

# Milwaukee River Watershed Conservation Partnership




# NEWS LETTER

## 2019 YEAR IN REVIEW

Initiated in Fall of 2016, the Milwaukee River Watershed Conservation Partnership (MRWCP) began a five-year effort to build the capacity of watershed stakeholders within the Milwaukee River watershed to promote and support healthy soils, clean water, and smart business. Led by a steering committee, partners are utilizing \$1.8 million of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding made available through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs to offset the costs of conservation implementation in the watershed. As of 2019, the end of project year three, the Partnership has collectively contributed \$5 million in value toward the five-year project goals. The partners estimate approximately 2,000 pounds of phosphorus have been better managed on the land. Twenty-four organizations have pledged support to the partnership and contribute time and resources toward the achievement of program goals:

## Healthy Soils | Clean Water | Smart Business



-  Promote conservation practices along priority streams and rivers to assist the watershed community to improve soil health, water quality, and reduce flood risk.
-  Permanently protect productive agricultural land to support and sustain the regional economy.
-  Evaluate performance of conservation practices on soil health and water quality; measure impact through demonstrations, outreach, and public engagement.



Mike Paulus, Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families member, discusses the importance of cover crops to improve soil health, protect the soil, and reduce runoff.



A soil pit was dug for the Cedar Creek Community Connection to allow Jamie Patton to use her "underground" knowledge to educate attendees about the profile. We took a look at roots, soil horizons, and found worm channels.

**THE MAKING ALLIES FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES** collaborative aims to protect prime and unique farmland and place permanent agricultural easements on hydric agricultural land through the District's Working Soils® Program. *Making Allies* was established to address 1) affordable farmland ownership, 2) proximity to urban markets, and 3) land-rent microeconomics and succession planning concerns among the Hmong farming community that serves Milwaukee's north-side urban farmers' markets. Fondy Food Center, a Milwaukee farmers' market group, and their cooperating farmers received grant assistance through the Mott Foundation and are working with the Land Trust Alliance and The Conservation Fund.



# PRODUCER-LED GROUPS

Producer-led watershed groups were initiated by farmers and local County Land and Water Management Departments (LWMD) to engage farmers and address conservation opportunities that promote soil health and improve water quality. The producer-led groups are made possible with administrative and fiscal management assistance from the LWMDs they work with, through grant support from the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), and the Fund for Lake Michigan (FFLM). The Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families (CFF) and Cedar Creek Farmers (CCF) local incentive funding is available to farmers exploring conservation measures. Fundraising efforts are coordinated by MRWCP partners, which include the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District.

## Cedar Creek Farmers - Improving Land for Cleaner Waters



This producer-led group was organized in 2017. CCF was awarded a DATCP grant for 2018 with matching funds from FFLM. Both CCF and neighboring CFF coordinate outreach efforts to encourage farmer attendance at educational events and to experiment with conservation on their farms. To build support for watershed conservation and the producer-group, Washington County hired an additional staff member supported by National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, FFLM, and the District.



Cedar Creek Farmer Paul Puestow received his Conservation Farm Award from Ross Bishop. No-Till, Cover Crops and Nutrient Management are practiced on his farm and in his fields.



Cedar Creek Farmers Ben Marks and Brian Peters talk with a resident about healthy soils and their biological "Soil Your Undies" experiment done in different locations around the watershed.

## Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families



Mike Patin, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist provides a "seeing is believing" demonstration of how practices such as no-till farming and cover crops benefit soil health and improve water infiltration at the Soil Health Field Day hosted by the Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families and Ozaukee County Demonstration Farm Network. He shows them what runoff and soil can do to our rivers, lakes and streams.

This producer-led group came together in 2016 by area farmers. Ozaukee County LWMD staff provided assistance in grant application to DATCP Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant. FFLM provided matching grant support to achieve greater outreach, establishment of conservation demonstration sites, pilot practice installation, innovative equipment rental and demonstration, event organization, and peer-to-peer information sharing. Eight founding members of CFF Producer group received annual training in 2017, 2018 and 2019 through DATCP's Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants Annual Workshop.



Grassed waterways were reconstructed on Lee Kissinger's farm in the Town of Polk.



After a 4" rain, it is evident why these waterways are so critical for preventing soil loss and keeping our water clean.



# IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

## AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PRACTICES INSTALLED

### NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program supported 774 acres of conservation practices:

- 1 Nutrient Management Plan written on 435 acres
- 318 acres of Cover Crop planted
- 13.9 acres of Forage and Biomass Planting
- 3.8 acres Filter Strip installed
- 0.9 acres of Contour Buffer Strips planted
- 2.1 acres Critical Area Planting



Oat crop being harvested from one of several cover crop demonstration plots established by the Clean Farm Families.



Interseeding a cover crop into this no-till corn field will result in an established cover crop following corn harvest. The Ozaukee County Interseeder purchased with dollars from the Fund For Lake Michigan and Ozaukee County resulted in approximately 150 acres of cover crops interseeded into standing corn in the RCPP Project area.

### 2,570 acres of practices were installed through producer council programs or County-specific programs

- 1,395 acres of No-Till Planting
- 1,131 acres of Cover Crops
- 254 acres Nutrient Management Planning
- 1,265 acres of Conservation Farming
- 3,284 feet of Grassed Waterway installed
- 58 farmers have helped save soil

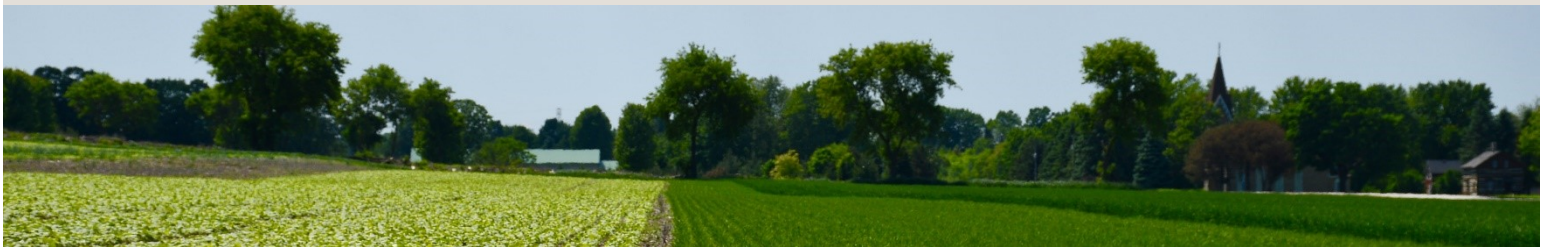
## AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

By end of 2020, partners anticipate over 637 acres will be in permanent agricultural easement protection. Additional funding from NRCS awarded in 2019 may alleviate partner budgets to allow for outreach and conversations with families for additional acreage protection in 2021.

- 2 easements closed in December 2018 on 140 acres
- 1 easement closed in March 2019 on 55 acres
- 3 easements closed on 118 acres
- An additional 4 easements on 324 acres were approved by NRCS for closing in 2020
- A total of 10 Conservation Plans across these 10 easements were completed with the easement contracts



Joseph Mantoan at Suave Terre Farm.



## MEASUREMENT OF RESULTS

Two-year baseline surface water quality monitoring has been completed for 2018 and 2019 at 25 sites by The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District's contractor Great Lakes Environmental Center. The final report covering 2018 and 2019 data will be available in March 2020. Infiltration meters are also being used in some watershed areas to assess soil moisture conditions. Farmers are independently sampling soils to assess soil health as part of their nutrient management. The Haney Soil Test methodology is being used for 2019-2020 at the 35-acre CFF demo plot site to assess soil health measures on plots with cover crops and no-till planting versus conventional tillage with no cover crops over 5 years. Infiltration rings are being used to compare water infiltration rates on the various plots.



# EVENTS AND OUTREACH

## In 2019 partners collectively conducted the following events:

- Jan. 24, 2019, Nutrient Management 590 and Conservation Update Producer Meeting: ~ 80 attendees
- Feb. 8, 2019, Soil Health Workshop with Steve Groff “The Cover Crop Guy”: ~ 90 attendees
- Mar. 2019, Demonstration Farm/Clean Farm Families Winter Workshop Meeting: ~ 80 attendees
- Aug. 22, Ozaukee Washington Land Trust Tim Kaul Conservation Leadership Award at Annual Meeting
- Sept. 7, 2019, Cedar Creek Farmers & the Village of Jackson—Cedar Creek Community Connection Urban & Rural event: ~ 200 attendees
- Sept. 10, 2019, Fall Demo Farm tour: ~ 85 attendees
- Clean Farm Families Producer-Led Watershed Group meetings; bi-monthly
- Demo Farm Pop-Up days: ~ 40 attendees
- Cedar Creek Watershed Farmers Producer-Led Watershed Group meetings; bi-monthly
- Dec. 7, Cedar Lakes Conservation Foundation Annual Meeting



Cedar Creek Farmer Ross Bishop talks with families about his no-till operation, how he helps prevent soil loss, and shows them what runoff and soil can do to our rivers, lakes and streams.



A mix of radish, sunflowers, field peas, barley, oats and buckwheat were planted to show an example of a cover crop mix farmers use after wheat harvest. (Egner family).

## CONTACT US

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THANK YOU

## The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District staff extend their appreciation to contributing partners who have made the collective watershed outcomes possible:

- Cedar Creek Farmers
- Cedar Lakes Conservation Foundation, Inc.
- Country Visions Cooperative
- Fondy Food Market
- Fund for Lake Michigan
- Helena Agri-Enterprises, LLC
- Land Trust Alliance
- Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District
- Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families
- Ozaukee County Land & Water Management
- Ozaukee Washington Land Trust
- Sand County Foundation
- Pheasants Forever
- The Conservation Fund
- University of Wisconsin Extension Cooperative
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Washington County Land and Water Conservation Division
- Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

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### Credits

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