



## The Nature Conservancy Ohio/Western Lake Erie Basin Agriculture Team

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*Photo: Ethon Pawlaczyk with Black Swamp Cattle Co,  
©Rae Holloway-Collins*

## How we work

**The Nature Conservancy is working toward a more sustainable and equitable food system for all.**

Our work centers around collaboration because multi-faceted challenges require multi-faceted solutions. We are proud to partner with farmers and growers, researchers, service providers, crop advisors, soil and water conservation districts, and other non-profits who are working to be part of the solution. Our goal is to increase the adoption of soil health, nutrient management, water management and nature-based solutions. Implemented in the right places and at the right scale, these systems will contribute to functional foodsheds and watersheds throughout Ohio and the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB).

We acknowledge that we must do more to build trust by working in partnership to remove systemic barriers facing young and first-generation farmers and black, indigenous and farmers of color.

# Regenerative Cropping Systems

## Goals:

- Farmers adopt regenerative soil health practices on 900,000 acres.
- Farm Advisors support 4R Nutrient Stewardship practices and/or participate in a 4R Certification Program on 8 million acres.
- Farmers lead change to influence regenerative soil health system transitions among their peers on 1,00,000 acres.



Above: Aaron Hopkins with Southside Family Farms, ©Rae Holloway-Collins; Farmer Shane Meyer, Henry County, ©David Ike; Farmer Advocates for Conservation, Shane Meyer and Matt Burkholder, ©David Ike

TNC supports farmers shifting to management systems that work in harmony with nature to restore and protect the soil's long-term health. Regenerative farm systems use cover crops and diverse crop rotations to cover bare soils and provide a living root in the soil for all or much of the year. They also utilize the **4Rs of nutrient stewardship** and rotational grazing to manage fertilizer and manure and reduce or eliminate tilling the soil. The benefits of these practices include increased profits through sustained or better yields with fewer inputs, enhancing the soil's ability to store water, nutrients and carbon and improving the farm's overall resilience to climate change.

## Progress:

- **Farmer Advocates for Conservation—Farmers Leading Change:** We support 20 Farmer Advocates for Conservation in the Maumee River Watershed to advance and elevate regenerative soil health and water management practices.
  - **8,489** farmers engaged with direct peer-to-peer methods influencing **882,367** acres.
  - **818,071** people reached through other contact such as meetings, articles, videos and social media.
  - **44** women participated through three Women's Learning Circles in collaboration with American Farmland Trust.
  - **85** Haney soil test kits distributed with 3 webinars and 11 peer group meetings to advance understanding of farming inputs.
  - **8** Farmer Advocates for Conservation training modules developed.
- **Soil Health Field Days:** We supported **10** soil health events reaching **960** people.
- **Sponsor of BIPOC Food and Farming Network's Black Farmers Conference,** which reached **200** attendees.
- **NEW! Farmers for Soil Health—**In cooperation with USDA Climate Smart Commodity Project, Ohio Soybean Council, Ohio Corn and Wheat, and Ohio Agribusiness, we are offering incentives and technical support to Ohio farmers to motivate cover crop awareness and adoption on **65,000** acres in Ohio.
- **NEW! Agroforestry—USDA Climate Smart Agroforestry Project—**In cooperation with partners such as Virginia Tech and Savanna Institute, we will support agroforestry plantings on **30,000** acres across **29** states, including Ohio.

### Supporting Statewide Initiatives:

We serve on the Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative and on the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Council

Current 4R Certification Program stats: **56** certified facilities servicing **2.5** million acres and **5,000** clients

Current H2Ohio Program Stats: **35%** WLEB cropland enrolled in program

# Edge-of-Field Treatment & Natural Infrastructure

TNC provides resources to drainage managers, conservation technicians, farm advisors and farmers to implement water management and edge-of-field practices. Strategically introducing edge-of-field solutions that mimic nature can help farmers better withstand climate change-related impacts of flooding and drought and improve field conditions to support food production.

## Progress:

- **Elevated Phosphorus-Public Private Partnership:** We continue collaboration with Ohio State University to understand the extent and impact of elevated phosphorus fields.
  - **5** events to educate **400** people.
  - **4** articles reaching **20,000** people.
  - **24** Certified Crop Advisors participated in training.
- **Planning for Conservation:** We continue to advance the Agriculture Conservation Planning Framework Toolbox (ACPF), a mapping tool for locating edge-of-field conservation practices. > [acpf4watersheds.org](http://acpf4watersheds.org)
  - **36** HUC12 watershed models completed in the St. Mary's watershed and Maumee River Area of Concern.
- **Cascading Waterways and Conservation Ditches:**
  - We collaborated with Ohio State University researchers to begin monitoring and documentation of two-stage and self-forming ditch designs and cascading waterways.
  - We led the implementation of one cascading waterway.
- **Building Awareness:**
  - Partnered with OSU Extension to develop a new [Conservation Drainage website](#).
  - **60** people attended **3** lunch and learn on edge-of-field practices.
  - **160** people participated in a watershed education event we hosted with Miami University and Preble County SWCD.
  - **270** people reached with edge-of-field presentation at the Understanding Algal Blooms: State of the Science Conference.

## Goals:

- Edge-of-field and water management practices treat **50%** of the agriculture acres in Ohio and the WLEB.
- Restore **1%** marginal row crop agriculture land to natural infrastructure.



Above: Jeff Duling, Edge of Field, ©David Ike; Allen County Cascading Waterway, ©Williams Aerial; Oaks & Sprouts, ©Rae Holloway-Collins;

Left: Houts Ditch in Mercer County, ©Mercer SWCD



## Communications, Outreach & Partnerships

Increasing sustainability and diversity of farm operations, reducing nutrient loss, and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions in the agricultural sector requires collective action.

By raising funds, providing administrative support on public and private grants, leveraging our access and relationships with policy and decision-makers and amplifying the work of others through marketing and communications, we support partners to help stimulate systemic change throughout the food system.



- We serve on **16** multi-stakeholder partner boards and committees that enable us to amplify shared conservation messaging.
- We co-host, sponsor and train partners to host outreach events such as lunch and learns, field days and workshops. During 2023, the Ohio TNC Ag team held or participated in **113** events, directly engaging **5,154** people.
- We reached an additional **107,000** people with indirect outreach methods such as e-newsletters, videos, articles and social media.
- Website: [bit.ly/sustainable-ag-ohio](https://bit.ly/sustainable-ag-ohio)



Join our **Facebook Group** Ohio TNC Agriculture



Sign up to receive our monthly e-newsletter for project updates and events: [bit.ly/TNCmonthlynewsletter](https://bit.ly/TNCmonthlynewsletter)



Find us on **YouTube**

Partnerships are key to everyone's success. Thank you to the many individuals, corporations, foundations, and NGOs who have contributed to the impacts highlighted in this report.

### Connect With Us:

Would you like to collaborate? Each of these strategies requires diverse partnerships and perspectives. We'd love to speak with you to learn how we might partner if you are interested in advancing soil health, water management, or natural infrastructure.

*Above: Field Day with Bret Margraf, ©David Ike. Left: Rid All, ©Rae Holloway-Collins; Field Day with Allison Grimm ©David Ike*

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