# 2024 Muddy Bottom Farmers Producer-Led Group



The mission of the Muddy Bottom Farmers (MBF) Producer-Led Watershed Group is to bring farmers together to learn from each other and build community. The Muddy Bottom Farmers vision is to create a community between the public and the farmers focusing on the importance of water quality while still maintaining sustainable and profitable agricultural operations.

## MUDDY BOTTOM FARMERS EVENTS



2024
Winter
Workshop



JOIN US FOR LUNCH & A DISCUSSION

- · SOIL STRUCTURE
- · EQUIPMENT FOR SOIL HEALTH
- · CHEMICALS FOR TERMINATION
- · WEED CONTROL
- SOIL HEALTH SUCCESS STORY RSVP: 920-232-1957

Muddy Bottom Farmers Producer-Led Group

Creating a community between the public and the producers focusing on the importance of water quality while still maintaining sustainable and profitable agricultural operations.

The Muddy Bottom Farmers (MBF) started their year strong with their first Annual Winter Workshop in March. This meeting began with an introduction to the MBF group and had five guest speakers. The farmers learned about Nutrient Stratification, Crop Insurance, and Crop Marketing, followed up by a discussion about Resistant Weeds and Equipment. The meeting brought together 23 local farmers to share their experiences and learn from one another while enjoying a locally catered lunch.

## 2024 Winter Workshop (con't)





#### **WPS Farm Show**

In late March, the Muddy Bottom Farmers partnered with Winnebago County Land & Water Conservation Department (LWCD) to host a booth at the Wisconsin Public Service (WPS) Farm Show. The WPS Farm Show is an annual event held at the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Grounds. This show is an opportunity for agricultural businesses and the community to see the latest in farm equipment, services, and technology from around 400 exhibitors throughout the U.S. and Canada. MBF advertised their group and promoted upcoming events.



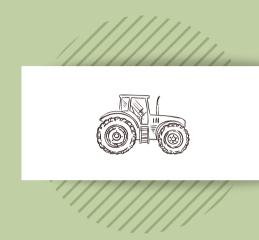
#### Grilled Cheese on the Farm

On June 1st, to celebrate June Dairy Month, a local farm partnered with the Winnebago County Farm Bureau (WCFB) to host a "Grilled Cheese on the Farm" event. This public event provides an opportunity for attendees to see how the farm operates while participating in fun activities for the children and enjoying a savory grilled cheese sandwich cooked by the WCFB. This year the MBF hosted their own booth, where kids could make their own soil profile to learn the different types of material in soil, and the adults could see an agricultural drone available for use by the MBFs in their cover crop and no-till operations.



#### **Cook Out & No-Till Conversation**





On June 10th the group hosted a "Cookout & No-Till Conversation" for the farming community. Seventeen of the group's members came together to talk about successes and challenges they faced this planting season. They brainstormed ideas and solutions for next planting season.





## Rainfall Simulator Winnebago County Fair

August brought the Winnebago County
Fair where the MBF partnered with Levi
Schultz from the Natural Resource
Conservation Service (NRCS) to display
the NRCS Rainfall Simulator. This
Rainfall Simulator demonstrates the
importance of conservation practices by
comparing different soil health systems
under heavy rainfall events. The Rainfall
Simulator was located near the fair
animal barns. Demonstrations were run
several times and allowed time for
audience questions and answers.





August 7th was the Farmer Social Field Day. The day started with Jim Luedtke introducing the MBF group and explaining what they hope to accomplish. Monica Schauer (UW Researcher) and Lindsey Rushford (UW-Ext Coordinator) talked about the DATCP Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program (NOPP), which 3 of the MBF are a part of. The Soil Pit Demonstration came next and was past knee deep with mud and water by the time Jamie Patton (NRCS) got to present. They placed several pallets in the water for Jamie to stand on, however she was still soaked. The Soil Pit explained why this group named themselves the "Muddy Bottom Farmers". Derrick Rasper and Levi Schultz demonstrated the NRCS Rainfall Simulator using local soil types to show the amount of runoff in different tillage systems. About 38 people attended the

event and conservation discussion.

## Farmer Social (con't)





The Soil Pit explained why this group named themselves the "Muddy Bottom Farmers".

## **PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL**



**T-shirts** 



**Banner** 



**Farm Signs** 



**Equipment & Window Stickers** 

## OTHER EVENTS ATTENDED

#### SOIL HEALTH FIELD DAY

August 27, 2024

For this field day, participants gathered at Shane Kallas's field to learn about cover crops and no-till farming. Shane, a participant in the Winnebago County "Soil Health Challenge" Program, has been using these practices for six years to boost soil health and improve water quality. He shared his experiences, noting better water infiltration and smoother planting compared to conventional fields.

Jamie Patton used a soil pit to share insights on improved soil structure from Shane's practices. Levi Schultz demonstrated the effects of rainfall on different farming systems using the Rainfall Simulator. Monica Schauer updated

attendees on the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Programs (NOPP), and UFW Demo Farmer, Jamie Albright is also part of the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program. Participants learned about research conducted in Jamie's NOPP plot and its impact on soil health. Jamie was on-sight for questions and discussion. Matt Brugger represented the Upper Fox-Wolf Demonstration Farm Network, highlighting our conservation efforts.

This field day was co-hosted with the Muddy Bottom Farmers, Winnebago County Land 8 Water Conservation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension. In all, 29 people attended.





**DATCP Producer-Led Meeting** 





# Wisconsin Water and Soil Health Conference

Jim Luedtke was on the Farmer Panel for Insights into On-Farm Nitrogen Research





Where: Mastricola's on Broadway Berlin, WI

When: February 15, 2024

Time: 10am-4pm

#### **Registration Fee**

\$10 Farmer and Landowner \$50 Conservation Professional and Community Member

#### Register Online By 02/07/2024

soilhealthinprogress.org

FOX-WOLF

#### Amber Radatz and John Koepke

John is a local farmer specializing in soil health, and Amber with Discovery Farms

Topic: Maximizing Water Quality with Soil Health

- Farmer Led Panel
  Lightning Discussions
  Managing soil health in a challenging weather year
  Success with cover crops in vegetable and grain operations
  Cost share opportunities
  The Farm Progress Report
  Soil Health Testing
  Equipment and demos for soil health systems



#### Farmer Networking Cocktail Hour Lunch Provided at CONTACT TIM AT TIM@FWWA.ORG TO LEARN MORE

or visit our website www.soilhealthinprogress,org



## 2024 **Farmer** Roundtable

Jim Luedtke was on the planning committee. Several MBF were in attendance.

## **IN THE NEWS**

### **Omro Herald August 8, 2024**

OMRO HERALD THURSDAY, AUGUST 8, 2024 7









FAR LEFT: GROOMING HORSE GYPSY VANNER is the Town of Omro's Kennedy Black, LEFT CENTER: MELISSA HELMS SHARES a magic moment with her Flemish Glant, Madeye. RIGHT CENTER: WINNEBAGO COUNTY Fairest of the Fair, Lexi Novak beams for visitors, livestock competitors, and exhibitors. FAR RIGHT: SPRING YEARLING HOLSTEIN, Regret, is happy for hay from owner Brooke Zillges, who has been showing for 12 years.

#### Animals, agriculture, and environmentalism at Winnebago County Fair

By Tony Daley

The Winnebago County Fair's theme for 2024 of "Strollin' the Fair without a Care" blended different features for its run at the Sunnyview Expo Center July

31-August 4.

This year there was plenty see, from the usual wide array of animals to a special environmental demonstration focused on weath-

Water Conservation Department's Emily Dufeck, a watershed spe-cialist, explained to the Owne Hereld while at the Fair on Thurs-

day, August 1. Dufeck coordinated the presenta-tion with Natural Resources Conservation Service's Levi Schultz. Near the Expo Center head-

Near the Expo Center nead-quartering Winnebago County
Fair offices and administration
for the event's run, mechanisms
were used to simulate rainfall and
subsequent effects on different soil
types, to help educate about nutrient holding, saturation, and runoff.
This was one of the ways that This was one of the ways that

the Winnebago County Fair brings information to visitors. "We have both education and

entertainment," said Jody Bezio, Winnebago County Fair Asso-ciation board member and Fair Treasurer, on Thursday, August 1. For visitors to the Pair, both the

indoor non-animal and barnyard animal displays and shows are ways to connect community members to many kinds of subject matter.

er patterns and outcomes.
"We're showing how different minfalls affect crops and growth," the Winnebago County Land & cated Bezio.

caned Bezio.

As noted by Bezio, with the Winnebago County Fair having grown 30 percent in its last five years of operation, one of the directions in which the Fair is going is to further accommodate more

kinds of interests, which will draw even more visitors, said Bezio. Traditionally at the Fair, farm-

vitality of the area ag-constitue

Part of that constituency is young people, many members of area 4-H clubs.

These young people continue the grand tradition of showing animals and perpetuating farming culture and heritage.

A Winchester 4-H member,

Nora Good of Larsen, said, "I really like coming to the Fair."

Brooke Zillges, who showed her spring yearling black and white Holstein, Regret, said, "I've been showing at the Fair for 12 years."

Committed kids like these and other community members are part of the reason the Winnebago Coun-ty Fair has shown its growth and continues to grow, indicated Bezio.

"So many people contribute to the success of the Winnebago County Fair," Bezio said.

At the Fair for its "Strollin' the Fair without a Care" 2024 theme, with a smile and greetings, was Winnebago County Fairest of the Fair Lexi Novak. Novak said, "There is much to

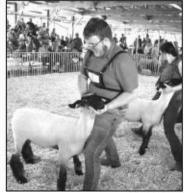
enjoy at the Fair. There are things for farmers and for those not in farming. You can learn a lot and also have fun. There is just so much to do for every



TOOTSIE IS A PRIZE among many in the poultry barn. BE-LOW: A HOG OWNED BY Aden Davis of the Lakeshore 4-H Club lounges during a hot day at the Fair











ABOVE LEFT: MECHANIZED DISPLAYS SUCH as this rainfall simulation, coordinated in part by Natural Resources Conservation Service's Levi Schultz (left), entertain and educate visitors to the Winnebago County Fair. ABOVE RIGHT: LAMBS STRUT THEIR stuff at a judging. AT ABOVE RIGHT: GILBERT THE PIGEON takes a break with Nora Good of Larsen, Winchester 4-H member. AT RIGHT: ALL EYES FOR THE Winnebago County Fair is Mini Rex rabbit, Jet, beloved bunny of Lilyan Noffke.

#### Fox Wolf Watershed Alliance 2024 Winter Basin Buzz Article

## SOIL HEALTH IS TAKING OFF IN THE RAT RIVER AND FARMERS ARE WORKING TOGETHER

By: Emily Dufeck, Winnebago County LWCD edufeck@winnebagocountywi.gov

"How did we get to the Rat River" is the question that came up as a circle of producers and a few agency staff stood together on the outer edge of a field that had recently been planted to a multispecies cover crop mix. Although the area has only been a focus for a couple of years, a lot has been accomplished and the success only continues to grow!



The Town of Dale-Rat River Watershed is the highest phosphorus-loading HUC 12 watershed in Winnebago County. In 2021, the Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program (GLSNRP) grant was received by Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance (Fox-Wolf), in partnership with the Winnebago County Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD). This grant was dedicated to work towards soil health adoption in the Rat River Watershed. The GLSNRP grant allowed the LWCD to partner with three producers in order to transition a total of 272 acres into cover crops and no-till for a three-year period. Shortly after, the LWCD received an additional grant for the implementation of soil health practices. This grant came from Fox-Wolf funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Winnebago County LWCD decided to use these funds towards an additional two producers in the Rat River Watershed to implement cover crops and no-till on a total of 100 acres for a two-year period.

As part of the GLSNRP grant, the LWCD agreed to do multiple forms of outreach to spread the concept of soil health. Our first approach included looking through aerial maps for fields with possible erosion concerns. Once a concern was located, outreach to the landowners was initiated by sending them a map of the site, along with a letter suggesting soil health practices that could potentially benefit that particular field. After being contacted by a few upset producers who did not appreciate "being told how to farm," I realized we might need to find a new method of outreach that would communicate our intent more clearly. Thankfully one of our initial letters led to meeting with a particular farmer, where ideas were shared, and a success story was just beginning.

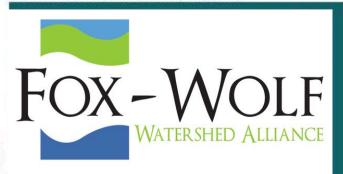
The farmer shared that he had been hearing a lot about the "Producer-Led Groups" that have been popping up all around the state. He talked about traveling to attend other group meetings, but that he had a passion for starting one in his area. As he spoke about his ideas and what he was learning, I began to think about a new outreach approach for the LWCD. How impactful could it be to support producers like this farmer who want to work with other producers to learn about soil health practices from each other?

Two months later in August, the LWCD collaborated with the farmer to assist in hosting his first field day to bring together local farmers. At this field day, soil health as well as the benefits and struggles that come along with it were discussed. Before the event ended, the idea of starting a Producer-Led Group was brought up. This field day sparked a lot of interest in forming a group. As the summer led into fall, a few more field days were held and it seemed as though there was a persistent core group of farmers who always showed up, including four of the five producers who are part of the GLSNRP and NFWF grants.



To improve water quality and soil structure through the implementation of soil health principles and conservation practices, along with providing outreach and education to farmers and the general public.

Their first official Producer-Led Group meeting was held in February of 2023, and they named themselves the "Muddy Bottom Farmers." The group's mission is to improve water quality and soil structure through the implementation of soil health principles and conservation practices, along with providing outreach and education to farmers and the general public. Although the majority of the members are currently producers in the Rat River Watershed, this group expands throughout the Lake Poygan HUC 10 watershed. The LWCD's outreach efforts in the Rat River Watershed now focus on supporting the Muddy Bottom Farmers through partnering in identifying conservation projects, encouraging innovative projects, and assisting in the education of rural and non-rural neighbors.



#### Fox Wolf Watershed Alliance 2024 Summer Basin Buzz Article

## Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program

Emily Dufek and Sheila Smith, Winnebago County Land and Water



Winnebago County Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD) was approached by four local farms for assistance writing grants for the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program (NOPP). The NOPP is a 2-year grant through the Department of Ag, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) that provides funding to farmers to encourage them to develop innovative approaches to optimizing the application of commercial nitrogen. Each field is a standalone research study that uses statistical approaches to address the questions the farm may have. The goal of this program is to reduce nitrates in surface and groundwater and improve the farmer's bottom line.

The farms received both of the grants they applied for! One grant was awarded to the Albright Brothers NRCS Demonstration Farm, and the other grant was awarded to Muddy Bottom Farmers Producer-Led Group which included Jim Luedtke, Brian Krenke, and Dan Rieckmann.

#### Combining Commercial Nitrogen and Steer Manure

The Albright Brothers, a third-generation farm, has had a long-time family "discussion" which brought them to the NOPP - "How much nitrogen do we need to use with different rates of our steer manure?" They started using different conservative rates of nitrogen with mixed results. Then a 32% applicator was accidentally set at a much higher rate than usual, which resulted in a noticeable yield increase. But what about the rate of return? The Albright Brothers are planning four rates of nitrogen and two rates of manure and hope the NOPP will answer the family "discussion" and assist other farmers with the same question.



#### Commercial Mitrogen Rates

Agricultural producer Brian Krenke, a third-generation farmer, and Dan Rieckmann, a fourth-generation farmer are also participating. Brian and Dan are interested in the results of the nitrate tests to find out how much nitrate is in the soil prior to planting and at the end of the season. Each has set up their plots to look at the optimum application rate of nitrogen of a corn crop. Brian will be comparing four rates of nitrogen 0, 25, 45, and 70 gal/ac. Dan will be applying nitrogen at rates of 0, 30, 60, and 90 gal/ac. At the conclusion of this grant, both producers are hoping to find the rate of application that maintains yield, while not losing nitrogen to the atmosphere or through leaching.

#### Cover Crops and Nitrogen Availability

Agricultural producer Jim Luedtke is a fourth-generation farmer and is the president of the Muddy Bottom Farmers Producer-Led Group. He is also a NRCS Demonstration Farm. Jim became interested in the NOPP grant when hearing about it through several ag meetings and talking about it with a friend who participated in the program last year. Jim has been no-tilling for several years and has been trying various cover crop mixes. Jim has some knowledge of the effects cover crops have on nitrogen but would like to test his understanding. As part of this grant, Jim has set up a plot where he will apply four nitrogen rates on strips with cover crops and strips without cover crops. The focus of his project is to learn the point at which the cost of nitrogen transcends its benefits and the effects of cover crops on nitrogen availability.

As part of the research, multiple tests will be run on each of the plots. Regular soil tests will be run on all fields. In order to track the nitrogen in the soil, pre-plant, pre-sidedress, and post-nitrate samples will be taken at one and two-foot depths. Tissue samples will be taken on the corn at tassel to confirm macro and micronutrients, and at harvest, stalk nitrate and grain nitrogen assessment samples will be taken. The Albrights will be manure sampling as they spread, and Jim Luedtke will do a biomass test of the cover crops in the spring before planting.

It has been a busy spring trying to get the plots planted and soil and nitrate samples taken in a timely fashion. We look forward to the results we get from the testing and hope this leads to a better understanding of the nitrogen being applied and where it is being utilized for these farms.

# Upper Fox-Wolf Demonstration Farms Network 2024 Year End Report

#### MUDDY BOTTOM FARMERS GROUP EVENTS

#### Farmer Cookout + No-Till Conversation June 10, 2024

This year, we partnered with the Muddy Bottom Farmers group, of which Jim Luedtke (one of our new demo farmers) is a part of. The Muddy Bottom Farmers is the first Producer-Led Watershed Group in Winnebago County. This group consists of 30 local producers who are dedicated to improving soil health and water quality while maintaining sustainable and profitable farming operations. They aim to foster a strong community connection between the public and producers.

Their first event this year was a farmer cookout. It focused on bringing area farmers together for fellowship, food, and conversations around no-till practices in the area. About 17 people attended.





#### Farmer Social + Field Day August 7, 2024

At the second Muddy Bottom Farmer's field day, attendees enjoyed an engaging afternoon filled with soil insights, nitrogen optimization, and farmer fellowship. Jamie Patton provided an in-depth exploration of the fascinating world of soil at the Soil Pit. Experts Lindsay Rushford and Monica Schauer led a session on nitrogen optimization, sharing valuable knowledge and techniques. Derrick Raspor from the demo farm network demonstrated the rainfall simulator, offering participants a hands-on experience to view how soil management practices affect water infiltration and runoff. The event was designed to be both informative and interactive, allowing farmers to gain practical knowledge and network with peers.

This event was co-hosted by the producer-led Muddy Bottom Farmers group, Winnebago County, and Upper Fox-Wolf Demo farms. About 38 people attended this event.









## We Are Green Bay

**Life on the Farm with Jeremy Hansen** 





https://www.wearegreenbay.com/midwest-farm/life-on-the-farm-nitrogen-optimization-pilot-program/

### **Winnebago County**

## Land & Water Conservation Department 2023 Annual Report



2023 Annual Report

### Muddy Bottom Farmers, Inspiring Success

The mission of the Muddy Bottom Farmers Producer-Led Group is to improve water quality and soil structure through the implementation of soil health principles and conservation practices, along with providing outreach and education to farmers and the general public. In 2023 they applied for and received their first Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant funded by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

The Town of Dale in the Rat River Watershed is the highest phosphorus and sediment loading HUC 12 watershed in Winnebago County. In 2021, the Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program (GLSNRP) grant was received by Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance (FWWA), in partnership with the Winnebago County LWCD. This grant was dedicated to soil health adoption in the Rat River Watershed.

As part of the GLSNRP grant, the LWCD agreed to do multiple forms of outreach to spread the concept of soil health. This outreach led to a meeting with a farmer where ideas were shared and a success story was just beginning. The farmer spoke about the "Producer-Led Groups" that have been popping up all around the state. He talked about traveling to attend other group meetings, but that he had a passion for starting one in his area.

Two months later in August, the LWCD collaborated with this farmer to assist in hosting his first field day to bring together local farmers. At this field day soil health, as well as the benefits and struggles that come along with it, were discussed. Before the event ended, the idea of starting a Producer-Led Group was presented. This field day sparked a lot of interest in forming a group. As the summer turned to fall, a few more field days were held and it seemed as though there was a persistent core group of farmers who always showed up.

This core group of farmers along with a few others, held their first official Producer-Led Group meeting in February of 2023 and they call themselves the "Muddy Bottom Farmers". The group's mission is to improve water quality and soil structure through the implementation of soil health principles and conservation practices, along with providing outreach and education to farmers and the general public.

Although the majority of the members are currently producers in the Rat River Watershed, this group expands throughout the Lake Poygan HUC 10 watershed.

The LWCD's outreach efforts in the Rat River Watershed now focus on supporting the Muddy Bottom Farmers through partnering in identifying conservation projects, encouraging innovative projects, and assisting in the education of rural and nonrural neighbors. The Muddy Bottom Farmers applied for their first Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant funded by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection in September of 2023.

The group was awarded their full request for the 2024 grant period. These funds will be allocated to support the group's mission by hosting a winter workshop, multiple field days, and promoting the Muddy Bottom Farmers and Producer-Led Groups.



Lake Poygan HUC 10 Watershed







## **Thank You Partners!**











Thank you to Winchester School & Historical Society for the use of your space for meetings & events.





## **CONTACT INFORMATION**



#### **President**

Jim Luedtke (920) 422-4957

www.facebook.com/MuddyBottomFarmers



#### **Collaborator**

Winnebago County LWCD (920) 232-1950

https://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/lwcd www.facebook.com/WinnebagoLWCD