

LSP BRIDGE TO SOIL HEALTH PROGRAM'S PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING GROUPS:

THE STRATEGY & CONSTRUCTION OF REGIONAL FARMER SOIL HUBS

RELEASED MAY 2023



**LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT**

[LANDSTEWARDSHIPPROJECT.ORG/SOILHUBREPORT](https://landstewardshipproject.org/soilhubreport)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LANDSTEWARDSHIPPROJECT.ORG/SOILHUBREPORT

Farmers work and live in isolated settings, and their livelihoods are intricately tied to the weather and the land. As farmers prepare for a changing climate and consider implementing new, regenerative practices — no-till, cover cropping, interseeding, diverse rotations, and adaptive rotational grazing — to build the resiliency of their operations, small peer learning groups have become a popular way for sharing information and helping one another adopt new practices. This report is a reference document for any group, agency, or organization looking to start a multi-year farmer group. As farmers work to help one another lessen the learning curve that comes with implementing new regenerative farming practices, this report is intended to guide other farmer learning groups through discussions and activities that draw out their values and vision for implementing soil health on their farms. Due to increasing food production pressures, water quality issues, and climate instability, it is vital that farmers learn from each other how to sequester more carbon, create cooperative communities, and build resilient farms.



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For more information on the Land Stewardship Project's soil health work, see:
landstewardshipproject.org/soil-health

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LANDSTEWARDSHIPPROJECT.ORG/SOILHUBREPORT

First off, thank you to the 25 farmers that participated in our first round of soil health hubs. Your commitment to the group and your investment of time to learn regenerative practices for your farm is deeply appreciated by Land Stewardship Project staff and all those who benefit from the good work you are doing.

There have been several LSP staff that have contributed to the creativity and construction of the soil hub groups. We deeply appreciate all the support and careful thought that has gone into this work, and we look forward to seeing what future staff members bring to the programming. Thank you to Alex Romano, Shona Langseth, Doug Nopar, Liana Nichols, Brian DeVore, Barb Sogn-Frank, and Maura Curry for your tremendous organizing.

The farmer-leaders that make up our Soil Health Steering Committee, the members that lead LSP's board of directors, and our 4,200 members are vital to the continuation and promotion of the soil health work within the organization and beyond. We are deeply grateful for your commitment to the organization's mission and to the work of connecting farmers with one another to promote the adoption of regenerative practices across the Midwestern landscape.

Lastly, the Soil Health Program would not be able to invest the time and resources this level of critical engagement requires without the ongoing, steady support of our funders and program officers. We thank the Walton Family Foundation, Cedar Tree Foundation, McKnight Foundation, Regenerative Agriculture Foundation, Ceres Trust, No Regrets Initiative, Patagonia, Fishers and Farmers Partnership/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Earth Cloud Fund, Bradshaw-Knight Foundation, Carolyn Foundation, and the Wright Foundation for Sustainability and Innovation for all the financial and leadership support throughout the years.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

LANDSTEWARDSHIPPROJECT.ORG/SOILHUBREPORT

The Land Stewardship Project is sharing our experience constructing and implementing the Regional Soil Hubs with hopes that other agricultural groups, including farmer-led groups, might want to borrow or adapt some of the approaches we've used, as was done similarly with the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative Strategic Plan (https://www.ccsin.org/_files/ugd/5eec36_463da4de1bd94ba3bbbb106dc8496cc4.pdf). We also invite any suggestions or additions to the “curriculum” we have laid out in this report. To access this report online, see <https://landstewardshipproject.org/soilhubreport>. That link gives hard copy readers full access to all the resources and links listed in the report.



BACKGROUND, STRATEGY & INTENDED OUTCOMES FOR GROUPS

LSP staff began constructing the concept of two-year Regional Soil Hubs based on the success and popularity of LSP's Soil Health Team and the soil health work happening in Indiana. When the pilot project for the Soil Health Program at LSP first started, LSP staff pulled together 10 farmer-members to start the conversation on how and why farmers in the region are implementing soil health practices. This rousing team of farmers brought great insights and humor to the table and furthered the idea that small groups of farmers engaging in deep discussion on conservation practices help strengthen their confidence, alleviates the learning curve, increases the adoption of practices on their farms, and develops their ability to speak publicly about agriculture and their farms, all while developing relationships with one another. This concept was also confirmed by NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service), agronomist Barry Fisher, who facilitated a successful farmer-led approach using regional farmer-mentor circles via Indiana's Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative. As was reported in a special *Land Stewardship Letter* series (<https://landstewardshipproject.org/wp-content/uploads/Soil-Health-Hubs-Indiana.pdf>), the initiative created a partnership involving NRCS, regional agricultural professionals, and local farmers. This partnership has resulted in the state of Indiana having the highest percentage of land in the country no-tilled (70%), and cover crops being used on 1.5 million acres.



BACKGROUND, STRATEGY & INTENDED OUTCOMES FOR GROUPS

After a phone consultation with Barry Fisher, LSP started the formation of farmer groups committed to making soil health changes on their operations. We hoped that by the end of two years, the farmers would have an individual plan or road map for how they would accomplish their soil health goals, and that the individual farmer would feel supported and informed enough to take larger soil health steps on their operation, thus reducing the learning curve of implementing these new practices.

When forming the two-year hubs, we wanted a balance of farmers who were conventional and organic, as well as livestock and grain producers, and that they would have a demonstrated interest and commitment to soil health, cover cropping, grazing, and reduced tillage practices. LSP believes that conventional and organic farmers are dealing with similar financial and societal pressures, and that by rebuilding their soils together, the division between the farm communities can be healed as they learn and share experiences together. We were also seeking to invite farmers under the age of 40, and ideally some women as well, in addition to the usual older, male farmer audience we regularly work with. The decision was also made to cap each hub size at 8-15 mid-sized farmers and to make sure they all farm within 25-30 miles of one another in order to maintain a geographically concentrated group.

As these farmers worked together over the next two years, we designed curriculum that would facilitate the building of relationships, visioning for their farms, public speaking opportunities, and the time to share back what they are trying out on their farms. The regional soil hubs are intentionally closed groups, so that each group builds trust and skills with each other, and shares more personal information, including Holistic Management ideas, hopes for their operations, and potentially farm finances. Intended outcomes are to see farmers making on-the-ground changes to their land, building community, and developing as soil health leaders who can be resources for other farmers and advocates for needed policy changes.

CONSTRUCTING THE SOIL HUBS, CREATING COMMUNITY, & BUILDING LEADERS

This section focuses on the logistics and methods used in constructing the hubs, helpful facilitation techniques to build community relationships, and some of the key activities used to build the skillsets of the participating farmers.

RECRUITMENT

One of the most important recruitment and organizing tools used at LSP is one-to-one meetings (see LSP's *Building the Bridge to Soil Health* report, <https://landstewardshipproject.org/wp-content/uploads/Bridge-to-Soil-Health-Report-10-15-20.pdf>, page 10, for more details). Each potential soil hub participant must be visited on their farm before being invited to participate. Not only does this give the organizer a good sense of what the farmer is already doing on their land, but it starts the relationship-building process and establishes credibility with that farmer so that when asked to join the soil hub, they know who will be facilitating the conversations and what the intentions are behind the soil hub meetings. To initially meet farmers and collect contact information, LSP uses large, public, educational events to draw in the interested farmers and promote the message of soil building.

When there have been 20 to 30 one-to-ones held in a distinct, geographical region, a soil hub can be started. The legwork prior to starting the meetings is just as important as the establishment of the soil hub itself. There needs to be some familiarity with the organizer and the organization for it to be a successful investment of time and energy.

CONSTRUCTING THE SOIL HUBS, CREATING COMMUNITY, & BUILDING LEADERS

COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMITTMENT TO THE GROUP

Beyond the one-to-one meetings, the next step in recruiting farmers into a soil hub is to directly invite them over the phone or in-person. It might take several asks to move a reluctant person, but persistence shows the dedication of the organizer and the desire for the engagement of the farmer. Communication about the soil hub opportunity should be presented in a variety of platforms, including posted letters, e-mail, text messages, and phone calls. While this might seem excessive, each farmer communicates through different means and the Marketing Rule of 7 — the idea that a person needs to see or hear a message seven times to act on the request — also applies to asking people to engage and take on leadership roles, especially for women.

When a farmer shows interest in the soil hubs, a letter of commitment is sent to them via mail and through e-mail (for an example, see Appendix a). This letter provides the background and context for this work, outlines who the target audience is and explains meeting frequency and times. It also states that this is a closed group and not open to the public. Lastly, LSP staffers ask the farmer to commit to the group by signing the letter and acknowledging that they will be involved for at least the first year, so they have a good sense of the group and the work being done together.



CONSTRUCTING THE SOIL HUBS, CREATING COMMUNITY, & BUILDING LEADERS

LOGISTICS — VENUE, FOOD, & CREATING THE ENVIRONMENT

When looking for an ideal meeting space, consider finding a location that will hold 20 people comfortably without being overly large and that will allow for meetings on a weekday or a weekday evening. It is also helpful to have a space that already comes with a projector, whiteboard and plenty of wall space for flip chart notes. Public libraries, small rural churches, community meeting rooms, and private rooms at restaurants have served as some of our popular soil hub meeting spaces. Also, make sure that food and drink are allowed in the room.

LSP prides itself on setting up an inclusive environment so that all participants can be seen and heard by one another. With a group of 10 to 15 people, we found that either a horseshoe design or large group circle is the best way to arrange the tables. The horseshoe setup allows for everyone to see one another — as well as the facilitator and farmer presenter, if presentations are given that day.

Food is one of the highlights of the soil hubs. LSP likes to seek out local restaurants and cafés as sources of food, especially those that are willing to work with locally produced meats and produce. Breaking bread together is a great community-building activity and shows the dedication of the organization to supporting local businesses and farms in the region. Offering coffee throughout the hub meetings is a necessity.

SOIL HUB TOOLS & ACTIVITIES

LSP staff used a variety of tools and activities throughout the two years to engage the soil hubs. Below are the facilitator resources and activities that were especially useful in the groups' establishment and growth.

GROUP AGREEMENTS & GROUND RULES

At the first meeting of the soil hubs, it is important to establish group agreements to build trust and accountability among the members. This can be a consensus-based discussion or staff can bring in basic ground rules that can be added to or adjusted. Examples of agreements used in the past include: recognize the soil hub meetings as important time together and attend as many meetings as possible; respect one another's perspectives; wait until the person speaking is finished before contributing to the conversation; accept that this is a safe space to ask questions and challenge one another respectfully; and lastly, if you are a person who likes to talk, please be aware of the time you are taking, and if you are a person who likes to listen, please step forward in discussions when you have a point to make.

As the group builds their capacity to utilize the agreements, more challenging topics of discussion can be explored, including questions like “Are you experiencing extreme weather on your farm?” and “Do you think it is connected to climate change?” and “How can beginning farmers get started in agriculture today given high land prices?” While the focus of soil hubs is connecting farmers around soil health, space can be made within the agenda to explore other relevant, challenging topics that rural communities and farmers face. It is helpful to have the group agreements displayed at every meeting so that they can be referred to when a conflict arises, or agreements are breached.

SOIL HUB TOOLS & ACTIVITIES

VISIONING ACTIVITY

Not very often is the average farmer asked, “Where would you like to see your farm in 20 years? What would be growing and who would be working the land?” Most of the time they are told by government agencies, financial institutions, chemical companies, and farmer co-ops how they should manage and take care of their land. Consolidation is another harsh reality that threatens to snatch away the connection farmers have to their land and livelihoods. Visualizing their future farm on their own terms is an empowering exercise for combatting the big challenges farmers face. The visioning activity seeks to break out of that mold and allow the farmer to take time and consider what they genuinely want for their operation/land, and how they would like to see it managed in the future. It is affirming for the farmers to share their visions with one another and have the support of other farmers in the room.

FARMER DIRECTORY

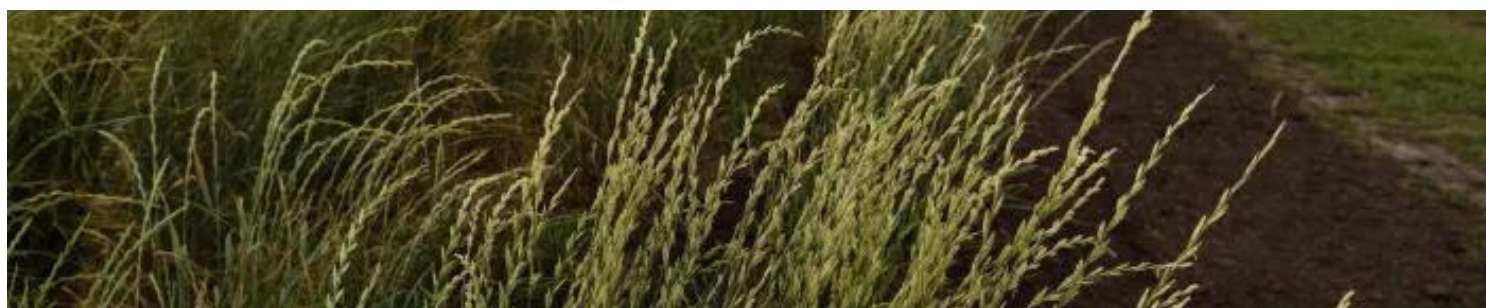
An important communication and connection tool for the soil hub farmers is creating a contact directory of the farmers involved. When an individual farmer is taking strides to try out new practices on their farm, it is helpful for them to have other farmers that they know to ask questions of and share ideas with. Also, as the farmers are meeting in the winter for the first couple of meetings, this tool allows them to stay connected throughout the planting and harvesting seasons. This is critical for the farmer-to-farmer learning process to flourish (for a directory example, please refer to Appendix b).



SOIL HUB TOOLS & ACTIVITIES

THE SHED

The Shed was a tool developed by an LSP staff member to help keep discussions flowing and on-track with the agenda at each soil hub meeting. At times, great questions or topics of discussion would come up during our soil hub meetings, and to help keep track of the important tangential conversations to be revisited later, we would “park” the conversation in The Shed. We would then revisit the topic during Shop Talk, or staff could create structured time in another meeting agenda, if the group felt like it was needed. The Shed can be used at every soil hub meeting (see Agenda Year 1, Meeting #1).



SHOP TALK

Shop Talk is a purely intentional space in the agenda for farmers to do what farmers do best: talk shop. They can bounce ideas off each other, ask for guidance on trying a new practice, get clarity on something they heard earlier, or refer to The Shed to finish the discussion that they were interested in. It may seem unstructured, but this time is important to farmers. We have even heard feedback that more time is needed for Shop Talk. To prompt the Shop Talk time, key topics of interest that were brought up earlier in the agenda can be re-visited, or the facilitator can ask the group if there were any topics someone would like to hold a small group discussion on. Prompts initially can help alleviate the awkward moments as the farmers grow comfortable seeking out their own interests during this time.

SOIL HUB TOOLS & ACTIVITIES

CREATING A PLAN

While all farmers have great ideas for the next year or years on their farms, they are not always great at sitting down and writing out a plan-of-action. That is one of the major benefits of a facilitated farmer group. LSP staff can challenge farmers to try out and adopt new habits of farm planning to make regenerative agriculture a priority on their farms. To start off the process, we offer a one-year outline to help sketch out what the farmer would like to accomplish over the next growing season.

This outline includes thinking through their year's goals and the practices they want to implement, the tools needed, how they will evaluate success, and the costs that accompany the change. After thinking through the next year, we then can talk about visioning out the next 3 to 7 years. This is a good practice to build for farmers so they can, for example, consider disease and pest pressures within their crops and create rotations that build more resilience in their systems, rather than rely solely on chemical control.

This also allows a farmer to say that they are building towards a larger goal on their farm, whether that be bolstered finances, healthier soil, or creating a system that will benefit future generations (see Appendix c for the single and multi-year soil building plans).



RESULTS

At the end of the two years, LSP's Soil Health Team staff reflected on the results of the work. Overall, we were able to build an environment of teamwork, excitement, hope and creativity that compelled the farmers to return for each meeting. There was also a group understanding that meeting together on soil health, sharing learned experiences, and asking questions of one another is important. It was recognized that we, as staff members, had built professional relationships with the farmers. Strong relationships were built among the farmers within the hubs, so much so that they were in communication outside of the facilitated meetings. The farmer directory helped establish these outside connections.

Most importantly, we were able to get our hubsters to publicly speak about their own farms and create presentations that they could share with other farmers. Chris Gunderson, DJ Mueller, Robb Miller, Everett Rolfig, Luke Bergler, Rory Beyer, Mike Steinfeldt, Mike Krause, Olaf Haugen, Rod Nelson, Martin Larsen, and John and Ben Snyder have all taken public speaking roles outside of the soil hub meetings to spread the message beyond their close-knit groups. Many of the farmers have hosted public field days to share what they have learned on their regenerative agriculture journey. Soil hub participants Martin Larsen and John and Ben Snyder have engaged with their local Minnesota state lawmakers to lift up the importance of soil health practices and to push for soil health grants at the state level. Lastly, all the farmers are still actively farming and making on-farm changes to improve the health of their soil (see Chart 1).

RESULTS

Farmer Name	Soil Hub Location	Acreage Changed	Practice Used Summer 2019
DJ Mueller	Lewiston	140	Cover Crops and No-Till
Everett Rolfig	Lewiston	100	Cover Crops and Vertical Till
Luke Bergler	Lewiston	50	Cover Crops
Mark and Mike Stokes	Lewiston	200	Cover Crops
Mike Krause	Lewiston	40	Cover Crops
Mike Krause	Lewiston	600	No-Till
Mike Steinfeldt	Lewiston	10	Improved Grazing Practices
Pat and Kelly Kalmes	Lewiston	30	Cover Crops
Pat Clemens	Lewiston	150	Cover Crops
Robb Miller	Lewiston	60	Cover Crops and Vertical Till
Rory Beyer	Lewiston	40	Interseeding Cover Crops
Willie Erdmann	Lewiston	40	Cover Crops
Aaron and Jeff Gillespie	Preston	450	Cover Crops
Chris Gunderson	Preston	40	Cover Crops
Gerald Peters	Preston	60	Cover Crops and No-Till
John and Ben Snyder	Preston	630	Cover Crops
John Meyer	Preston	20	Improved Grazing Practices
Keith Ekstrom	Preston	40	Interseeding Cover Crops
Lynn Steinbrink	Preston	250	No-Till
Lynn Steinbrink	Preston	30	Cover Crops
Mark Spande	Preston	20	Cover Crops
Martin Larsen	Preston	160	Cover Crops
Olaf Haugen	Preston	30	Cover Crops
Rod Nelson	Preston	30	Cover Crops
Tom Thompson	Preston	100	Cover Crops
Total		3,320	

LESSONS LEARNED & PROGRAM ADJUSTMENTS

Overall, the first round of soil hubs was deemed a success. However, LSP staff and some soil hub members noted a few items that could be adjusted for future hubs, including creating more space for Shop Talk, extending the soil hubs beyond two years, tightening up the multi-year plan, adding stronger financial components, and having an intentional evaluation process.

FEEDBACK

- Martin Larsen found the soil hubs to be a very useful space for farmers to come together and to have intentional time for conversation. He would like to see the soil hubs continue beyond the two years, but it would take more thought on what should be accomplished together. Martin reflected that after the visioning activity, he accomplished everything he was hoping to on his farm, including purchasing and utilizing a sawmill, raising ducks, and including more diversified crops in his corn and soybean rotation.
- Everett Rolfing really liked the looser agenda and talking through what is working and not working when implementing soil health practices. Everett would like to see separate discussion groups for graziers and row crop producers and thinks organic and non-organic producers can be in the same group together — everyone's goal here is to reduce inputs, and these two groups of farmers share many of the same challenges when it comes to implementing no-till and cover cropping. He wants one meeting in the spring to plan for the growing season and one in the fall to review how the growing season went.



LESSONS LEARNED & PROGRAM ADJUSTMENTS

We heard that the farmers enjoyed the space created for them to engage as farmer-neighbors and community members, and they would like more time together. Extending the soil hubs to three years is in the works for the next round of hubs. We also heard loud and clear that farmers, particularly Everett Roling, want more time to talk shop with fellow soil hub participants. Both pieces are being worked into future agenda formats, such as what are represented in Appendix d and e.

LSP staff noted a couple of items that we would like to see developed further, including the planning and implementation of a regenerative practice on a single field that the farmers could report back on to the group at a winter meeting. This would put an on-the-ground component into the soil hub work. We also noted that there is room to look further into a Holistic Farm Financial component with the soil building plans. It is a need and desire for the program to build out more financial tools for farmers. Lastly, we did not include a formal, final evaluation of the first soil hub participants and that was a missed opportunity. LSP staff had informal conversations about the hubs, but that information was not collected and summarized in a way where everyone was able to give feedback on the work.



APPENDIX

- (A) COMMUNICATION LETTER
- (B) EXAMPLE DIRECTORY
- (C) SINGLE AND MULTI-YEAR PLANNING
- (D) YEAR ONE SOIL HUB MEETING AGENDAS
- (E) YEAR 2 SOIL HUB MEETING AGENDAS

A)Appendix

(a)Communication Letter

From: LSP's soil health staff - Doug Nopar, Shona Snater, Alex Romano, Liana Nichols

Date: January 14, 2019

Thanks for your interest in being part of the Land Stewardship Project's soil health hub based in Lewiston. We're pleased to be pulling together an excellent group of farmers for this effort (all located within 30 miles of Lewiston). We're looking forward to each of you getting to know each other, and to all of us learning from one another.

We've identified a set group of farmers that have been invited to be part of this -people we know that are really interested in soil health and the connection between soil health and profitability. This will be a small, invitation-only group of people, each of whom have some experience with practices like cover crops, no-till, interseeding, or intensive grazing, and are interested in trying to make significant on-farm changes in soil health.

An important long-term goal of this effort is for farmers in our area to be able to re-build the natural productivity of the soil, and in doing so, to also become more profitable, able to cope better in the face of weather extremes and improve the environment. Although it is not yet widespread, we know there are farmers in the Upper Midwest that are effectively making these kinds of changes -building soil, improving organic matter and yields, sinking carbon into the soil, and cutting expenses. And we believe that more farmers are primed and ready to make those kinds of changes.

The short-term goal for the soil health hub is that each of you will, after 2 years, have a solid plan for how you want to significantly build soil health on your farm. It's important to note that the meetings of the soil health hub are not open to the public. These will be invitation-only groups, and not publicly advertised. LSP is organizing a number of larger soil health workshops this winter in Faribault, Lewiston, Preston, Rushford, and Stewartville that are open to the public and that will be broadly publicized. But that's not the case with the soil health hub, where a "closed group" will help us have more detailed and focused discussion. It is a chance for farmers to share information, support, and ideas with one another, ask questions, and to come up with individual goals and plans over the next couple years that take your farm where you want it to be in terms of both soil health and profitability. What we have found is that it's a lot easier to be making these kinds of changes if you're part of a group that is looking at things together.

The first meeting will be from 10 to 3 on Tuesday, Feb 5th, at the Lewiston Church of the Brethren (25335 County Rd 25), two miles southeast of town. The 2nd meeting will be on Tuesday, Feb 19th, same time, same location. At the first meeting, you'll begin to learn more about one another's farms and the innovative methods you've each been trying in recent years that help build the soil (and any observations you have about that experience). We'll begin to gather your ideas for what you want to learn and how you want to move your farm forward in soil health.

The farmers making up the soil hub will come from a mix of mid-sized crop and livestock operations. Some of you are organic, some are conventional. It's our sense that everyone in the group is deeply committed to improving the soil. From a philosophical perspective, at LSP we believe that farmers don't need to be told "the solution" to creating soil health or better farming, but that farmers can find their way forward based on your own goals and resources, and by learning from other innovative farmers and researchers. These soil hubs will only meet twice this winter. We expect the soil hubs to meet for one or two shorter meetings in summer or late fall, and then to have a similar schedule in 2020. We're looking at having this group meet for two years, and we're asking you to make that two-year commitment. Based on our past experience, these groups should be pretty rewarding for everyone involved. If, for some reason, it's not meeting your needs, it would be fine to step aside after the first year.

What we ask from you is to commit to attending each of the group's meetings, as the value of this kind of group really rests on everyone being there to share their ideas and to learn from each other. Of course, if some crisis comes up for you on the farm, that's understandable. There isn't a fee to be involved, except for the meals, where we are asking for a free-will contribution to help us cover those costs.

Please give us a call here at the office (507-523-3366) by Tuesday, January 22nd, to confirm that you want to be part of the group.

(b) Example Directory

<div></div> <div><p>Patrick & Kelly Kalmes</p><p>Phone Number</p><p>E-mail</p><p>Communication Preference</p><p>Farming practices include no-till gardening</p></div>	<div></div> <div><p>Michael Krause</p><p>Phone Number</p><p>E-mail</p><p>Communication Preference</p><p>Farming practices include no-till, planting green, fall cover cropping</p></div>
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 <p>Lance Klessig Phone Number E-mail Communication Preference Farming practices include cover crops, interseeding, relay/double cropping, frost seeding, grazing, no-till planting, having an open mind, willing to think outside the box</p> 	 <p>Mark Stokes Phone Number E-mail Communication Preference Farming practices includes no-till, planting green, fall cover cropping, interseeding cover crops, grazing</p> <p>LSP Bridge to Soil Health Program Staff: Shona Snater, SSnater@landstewardshipproject.org Doug Nopar, dnopar@landstewardshipproject.org Liana Nichols, lnichols@landstewardshipproject.org Alex Romano, aromano@landstewardshipproject.org Lewiston Office: 507-523-3366</p>
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(c)Single and Multi-Year Planning

SOIL-BUILDING PLAN

CROP YEAR 2020

Mid-term goal(s): increase profitability per acre on corn ground

Soil building practice(s): interseeding kale, clover, annual ryegrass into corn and grazing in the fall

Method of assessment/tracking (how will you track/determine success?): tracking input costs and expenses for corn acres and also# cow grazing days from the interseeded cover crop

Enterprise and scope/scale(% of pastureland/cropland, # acres): 20% of corn ground interseeded this year, 50% next year if it works well

Tools/resources available to me, learning opportunities: cover crop mix from Albert Lea, rotary hoe and Gandy seeder, other farmers who have interseeded (Gillespies, Snyders, Martin Larsen)

Back-up plan: If it's too wet to interseed, then frost-seeding rye in the spring

Cost: \$30/ac for cover crop mix (\$15/ac for rye), Iowa custom rates for seeding

Benefit/savings (quality of life, soil health, profitability, your goal): increasing diversity of crops, keeping green cover on the landscape, grazing potential in the fall (\$/acre value?), option to cut out herbicide pass in spring (rotary hoe with interseeding)

FARM: -----

MID-TERM GOAL: -----

SOIL BUILDING PRACTICES: -----

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT: -----

2024	2025	2026 until mid-term goals	Mid-term goal achieved (3-7 years)
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Enterprise and scope/scale: • Tools/resources available to me: •Back-up plan: • Cost: • Benefit/savings (quality of life, soil health, profitability, your goal): 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Enterprise and scope/scale: •Tools/resources available to me: •Back-up plan: • Cost: • Benefit/savings (quality of life, soil health, profitability, your goal): 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Enterprise and scope/scale: •Tools/resources available to me: •Back-up plan: • Cost: •Benefit/savings (quality of life, soil health, profitability, your goal): 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •When do you see your mid-term goal being achieved? •What does your farm look like now? What has changed since 2023?
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(d)Year One Soil Hub Meeting Agendas

Austin Facilitator:	Barbara Sogn-Frank
Plainview Facilitator:	Maura Curry
Austin Date/Location:	Feb 1, 2023 / El Mariachi Meeting Room
Plainview Date/Location:	Feb 2, 2023 / Foresight Bank
Group:	Soil Hub-Year 1, Meeting #1
Goals:	

- 1.To enjoy being together
2. To build rapport
- 3.To establish stimulating & collaborative atmosphere

Objectives:

- Learn about one another through introductions and engaging activities & discussions in partner/small/large groups
- Encourage participation by making space for group/individual input and changing up group dynamics
- Have a clear sense of purpose and direction of the groups

Working Agenda:

4:00 Welcome & Review Agenda
 4:20 Warm Up Activity
 4:40 Introductions
 5:00 Whole Group Discussion
 6:00 Dinner
 6:25 Farmer presentation #1
 6:40 Farmer presentation #2
 6:55 Pairs Activity
 7:25 The Shed & Shop Talk
 7:45 Next Steps & Upcoming Events
 7:55 Group Evaluation
 8:00 Adjourn

Materials Needed:

- Soil Health Bin - Pens, Sharpies, Masking Tape, Nametags
- Projector & Screen (for farmer presentations - optional)
- Flip chart, easel, markers
- Coffee, milk, tea, napkins
- Meeting 1 Handouts

4:00 PM

Welcome & Review Agenda

- Materials:* agenda written on FLIP CHART, invitation letter
- Explain:* Introduce facilitators, review agenda, introduce "The Shed," orient to the space, review context and go over the format and goals of the next few years of the soil hub.
- Introduce 'The Shed':
 - 1.*Materials:* Blank piece of FLIP CHART with "The Shed" for title
 - 2.*Explain:* Whenever a question or discussion topic comes up that's not relevant to the discussion at hand "put it in the shed" (a large sheet of paper on the wall). In other words, write it up on the paper and we'll deal with it as a group later. Then we can stay focused without ignoring anyone's questions and comments.

- 4:20 PM Warm Up Activity - Rotational Introduction
- Materials:* write abbreviated instructions on FLIP CHART
 - Explain:* Ask group to count off in two's (1-2, 1-2). You will be creating an inner and outer circle with the 2 groups. Have the 1' s become an inner circle and the 2's become the outer circle - make sure they are facing each other. Have inner and outer circle shake hands and introduce self to the person facing them. Ask 1' s to stand still and 2's to move 1 person to the left to introduce self and shake hands with a new person. Let's take a minute to think about the questions you'll answer with each person before we start (give 1 minute).
- 1.What is your name?
 - 2.Where do you live?
- 4:40 PM Introductions
- Materials:* Introduction elements written on FLIP CHART
 - Explain:* We're going to go around the room and have everyone say their name, where they're from, what they farm, and what interests them about being part of the soil hub.
- 5:00 PM • Whole Group Discussion (5 minutes per person/farm)
- Materials:* write questions on FLIPCHART
- 1.What 1-2 soil health practices have you tried in the past few years?
 - 2.What challenges did you face implementing these practices?
 - 3.What worked well for you?
 - 4.What key lessons did you learn over time?
- 6:00PM Dinner
- 6:25 PM Farmer Presentation #1
- A fundamental piece of each meeting will be an opportunity for each person to give a BRIEF presentation & present a question to the group for input. We will be having everyone do this at some point this year.
 - Present for 10-15 minutes with a few minutes for questions & feedback at the end. Think about these questions for the presentation
- oWhat is the history of your farm?
 - oWhat got you interested in soil health?
 - oWhat are you hoping to try in the next 1-3 years?
 - oWhat challenges do you anticipate facing?
 - oWhat are you starting to think about as possible indicators for measuring success?
- 6:40 PM Farmer Presentation #2

- 6:55 PM Pairs Activity
- Materials:* Clarifying Values HANDOUT, FLIP CHARTw/ questions
 - Explain:* We are going to take some time to break up into pairs and share some of the reasons about.. ..
 - 1.Which values are the most important to you?
 - 2.What drives you and your family to farm the way you do (or the way that you want to farm)?
 - 3.Where does that inspiration or motivation come from?
 - 4.How do you sustain yourworkwith soil health when many others may not share your vision?
 - Come back together for group discussion (10 mins)
 - 5.What values did you choose?
 - 6.Why would we have you do this activity?
 - 7.What thoughts came up?
- 7:25 PM The Shed & Shop Talk
- Materials:* "The Shed" FLIP CHART What's relevant to the soil hubs? What should be on our next agenda?
 - 2.What needs a different kind of follow-up? Shop Talk?
- Not sure?
- Explain:* This time is for those of us who have a question and need input from the group. This can be 1-on-1 or in smaller groupings.
- 7:45 PM Next Steps & Upcoming Events
- Explain:* We are looking for 3 volunteers to present for our next meeting in two weeks. Who would like to go?
 - Explain:* At our next meeting we will be talking about creating a 5-year plan for the farm. Of course, this is not binding, but a great opportunity to think aboutwhere you want your farm &journeywith soil health to be. Please talk with any business partners or family members you would like to talk to in order to be ready to participate next time.
 - Pass around a sheet of paper to create a Directory.
 - Upcoming Events:* February 16, next meeting; March 1, Regenerative Peer-to-Peer Workshop; March 23, Ranching For Profit
- 7:55 PM Group Evaluation
- Materials:* Write responses on FLIP CHART
 - 1.What worked welI today?
 - 2.What needs to be improved for next time?
 - 3.Reach out to Maura if you would like to share anything privately.
- 8:00 PM Adjourn

Austin Facilitator: Barbara Sogn-Frank
Plainview FacilitatoMaura Curry

Austin Date/Location: Feb 15, 2023 / El Mariachi Meeting Room

Plainview Date/Location: Feb 16, 2023 / Foresight Bank Group:

Soil Hub-Year 1, Meeting #2

Goals:

- 1.To enjoy being together
- 2.To build rapport
- 3.To establish a stimulating & collaborative atmosphere

Objectives:

- Discuss how to define success through various monitoring methods
- Plan out 5-year plan for each farm
- Continue to learn about individual farms through presentations and conversations

Working Agenda:

14:00 Welcome & Review Agenda
 14:10 Warm Up Activity
 14:25 Defining Success Discussion
 14:55 Farmer presentation #1
 5:10 Farmer presentation #2
 5:25 Dinner
 5:55 Farmer presentation #3
 6:10 5-year plan for the Farm Solo
 6:30 Graup Share Out
 7:20 The Shed & Shop Talk
 7:45 Next Steps & Upcoming Events
 7:55 Graup Evaluation
 8:00 Adjourn

Materials Needed:

- Soil Health Bin - Pens, Sharpies, Masking Tape, Name tags •
- Projector & Screen (for farmer presentations - optional)
- Flip chart, easel, markers
- Coffee, milk, tea, napkins
- Meeting 2 Handouts, The Monitoring Toolbox

14:00 PM	Welcome & Review Agenda <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Materials</i> agenda written on FLIP CHART • : <i>Explain</i> Review agenda and welcome.
14:10	Warm Up Activity - <i>Who do you admire and why?</i>
PM	Defining Success Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Materials:</i> FLIP CHART

PM

- Explain:* Take 5-10 minutes to brainstorm ways to monitor soil health and farm success with the whole group. Write answers on flip chart. Continue until things like infiltration, saving time, wildlife, reducing inputs, etc., get mentioned, along with profit, yield, etc. Discuss tools like soil tests, worms, infiltration rings, etc.
- What methods are you already using? What methods would you like to try? What do you put the most stake in?
- Document for future reference

14:55 PM Farmer Presentation #1

5:10 PM Farmer Presentation #2

5:25 PM Dinner

5:55 PM Farmer Presentation #3

6:10 PM 5-year Plan for the Farm Solo Activity

- Materials:* FLIP CHART paper for each participant
- Explain:* Write or draw some goals that you would like to achieve on your farm in the next 5 years. We will be sharing with the group & reflecting on some of these goals over the next few years of the hub.

- What are the most important things that you want to achieve or try?
- How does this relate to the values we talked about in meeting 1?
 - What are the biggest challenges to implementing these goals?
- What support do you need to overcome these challenges?
 - What practices do you want to be doing, and what do you want the results to be - e.g. better infiltration, less compaction, less weed pressure, less chemical use, etc.?
 - What markers would mean you were successful in your goals?

6:30 PM Group Share Out

- Materials:* FLIP CHART paper, camera
- Explain:* Each farmer will have a chance to share out their 5-year plan (5-10 minutes) and get feedback on challenges & support.
- Photograph each FLIP CHART paper & save for reference in year 3 of the soil hubs. Write NAMES!

7:20 PM Revisit The Shed and Shop Talk

- "The Shed" FLIP CHART
 - What's relevant to the soil hubs? What should be on our next agenda?

2.What needs a different kind of follow-up? Shop Talk? Not sure?

•*Explain:* Shop Talk is for those of us who have a question and need input from the group. This can be 1-on-1 or in smaller groupings.

7:45 PM

Next Steps & Upcoming Events

•*Explain:* We are looking for 3 volunteers to give a presentation for our next meeting next year. Who would like to speak at the next meeting?

•We do not have any meetings planned during the summer months as we know people are busy, but please feel free to keep in touch with folks through the directory. We will have a boat tour on the Mississippi that we would love for you to come to with the members of the Austin area soil hub. Additionally, if anyone would like to show a soil health practice on their farm this summer, we would love to support you in running a field day.

•2024 growing season is when we would like you to each implement a practice. We will do a lot of brainstorming as a group & get feedback, but if you know something about what you would like to do & need to do any preparation in the fall of 2023 for that plan, please do so!

•*Upcoming Events:*

1.Boat Tour

7:55 PM

Group Evaluation

•*Materials:* Write responses on FLIP CHART

1.What worked well today?

2.What needs to be improved for next time?

3.Reach out to Maura if you would like to share anything privately.

8:00 PM Adjourn

(e)Year Two Soil Hub Meeting Agendas

Austin Facilitator: Maura Curry

Plainview Facilitator: Maura Curry

Austin Date/Location: Feb 7, 2024 / El Mariachi Meeting Room

Plainview Date/Location: Feb 8, 2024 / Foresight Bank

Group: Soil Hub -Year 2, Meeting #1

Goals:

1.To enjoy being together

2.To build rapport

3.To establish stimulating & collaborative atmosphere

Objectives:

- Discuss how to define success through various monitoring methods
- Plan out 5-year plan for each farm
- Continue to learn about individual farms through presentations and conversations

Working Agenda:

4:00 Welcome & Review Agenda
 4:10 Warm Up Activity
 5:00 Farmer presentation #1
 5:15 Farmer presentation #2
 5:30 Farmer presentation #3
 5:45 Dinner
 6:10 Creating a Soil Building Plan
 6:40 Paired Conversation
 7:10 Group Share Out
 7:25 The Shed and Shop Talk and dinner
 7:50 Homework and wrap-up

Materials Needed:

- Soil Health Bin -Pens, Sharpies, Masking Tape, Nametags
- Flip chart, easel, markers
- Coffee, milk, tea, napkins
- Meeting 3 Handouts

4:00 PM (Welcome / Review Agenda
 • *Materials:* agenda written on FLIP CHART
 • *Explain:* Review agenda

 4:10 PM Warm Up Activity *Reflect on the last season; what was one thing that went well & one thing you learned from?*

 5:00 PM) Farmer Presentation #1
 5:15 PM) Farmer Presentation #2
 5:30 PM) Farmer Presentation #3
 5:45 PM) Break for dinner
 6:10 PM) Creating a Soil Building Plan
 • *Materials:* Soil Building Single & Multi Year HANDOUT

- Explain:* Each participant fills out the handouts as a solo activity. Can fill out a few single year plans to brainstorm. Be sure to think of financial benefits, quality-of-life benefits, and back-up plans. Reflect on past meetings -5-year plan goals & ways to measure success.
- Give context that we would like each farmer to choose a single practice to experiment with this summer. It can be as ambitious as they desire, but we will plan this meeting, get feedback next session, and reflect next year on this soil-building one-year plan.

- 6:40 PM Paired Conversation
- Explain:* Find a partner and discuss your single and multi-year soil building plan. What questions do you have for each other? Brainstorm some ideas and give feedback on your respective plans.
- 7:10 PM Group Share Out
- Materials:* FLIP CHART paper
 - Explain:* We will be going over each person's soil building plan during the next meeting in detail, but did anyone/anyone's partner have something *really* interesting they were trying, or considering for costs or benefits?
- 7:25 PM Revisit The Shed and Shop Talk
- Materials:* "The Shed" FLIP CHART
 - 1.What's relevant to the soil hubs? What should be on our next agenda?
 - 2.What needs a different kind of follow-up? Shop Talk?
 Not sure?
 - Explain:* Shop Talk is for those of us who have a question and need input from the group. This can be 1-on-1 or in smaller groupings.
- 7:45 PM Next Steps & Upcoming Events
- Explain:* Next meeting we will dive deep into each farmer's soil building plan & plan for the summer. Please take the feedback you heard from your partner & anything from the group share-out and share your plan with anyone in your operation that needs to know. Come to the next meeting prepared to dig in on a specific practice, costs, benefits, implementation techniques, equipment, etc.
 - Upcoming Events:*
- 7:55 PM Group Evaluation
- Materials:* Write responses on FLIP CHART
- What worked well today?
- 2.What needs to be improved for next time?
 - 3.Reach out to Maura if you would like to share anything privately.
- 8:00 PM Adjourn

Austin Facilitator: Maura Curry
Plainview Facilitator: Maura Curry

Austin Date/Location: Feb 21, 2024 / El Mariachi Meeting Room

Plainview Date/Location: Feb 22, 2024 / Foresight Bank

Group: Soil Hub -Year 2, Meeting #2

Goals:

- 1.To enjoy being together
- 2.To build rapport
- 3.To establish stimulating & collaborative atmosphere

Objectives: Use values, monitoring methods, and vision from past meetings to create a specific soil building plan on the farm

- Break down soil building plan into individual years and manageable goals
- Provide feedback to each other & push to create attainable yet challenging goals

Working Agenda:

4:00 Warm up/icebreaker activity
4:20 Farmer presentation #1
4:40 Farmer presentation #2
5:00 Farmer presentation #3
5:20 Dinner
5:50 Group Discussion on Soil Health Plans
7:35 The Shed and Shop Talk
7:45 Next Steps & Upcoming Events
7:55 Group Evaluation
8:00 Adjourn

Materials Needed:

- Soil Health Bin -Pens, Sharpies, Masking Tape, Nametags
- Flip chart, easel, markers
- Coffee, milk, tea, napkins
- Meeting 3 Handouts

4:00 PM () Welcome / Review Agenda

- Materials:* agenda written on FLIP CHART
- Explain:* Review agenda
- Warm-up activity - If you could wave a magic wand and change something in the agricultural system, what would you change?*

- 4:20 PM) Farmer Presentation #1
- 4:40 PM () Farmer Presentation #2
- 5:00 PM () Farmer Presentation #3
- 5:20 PM () Break for dinner
- 5:50 PM () Group Discussion on Soil Health Plans
•Explain: Group discussion where each farmer has 10 minutes to present their plan for the summer and ask questions to the group and get feedback. (105 mins, ~10 mins per farmer if 10 participants)
- 7:35 PM () Revisit The Shed
•Materials: "The Shed" FLIP CHART
 - What's relevant to the soil hubs? What should be on our next agenda?
 - What needs a different kind of follow-up? Shop Talk? Not sure?
- 7:45 PM () Next Steps & Upcoming Events
•Explain: We will meet again in February of 2025. Keep in touch as much as you would like over the summer using the directory. If you are trying out anything this summer and would like to either host a field day or an optional meeting of the soil hub, reach out! We can also create a self-guided tour of fields that are under new practices if folks are interested.
•Upcoming Events:
 - o
- 7:55 PM () Group Evaluation
•Materials: Write responses on FLIP CHART
 - 1.What worked well today?
 - 2.What needs to be improved for next time?
 - 3.Reach out to Maura if you would like to share anything privately.
- 8:00 PM Adjourn

The Shed

Planter Alterations
Soil Tests
BioChar
Fencing Supplies
Cattle Breeds



"I didn't fail, if I learned a lesson from it."

-Luke Bergler

Conventional com and soybean farmer
with grass-fed beef



"The biggest problem I have is between my ears, facing my fears. When I started no-till, it was for erosion control, but now I do it for the soil biology. My main priority is to build back the biology and controlling erosion is a secondary benefit. Anytime you bring that root on top of the ground you are ruining the soil you built."

-Everett Roling,

conventional com, soybean and beef farmer

THANK YOU TO THE STAFF WHO HAVE SUPPORTED THE HUBS

PREPARED BY:

Shona Langseth
LSP Programs Co-Director

Maura Curry
LSP Soil Health Organizer

Brian DeVore
LSP Managing Editor

Maura Curry
Barb Sogn-Frank
Alex Romano

Shona Langseth
Doug Nopar
Liana Nichols

AND TO THE MEMBERS OF THE HUBS

DJ Mueller
Everett Roling
Luke Bergler
Mark & Mike
Stokes Mike Krause
Mike Steinfeldt
Pat & Kelly Kalmes
Pat Clemens
Robb Miller
Rory Beyer
Willie Erdmann

Aaron & Jeff Gillespie
Chris Gunderson
Gerald Peters
John & Ben Snyder
John Meyer
Keith Ekstrom
Lynn Steinbrink
Mark Spande
Martin Larsen
Olaf Haugen
Rod Nelson
Tom Thompson

This report is available online at
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**LAND
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PROJECT**

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