



# THE WORKING SOILS<sup>®</sup> PROGRAM

## WHO WE ARE

The Working Soils<sup>®</sup> Program aims to protect productive farmland that also contains wetlands and vegetated corridors along or near creeks, streams, and rivers that feed into the Milwaukee River. Working Soils<sup>®</sup> is a collaborative effort among landowners, agricultural producers, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD), Ozaukee and Washington County land and water conservation departments, and local land trusts. NRCS is a USDA agency with local staff that provide America's farmers with financial and technical assistance to voluntarily put conservation practices on the ground, not only helping the environment but agricultural operations, too.

The Working Soils<sup>®</sup> Program focuses on the conservation of prime farmland in the Milwaukee River Watershed in Ozaukee and Washington Counties. The Working Soils<sup>®</sup> Program staff work with willing landowners to purchase permanent agricultural easements on eligible properties within the region. The easements maintain the farmer's ownership of the land and the right to farm the land while preserving the natural resources on a site. Participating landowners work collaboratively with

NRCS to develop a recommended conservation plan for the farm and to identify and fund the various land management practices to improve soil health and water retention.

The Working Soils<sup>®</sup> Program is dedicated to helping landowners plan for the future protection of their property as well as invest in the protection and growth of their farming operation. We would be honored to talk with you about the vision you have for your land and to discuss in more detail the land protection strategies outlined in this brochure and how these strategies may apply to your particular situation.

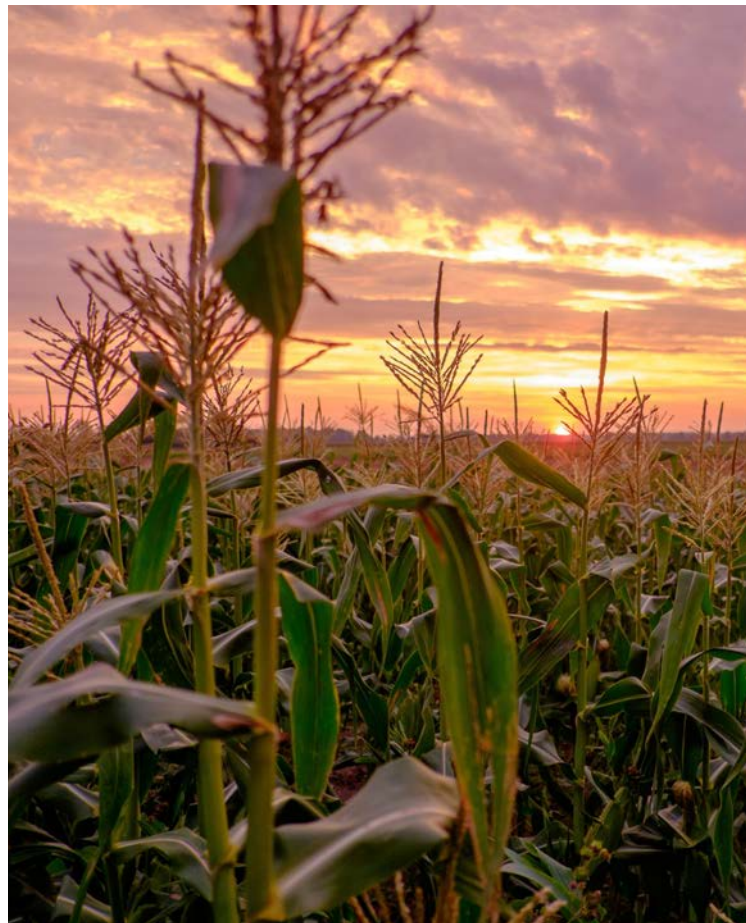




## HOW AGRICULTURAL EASEMENTS WORK

When you own land, you also “own” many rights associated with it, such as the right to harvest timber, build structures, grow crops, subdivide the land, and so on (subject to local zoning and other restrictions). A property owner who enters into an agricultural easement with the Working Soils® Program permanently restricts some of these activities in order to protect the agricultural conservation values of the land in exchange for a payment representing the value of those restrictions. The land continues to be privately owned, subject to any easement restrictions and the easements can be written to apply to all or a portion of a property.

The easement agreements are reviewed by an independent third-party appraiser who determines the value of the agriculture easement. That independent valuation serves as the basis for the Working Soils® Program’s purchase price offer to the landowner.



# Working Soils® Program Partner Spotlights

In 2019–2020, The Working Soils® Program purchased agricultural easements from seven area farmers. Two partners of the Working Soils® Program, Brian Huiras and David Lettow, shared their experience.



## BRIAN HUIRAS

**Acres: 92**

**Town of Fredonia, Ozaukee County**

*After meeting with the Working Soils® team and NRCS staff, it seemed like a great fit.*

*I would tell somebody who is considering doing this that it is a great idea. What I like the most is that at the end of the day it is still my land privately owned by me and my family. With this easement it is still your land and feels like it is your land.*

*The land I own and farm will never be developed, it will be in farmland indefinitely. In my lifetime, I have seen many agricultural landscapes get turned into housing, subdivisions, etc. I want the landscape I live on and farm to look the same thirty years from now as it does today.*

*I feel I like my land/farm is a part of something more important than just growing crops. The economic incentive associated with the conservation easement helped make it possible for me to follow my dream in owning my own farmland.*

*We chose the Working Soils® team because they were clearly passionate about land conservation and they were very professional and easy to work with. The conservation easement (practices/restrictions) that I have to follow on my land do not limit the production potential of my farm. Our goal is to produce a top yielding crop and to produce quality feed for our animals. We have a limited amount of topsoil on our farm simply*



*due to the physical geography of the farmland our ancestors settled on. We acknowledge that limitation and we don't want to lose any more soil to erosion. The conservation guidelines that were set up by MMSD and NRCS help me to conserve the soil and protect the landscape, but they do not limit the yield potential of my farm one bit.*



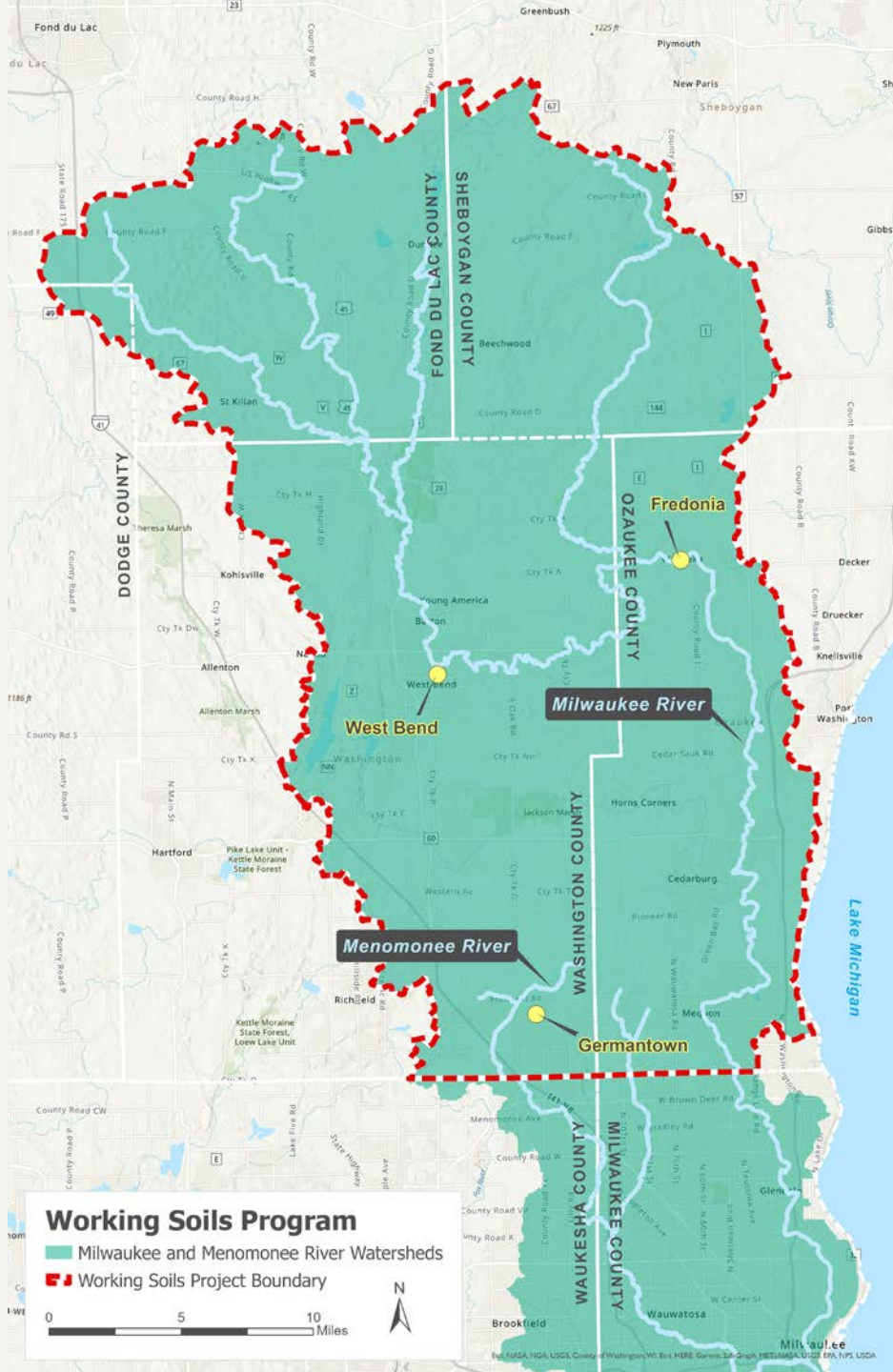
## DAVID LETTOW

**Acres: 90**

**Town of Kewaskum, Washington County**

*It's an opportunity to preserve the land and create financial security. The Working Soils® team can help field all of your questions and ease any hesitation around the confusion of land easements.*

*The financial contribution provided by the easement sale has allowed us to invest in more agricultural land without straining our current financial situation. This opportunity has added financial security to our dairy in times of agricultural uncertainty.*



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THE  
**CONSERVATION FUND**

In Partnership with:



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At The Conservation Fund, we make conservation work for America. By creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense, we are redefining conservation to demonstrate its essential role in our future prosperity. Top-ranked for efficiency and effectiveness, we have worked in all 50 states since 1985 to protect nearly 9 million acres of land.