



Michigan Chapter of the Soil & Water Conservation Society

ANR SEMINAR

SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION:

Enhancing Soil and Water Quality

March 6, 2026, 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Agro-Liquid Conference Center, 1130 S. Dewitt Rd., St. Johns, MI

PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

Title: Attitudes, Barriers, and Opportunities Towards a More Diverse Agricultural Landscape: Updates for the Diverse Corn Belt Project

Emily DeaKyne, Manager

Diverse Corn Belt Project, Purdue University

The Midwestern Corn Belt's longstanding focus on corn and soybean production has cemented its role in the social, economic, and political landscape of the Midwest. However, this system faces growing challenges from climate change, volatile commodity prices, market shifts, and declining rural economies. Research suggests that increasing agricultural diversity could strengthen agronomic, economic, and social resilience in the region. The USDA-NIFA-funded Diverse Corn Belt (DCB) project explores these possibilities by engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders to identify viable pathways for diversification across Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. This session will share findings from DCB, emphasizing farmer perspectives on market and policy changes needed to enable a more diverse landscape across the Midwest.

Title: Partnering for Sustainability & Resiliency: Bel's Regenerative Agriculture Initiative for Apples

John Halverson, Purchasing Category Director, Bel Group

This presentation will showcase Bel's commitment to sustainability and resiliency through its regenerative agriculture initiative for apples. It will highlight the company's collaboration with North American apple growers to implement practical, science-based farming practices that improve soil health, conserve water, and enhance biodiversity within orchard systems.

Title: Farmer-Friendly Cover Crop Recommendations to Overcome Barriers to Adoption

Madelyn Celovsky, Conservation Agronomist Educator

Michigan State University Extension

When talking with farmers about cover crops, how many times have you heard, "cover crops just won't work on my farm"? Cover crop innovation and research in the last 10 years in Michigan and across the Midwest has improved our recommendations on cover crops, making them more adaptable to Michigan's diverse farming operations. Celovsky will highlight some of the cover crop innovations and decision-making tools pushing adoption forward.

Title: Michigan Irrigation Trends and Research Trends

Younsuk Dong, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist

Michigan State University

This presentation will look at how irrigated acreage in Michigan has been changing and how MSUE and farmers are working together to use water more efficiently. It will also share our ongoing work to better understand Michigan's groundwater and other water resources using advanced geophysical survey tools.



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Title: Panel – Lessons from the Field

Mark Hacker – Mark Hacker Farms, Inc., Branch County

Mark will talk about his no-till planting experience and use of cover crops.

Robert Mantey, Ed Mantey and Sons, Inc. – Tuscola County

Makenzi Whittum, Ed Mantey and Sons, Inc. – Tuscola County

Information will be presented on the use of tile drainage water management and detention ponds to supplement overhead irrigation. Information on the use of controlled drainage in partnership with overhead irrigation will be presented, since this was a sub-irrigated system converted to overhead irrigation.

Liam Zahm, Owner and Chief of Operations, Zahm's Aerial Enterprises, LLC, Sparta, MI

This presentation will discuss the capabilities, options, advantages, and limitations of aerial seeding technology. The presentation will discuss conventional aircraft in addition to unmanned aerial vehicles, and will discuss limitations of both technologies. The presentation will also talk about aerial seeding advice that Zahm's Aerial Enterprises has learned first hand and also talk about the importance of cover crops to soil health and common sense anecdotes as to why farmers should utilize cover crops.

Title: Environmental Justice is Essential: Strengthening the Science & Art of Conservation

Jalonne L. White Newsome, Associate Professor

University of Michigan School of Environment & Sustainability

Environmental Justice Specialization

CEO/Founder, Empowering A Green Environment and Economy, LLC

This presentation will explore the intersectionality of environmental justice, water issues and public health, in a historical, present and future context. It will also offer a set of principles and practices to advance environmental justice and sustainability in the broader conservation movement.

**Title: Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework (ACPF)
Application in the Western Lake Erie Basin**

Peter Vincent, Environmental Quality Specialist

Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy

Michigan's Nonpoint Source Program has incorporated the ACPF into its Agricultural Inventory Process. The ACPF capitalizes on high resolution digital elevation models and SSURGO soil data to identify candidate locations within the landscape for agricultural best management practices. The ACPF also provides a runoff risk index output, identifying fields that have a higher potential to contribute sediment and nutrients to surface waters.