

2021 Saginaw Bay Soil Health Hero Awards Selection Committee



Karolyn Karl | District Conservationist, United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service

With over 7 years of service at the USDA-NRCS, Karolyn Karl has been a stalwart conservation practitioner in the Saginaw Bay Watershed. Karolyn has worked as Soil Conservationist in Bay County and now serves as District Conservationist in Isabella County. In addition, Karolyn currently serves as Michigan’s Technical Service Provider (TSP) Coordinator and NRCS Tribal Contact. Under the 2015 Saginaw Bay RCPP program, Karolyn screened more of her customer’s fields eligibility in the Great Lakes Watershed Management System (GLWMS) than any other person— over 700 total field scenarios! Karolyn’s dedication to farmer recruitment and conservation delivery has led to the successful enrollment of 42 different farm projects for the Saginaw Bay RCPP (38% of all projects!)



Joel Leland | MAEAP Technician, Saginaw Conservation District*

Joel Leland served as Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) Technician for the Saginaw Conservation District from 2015 to 2021. MAEAP is a voluntary ag conservation program that helps farms of all sizes and types voluntarily prevent or minimize agricultural pollution risks. Working with many producers throughout these Bay, Midland and Saginaw counties the past six three years has given Joel an intimate understanding of the agriculture in the region ranging from apples to sugar beets and everything in between. Joel has a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration along with an associate degree in Agricultural Technology. He is Certified Nutrient Management Specialist, which allows him to write and certify nutrient management plans for producers throughout both counties. Prior to his work with the Saginaw Conservation District, Joel worked as an environmental consultant for eight years. He sits on the Farm Bureau Board of Directors for Shiawassee County where he lives. **Joel has since changed positions and is currently employed with The Nature Conservancy.*



Dan Moilanen | Executive Director, Michigan Association of Conservation Districts

In 2020, Dan Moilanen joined the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) as the organization’s new Executive Director, taking over the role from Lori Phalen (recently retired). Lori Phalen had served in this position for 14 years and had previously served on two Saginaw Bay Soil Health Hero Awards Selection Committee. Dan Moilanen brings a wealth of experience in small business ownership, community service, and political engagement to the position as Executive Director. He has held a variety of legislative, political, and community-focused roles, and is a graduate of Albion College. He is the current Board Chair of the Genesee County Conservation District. Moilanen is also the former Owner of Vehicle City Tacos, a popular downtown Flint business.



Glenn O'Neil, PhD | Environmental Scientist & GIS Specialist, Michigan State University Institute of Water Research

Glenn O'Neil is an Environmental Scientist and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialist for the Michigan State University (MSU) Institute of Water Research, specializing in hydrologic modeling and web development. His work focuses on bridging scientific research and on-the-ground application through the development of web-based decision support tools for water management. Past and current projects include the development of tools to assess threats to surface water quality from agricultural lands, evaluate groundwater conservation practices, and explore the potential hydrologic impacts of climate change. Glenn also serves as President of the Michigan Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society.



Kristen Poley | Michigan Research Manager, Michigan Corn Growers Association

Kristin Poley joined the Corn Marketing Program of Michigan (CMPM) in 2019 as research manager, where she is responsible for managing CMPM's grant research portfolio. She is also the coordinator for the Great Lakes Crop Summit and is involved in climate and sustainability initiatives. Kristin grew up in Sturgis, Michigan. She attended Michigan State University and graduated with a B.S in fisheries and wildlife biology and an M.S. in entomology. From there Kristin joined the applied nematology staff at MSU where she studied nematode management and soil health. She is also a certified crop advisor. Kristin now resides in St. Johns, Michigan with her husband, Nathan, on a few acres raising chickens, geese, and ducks.



Steve Tait | Owner/Operator, Tait Farms

Steve Tait is a row crop farmer from Huron County specializing in soil health farming systems. He farms ~1,000 acres near Caseville with a rotation of primarily corn-soybeans-wheat, but occasionally he'll do sugar beets or dry beans as well. His conservation practices include continuous no-till, multi-species cover crops and nutrient management. Since adopting his conservation practices eight years ago, Steve has been able to increase his overall organic matter from 1.5% up to 2.5% and has also been able to reduce his fertilizer inputs. Steve is a user of, and rep for, the farm monitoring program *AgSpectrum*. Steve rents some of farmland and owns the rest. All his fields are within six miles of the farm headquarters. The landlords that rent to Steve do so because they know he tries his best to take care of the land. Steve says he tries to treat his rented ground as his own. Tait Farms is a multi-generational farm. In addition to himself and his wife Cynthia, the Tait's also employ two other workers. His teenage children also help on the farm. In 2019, Steve, along with another area farmer, launched the Thumb-Area Farmer-led Watershed Group. This group, which has grown to nearly 40 members, continues to meet up to three times a year to discuss soil health methods, ideas, results, and challenges with other local area farmers.



Tess Van Gorder | Associate Policy & Regulatory Specialist, Michigan Farm Bureau

Tess Van Gorder is the Associate Policy & Regulatory Specialist in the Agricultural Ecology Department in the Public Policy & Commodity Division at Michigan Farm Bureau. She works on environmental issues, which includes everything from recycling to anaerobic digesters. Prior to join Farm Bureau, Tess worked as an Energy Procurement Analyst for Engie Insight. Tess received a bachelor's degree in Public Policy and specialized in Environmental Policy, minoring in Environmental Geology and Spanish.