

# **SUSTAINABLE INTENSIFICATION OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE:**

## *Protecting Soil Health, Water Quality and Farm Profitability*

March 10, 2023, Seminar  
**SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES**

**John A. Yellich**, Director  
Michigan Geological Survey

John A. Yellich was appointed the Director of the Michigan Geological Survey (MGS) effective October 2, 2013. Mr. John A. Yellich obtained his Bachelors and Masters degrees in geology from Western Michigan University and for over 30 years, has been a Certified Professional Geologist (American Institute Professional Geologists) and member of the Society of Mining, Metallurgy & Exploration (SME) for 25 + years. Mr. Yellich brings more than 50 years of geologic experience in mineral exploration, mineral development, environmental consulting, business operations, stormwater, land development and OSHA safety compliance. He has worked in more than 30 States and has also conducted mineral assessments in Canada, Australia and China. Mr. Yellich is currently coordinating and conducting geologic research and surficial geologic mapping in priority areas of Michigan utilizing available Federal matching funds as the primary resource. MGS is developing fundamental geologic programs and research to support the identification and protection of Michigan's natural resources, including water and aggregate resources to justify annual funding for the MGS. These multiple programs utilize basic and new data and techniques to expedite and present unbiased validated geologic data in useable formats for all to use. As a result of these mapping and research products MGS was granted annual funding effective January 3, 2023, the first annual funding in over 30 years to meet State and Federal programs to support natural resources and infrastructure programs needing data. 2020-21 President of the Association of American State Geologists (AASG). Secretary of the Michigan Basin Geological Society 2017-present.

**Jason Rowntree**, CS Mott Professor of Sustainable Agriculture  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Michigan

Jason Rowntree is a professor of Animal Science at Michigan State University where he holds the Charles Stewart Mott Distinguished Professorship for Sustainable Agriculture. Rowntree's research focuses on identifying the metrics and management that reflect ecological improvement in grazingland and other agricultural systems. Rowntree has given presentations throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Saudi Arabia, Africa and New Zealand. Rowntree has led or been a co-investigator on \$27.75 million in funding to conduct food system research. Jason is also the co-director of the Center for Regenerative Agriculture at Michigan State University. His work in beef sustainability was featured in the movie Sacred Cow and he too has been highlighted in The Washington Post, New York Times, Forbes and many other popular media publications.

**Renee Bouldin**, Chapter and Community Builder  
Soil and Water Conservation Society, Ames, Iowa

Renee Bouldin is the chapter and community builder of the Soil and Water Conservation Society. She is responsible for chapter outreach and support. Renee also assists with event planning and execution. She started her work with SWCS as the Executive Director of the Southern New England Chapter in 2019.

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**Lauren Cooper**, Director  
Forestry Forest Carbon and Climate Program  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Michigan

Lauren Cooper directs the Michigan State University Forestry Department [Forest Carbon and Climate Program \(FCCP\)](#) and has experience in forest carbon project development, policy analysis, and landscape planning. Her current research explores at socio-ecological carbon cycling, conservation incentives, and sustainable development. Her expertise is in policy implementation, impact assessment, stakeholder engagement, knowledge transfer, and forestry. In terms of US state activities, she oversees an FCCP state level policy tracking project, has worked closely with the US Climate Alliance on Natural Climate Solutions, and currently leading a forest carbon modeling project across 7 US states to inform forest planning and management with climate benefits. Most importantly, she co-chaired the State of Michigan Council on Climate Solutions Natural and Working Lands Group, leading a diverse set of actors to [develop recommendations for the governor's office and state agencies](#) to pursue with the goal of climate neutrality by 2050. While she will maintain a role in the FCCP, in April of 2023, Lauren will transition to a [new role as the Chief Conservation Officer](#) for the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.

**Sarah Fronczak**, Environmental Management Educator  
Michigan State University Extension  
Hillsdale, Michigan

Sarah Fronczak grew up in Southern Michigan where she worked with her family on a laying hen and row crop farm. She received a MS in Ecology from Bowling Green State University. She has been working for Extension for 4 years as an Environmental Management Educator based in Hillsdale County. Previously, Sarah has worked as an engineering coordinator for a local municipality, a biology instructor, watershed coordinator, and a conservation technician. Sarah's interest are in water quality, nutrient management, and the interface of rural and urban spaces on water issues.

**Nate Rupprecht and Tom Hess**  
Tuscola Co. Farmers

**Nate Rupprecht** is 5<sup>th</sup> generation on the family farm near Vassar, his son and daughter-in-law, Drew and Beth are the 6<sup>th</sup>, and the grandchildren represent the 7<sup>th</sup> generation, already participating in the operation, caring for and feeding calves. The farm has been in the family since 1862, and many of the practices used on the farm historically are still in use today-cover crops, forages in the rotation, livestock grazing, and manure used as crop fertilizer. Nate began converting all the crop management to a no-till system many years ago and has now incorporated cover crops on almost all the rotation. He started planting green a few years ago, and with that success has started inter-seeding cover crops during the growing season to get more biomass on and into the soil. His farm has been MAEAP verified in all four applicable systems since 2013. He has served as Tuscola County President of Farm Bureau and received the Soil Conservationist of the Year award in 2018 and the Soil Health Hero Legacy award from The Nature Conservancy in 2022.

**Tom Hess** started using no-till on his rolling farm north-east of Vassar in the 1980's. He served as a director for the Tuscola Soil Conservation District at the time and was instrumental in getting the no-till drill rental program started in Tuscola County. The program has since grown to the largest and most extensive no-till drill rental program in the state. Tom continues to use many conservation practices on his farm, including grass waterways, extensive blocks of CRP for pollinator habitat and soil preservation, windbreaks, filter strips and of course no-till and cover crops on all his acres. Tom sells cover crop seed and has been using his cover crop inter-seeder on his and neighboring farms with early success. Tom's farm has been MAEAP cropping verified for over ten years.