



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

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Emily DeaKyne, Diverse Corn Belt project manager, Purdue University

Emily Usher-DeaKyne is a project manager and researcher dedicated to advancing agricultural diversification and climate resilience across the Midwest. As Lead Project Manager for the USDA-NIFA funded Diverse Corn Belt project at Purdue University, Emily collaborates with farmers, advisors, researchers, and policy leaders to identify opportunities and barriers to diversifying corn–soy landscapes. Her work bridges plant biology, social science, and policy development, translating stakeholder insights into actionable strategies that support resilient farming systems.

John Halverson, Purchasing Director, Bel Group

John Halverson is the Purchasing Director for fresh apples at Bel Group, makers of GoGo squeeZ applesauce snacks. With 20 years of experience in the US fruit industry, John has developed and maintained grower-centered fruit sourcing programs for two major CPG companies. In 2023, he led the launch of the Bel/GoGo squeeZ regenerative agriculture program for the company's North American fresh apple supply base. John is a strong supporter of local agriculture and believes in a commonsense approach to sustainable farming practices that is both realistic and achievable at the grower level. He is committed to building partnerships that drive innovation, empower growers, and advance sustainability within the fruit industry.

Madelyn Celovsky, MSU Extension Conservation Agronomist Educator

As a Michigan State University Extension conservation agronomist educator based out of Jackson County, Madelyn Celovsky works with farmers across Southeast Michigan. Celovsky is also a program coordinator with the Midwest Cover Crops Council, facilitating an online course for Midwest agriculture professionals.

Younsuk Dong, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist

Younsuk Dong is an Assistant Professor and Irrigation Specialist in the Department of Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering at Michigan State University. He is a three-time MSU graduate, earning his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering. Dr. Dong leads MSU's irrigation program, where his work focuses on improving irrigation water-use efficiency, enhancing crop productivity, and supporting sustainable water resource management. Dr. Dong serves as chair of the Michigan Irrigation Water Use Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices (GAAMPs) committee and as a technical advisor to the Michigan Water Use Advisory Council.

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

Bob Mantey was born and raised in Tuscola County, Michigan. He attended Michigan State University and received a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering, specializing in soil and water problems. He worked 4 years for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Water Management Division, as a Hydrologic Engineer before returning to the family seed corn farm, in Tuscola County. He was also the Tuscola County Drain Commissioner for 16 years. Bob and his brother Don raised conventional seed corn, soybeans and wheat on 400 acres of overhead irrigation. They are now retired and rent the irrigated land to a local dairy farmer.

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

Makenzi (Mantey) Whittum was also born and raised in Tuscola County. She attended Michigan State University and received a Bachelor degree in business. She started working on the farm part time when she was 12 years old. She started working on the farm full time in 2018. She helps with the finances, helps manage the part time labor and helps run and maintain the irrigation pivots, ponds and infrastructure.



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

Mark Hacker is a NoTill and 4th generation farmer on his family farm in Branch County near Athens, Michigan, also farming in Calhoun, Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties. Mark started notilling soybeans in 2001. He participates in many conservation meetings and National NoTill Conferences. His farm has been MAEAP Certified for over 10 years in Cropping System and Farmstead System.

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

Liam Zahm is a 4th generation farmer and first generation Ag Pilot. He started Zahm's Aerial Enterprises LLC in the fall of 2022 with the purchase of a 1977 Grumman Ag Cat and diversified into drones in 2024 with the purchase of a DJI Agras T40. He is an advocate for aerial application and believes it is important for people to have accurate information about the advantages and limitations of drones so they can make informed decisions. Liam Zahm also serves as the Treasurer for the Michigan Agricultural Aviation Association and has been a member of the National Agricultural Aviation Association since 2020.

Dr. 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

Dr. Jalonne L. White-Newsome is an Associate Professor in the Environmental Justice Specialization. Building on her multi-faceted, multi-sectoral and diverse areas of passion, practice, service and scholarship, Dr. White-Newsome's areas of research include: environmental and climate justice policy and practice; finding solutions to address the social, economic and public health impacts of climate change – specifically, extreme heat & flooding, and specific health impacts on the elderly and children; examining how to integrate justice, equity and corporate social responsibility; and advancing justice-centered leadership across the environmental sector. A Native Detroit, Dr. White-Newsome started her career in chemical engineering, first tackling environmental challenges and injustice in private industry, and then through a range of perspectives, including her work in the grassroots environmental justice movement, environmental philanthropy, state government and academia. Most notably, from 2022 to 2025, she was appointed to serve as the first Federal Chief Environmental Justice Officer, leading the White House's Office of Environmental Justice that was charged with advancing the Biden-Harris Administration's Environmental Justice initiatives. Dr. White-Newsome holds a Ph.D. in environmental health sciences from the University of Michigan School of Public Health, a master's degree in environmental engineering from Southern Methodist University, a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from Northwestern University, and a certificate in Diversity and Inclusion from Cornell University. Dr. White-Newsome continues to be acknowledged for her work and service to the nation and her local community. However, her greatest joy is family, particularly her husband Hughey, and two daughters, Arielle & Jeannelyn.

Pete Vincent, Environmental Quality Specialist

Pete Vincent has worked with Michigan's Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy's Nonpoint Source Program for twenty-two years. He provides technical assistance to staff and stakeholders on the development of nine-element watershed management plans and the use of geographic information systems.