

SUSTAINABLE INTENSIFICATION OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE: *Protecting Soil Health, Water Quality and Farm Profitability*

March 7, 2025, Michigan Chapter SWCS ANR Seminar
SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Nathan Ayers, Project Lead
West Michigan Agroforestry Partnership

“Nathan Ayers is the executive director of Chiwara Permaculture Research & Education L3C and project lead for the West Michigan Agroforestry Partnership. Since 2010, Ayers has partnered with farmers, research universities, K-12 schools, and governments to strategically integrate permaculture, agroforestry, and nature-based systems-thinking. He and his wife own a 20-acre coastal agroforestry farm in Oceana County, Michigan.”
Source: agroforestrycoalition.com

Dr. Bruno Basso, John A. Hannah Distinguished Professor
Michigan State University

“Bruno Basso, professor of earth and environmental sciences, integrates diverse disciplines such as biophysics, climatology, hydrology, genetics, agronomy and soil science to understand the spatial and temporal variabilities of crop yield and environmental outcomes in agricultural systems. With a focus on sustainable row crop production, Basso is harnessing advanced UAV technology and predictive process-based models to quantify the impact of current and future climate, soil, genetics and management on crop yield and ecosystem services. He is also a faculty member of MSU’s W.K. Kellogg Biological Station.

Basso, originally from Italy, received his Laurea in agricultural sciences from the University of Naples Federico II, Italy, and his Ph.D. in crop and soil sciences from Michigan State University. After earning his doctorate, Basso spent 12 years as a professor at the University of Basilicata, Italy, before returning to MSU in 2012.

Basso’s innovative and collaborative research has earned him several awards and key appointments, including being named a Fellow of the Soil Science Society of America and the American Society of Agronomy. He also received an MSU Innovation of the Year award in 2016, which led to the commercialization of some aspects of his research and the foundation of a start-up company called CiBO Technologies which recently received the Forbes Impact Award. Basso currently leads a multimillion-dollar project funded by the USDA-NIFA on digital agriculture and implementation of climate-water-nutrient smart technologies, and is also working with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to develop a crop yield forecasting system for the country of Tanzania. He is the chair of the Climatology and Modeling Division of the American Society of Agronomy.”
Source: msu.edu.

Aron Buechler, Owner
Buechler Farms and Total Solutions Consulting

I own and operate a 3rd generation farm in Bay County. I have worked for numerous large companies in the area in positions such as Mechanical Engineer, Project Engineer and Project Manager. I’m Chair of the Bay County Soil Conservation District, and Vice Chair for Region 6 of the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts. I’ve been a member of the Bay County Michigan Farm Bureau Board, and I serve on the Bay County Farm Bureau Policy Committee. I’m also a member of the Michigan Farm Bureau NEDRAC Committee and the American Farm Bureau Environmental Regulations and Water Issue Advisory Committee. I’ve also been involved with the Michigan Manufacturing Association, and the Michigan Chemistry Council. I enjoy spending my free time with my wife of 23 years and 3 children, ages 15, 17 and 18.

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Zachary Curtis, Ph.D.

COO Hydrosimualtics INC.

Dr. Curtis is a hydrologist, numerical modeler, and co-founder of Hydrosimualtics INC – a small-business spin-off from Michigan State University specializing in environmental software development and professional consulting. He served as the Region 2 Director of the Chapter from 2019-2024, and is currently President-Elect. He has also served as the Chairperson of the Scholarship Committee since 2020.

Jason Deshano, Owner

Deshano Farms, Bay County

Bio pending

Naim Edwards, Director

Detroit Partnership for Food, Learning, and Innovation

Michigan State University

“Naim Edwards is an advocate for food sovereignty and resilient local food systems. He studied how to manage urban gardens to support biodiversity, specifically ants and their potential for insect pest control. Edwards is the director of the Michigan State University (MSU) Detroit Partnership in Food, Learning and Innovation (DPFLI), more commonly referred to as the MSU-Detroit Urban Ag Center. Edwards serves the Wayne County community in his role with MSU Extension.

He is responsible for coordinating research, programming, and site development at the DPFLI. The site has been operating since 2019, and regular programming is set to begin Spring 2020. Currently, soil management research projects are underway investigating the effects of tillage, cover crops, and biochar on soil health. Other extension programs beyond agriculture and the food system are offered at the site as well.” *Source msu.edu*

Jane Elder, Author, Wilderness, Water and Rust

Retired Director of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters

Former National Director of Ecoregion Programs for the Sierra Club

Jane Elder served as executive director of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters for ten years and now consults on environmental and nonprofit strategy and volunteers with groups working on Great Lakes and climate issues. She previously led the Biodiversity Project and headed Sierra Club's Midwest office in Madison, Wisconsin, leading the Great Lakes program. She has written for *Sierra*, *Wisconsin People & Ideas*, and *The Living Wilderness* magazines. She holds degrees from Michigan State University (BA, communications) and University of Wisconsin (MS, land resources), and was awarded distinguished alumni status by the University of Wisconsin–Madison Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies in 2019.

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Tess Van Gorder, Conservation & Regulatory Relations Specialist
Michigan Farm Bureau

Tess Van Gorder is a Conservation and Regulatory Relations Specialist at Michigan Farm Bureau. She collaborates with governmental and non-governmental organizations on opportunities related to environmental research, stewardship, and conservation on farms. Tess provides technical expertise on topics including groundwater discharge permitting, carbon and ecosystem services credits, and water quality and supports the Michigan Manure Hauler Certification Program – a voluntary program for anyone who hauls and/or applies manure. Tess earned a BA in Environmental Policy from the University of Michigan and previously worked at ENGIE Insight, an energy and sustainability management firm out of St. Paul, Minnesota on energy procurement.

Bryan Schwab, Owner
Schwab Farms, Bay County

Bio pending.

Sarah Zeiler, President
Michigan Chapter Soil and Water Conservation Society
Environmental Management Educator
Michigan State University Extension

Sarah Zeiler grew up in Southern Michigan where she lived on a laying hen and row crop operation. She received her Bachelor of Science in Biology. Having a natural inclination toward land stewardship, she attended Bowling Green State University and received her Master of Science in Ecology. She has been working for Extension for 6 years as an Environmental Management Educator. Previously, Sarah has worked as an engineering coordinator for a local municipality, a biology instructor, a watershed coordinator, and a conservation technician. Sarah's interests are in water quality, nutrient management, and the interface of rural and urban spaces on water issues.