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 foodsheps 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.
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.

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 1,000,000 acres.

Regenerative Cropping Systems

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.

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.

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.

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
  - 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.
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

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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