective efforts.

The group, composed of 36 members, implemented various conservation practices including planting 6,988 acres of cover crops, using no-till on 10,143 acres, and planting into cover crops (otherwise known as "planting green") on 2,488 acres. They also have 16,481 acres participating in a nutrient management plan.

The potential environmental benefits of these practices:

- Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 3,543 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents, which is equal to greenhouse gas emissions produced by 844 cars driven for a year.
- Prevention of sediment loss from farm fields of 24,733 tons, equivalent to 2,473 dump trucks of soil.
- Reduction of phosphorus runoff by 34,858 pounds, potentially preventing 17.4 million pounds of algae growth in local water bodies.

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

"I have been quite proud to be part of a group that has achieved these outcomes and created this impactful change within our community." Loehr said.

Farmers interested in joining SRPF can find more information on srpfarmers.com.

By the numbers

Number of acres covered by conservation practices among SRPF members:

2018 — 20,427
2019 — 72,947
2020 — 89,080
2021 — 86,294
2022 — 96,920
2023 — 99,494
2024 — 89,260
2025 — 78,569

**Multiple conservation practices can be used on a farm field*

Potential impact of conservation practices in 2025:

Phosphorus runoff reduction:
34,858 pounds

Sediment erosion reduction:
24,733 tons

Carbon dioxide emission reduction:
3,543 metric tons

Jim Webb: SRPF new board member profile

Jim Webb, SRPF new board member

I grew up on my parents' registered Holstein dairy farm and primarily worked on the cropping side, although I helped in all areas of the farm along the way. A few years ago, I made a tough decision to step away from the farm and take a role as a Territory Manager for Eastern Wisconsin at Byron Seeds. I still offer some assistance to our home farm on cropping decisions, but my main role now is to support our dealer network for Byron Seeds.

My dad began a dealership with Byron Seeds in 2010, with some assistance from Larry Hawkins, the territory manager in Wisconsin for Byron Seeds at the time. I grew the seed business over the years and developed some close relationships within Byron Seeds, as well as with some of my customers.

One of the founders of SRPF was a neighbor of ours, Craig Goeser. I remember, on several occasions, how excited he was to begin this group and the potential to make an impact not only on a local level but also to raise public awareness about farming practices and opportunities to be better stewards of the land. If he could look at what he was envisioning then and compare it to what's happening now, I'd like to believe he would be pretty surprised and happy at the progress that was made.

Bits and pieces clicked and connected at the time, but limitations always seemed to exist. Knowing that water quality issues were a pressing concern in certain parts of the state, taking a proactive approach to address any issues with our local waterways was not only a good step, but absolutely the correct step.

Fast forward nearly a decade, and we are now understanding more of the technical benefits of these conservation practices, which, to their credit, many in the organic industry have already known or practiced for decades. A group of farmers (and some non-farmers), such as SRPF, brings together many different viewpoints on how to achieve these objectives, which include clean water practices, nutrient management, erosion control, soil health and others, with the background of what it takes to manage all the challenges a farm could face.

As a board member, I want to offer assistance in any way I can to keep advancing conservation practices with our local farming community. While I am not a full-time farmer anymore, I feel I can help make connections with people who may have ideas or approaches to issues that the group is trying to tackle.

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One amazing thing I've learned is that I am humbled by the knowledge of so many within this industry. And, in the larger context, we all have a responsibility to see each other succeed as nature does not see borders between farmers, forests, suburbs and cities. It all connects together, and we are all affected by those outcomes. So, I acknowledge that there are many others who have deeper understandings of agronomy, nutrition, and concepts than I can individually provide. If we can get those individuals to collaborate with the farmers who accomplish the work, innovation usually occurs. That is where innovation begins, and new ideas come to life.

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NEW WEBSITE!

The updated site features a modern design, improved navigation and enhanced functionality to provide a more streamlined and user-friendly experience.

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