

FARMING FOR THE FUTURE



March 12, 2025

Van Buren Conference Center, Lawrence, MI
Hosted by the Van Buren Conservation District

- 8:30 AM **Registration & Refreshments**
- 9:00 AM **Welcome & District Programs Update**
- 9:35 AM **Creating Optimism and Profit on the Farm**
Jeremy Sweeten, Understanding Ag
- 10:25 AM **Break**
- 10:40 AM **Breakout Sessions**
- Grain Track: Managing Slugs in No-till and Cover Crop Systems (John Tooker)
 - Livestock Track: Grass-Finishing Livestock (Jeremy Sweeten)
 - Perennial Track: Converting Unproductive Ground into Pollinator Habitat (Brook Wilke)
- 11:40 AM **Lunch**
- 12:50 PM **Breakout Sessions**
- Grain Track: Managing Low Profitability Zones on the Farm (Jason Stegink)
 - Livestock Track: Diversified Markets & Sheep Rotational Grazing (Kalli and Matt Hensley)
 - Perennial Track: Regenerative Ag for Specialty Crops (Jeremy Sweeten)
- 1:50 PM **Break**
- 2:00 PM **Breakout Sessions**
- Grain Track: Farmer Perspective: Profitable Conservation (Marc Hasenick)
 - Livestock: Starting from Scratch: A Grass-Fed Journey (Bob and Rob Egly)
 - Perennial Track: Managing Invasives on your Farm and Forest (Abbie Bristol)



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SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Keynote Address: Creating Optimism and Profit on the Farm (Jeremy Sweeten, Understanding Ag)

Session Description: A change towards regenerative agriculture can be daunting to think about and implement. The purpose of this presentation is to provide producers with a deeper understanding of how soil health principles can work on any operation, how soil health will benefit their operation, and how to build a more resilient operation.

Bio: Jeremy Sweeten is a first generation farmer from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He has seen first hand how regenerative farming practices can improve soils, livestock and profitability. He is passionate about helping farmers solve problems through his practical experience and education. Jeremy also has dual Bachelor of Science degrees in agricultural systems management and agronomy as well as a Master of Science degree from Purdue University in agronomy. Before becoming a full time farmer, Jeremy worked in Indiana for CISCO Seed as a forage agronomist.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: GRAIN TRACK

Managing Slugs in No-till and Cover Crop Systems (John Tooker, Penn State University)

Session description: Slugs pests can occasionally challenge crops in no-till systems. Because they are not insects, preventative insecticide-based management programs are ineffective against slugs; therefore, a different approach is needed. We will discuss the life cycle of slugs, why they can be such a challenge, and management practices that can be effective against slugs. We will also discuss the research that we have conducted at Penn State that has demonstrated that cover crops and natural enemies can provide effective control slugs but only when combined with integrated pest management (IPM).

Bio: John Tooker is a Professor and Extension Specialist in the Department of Entomology at The Pennsylvania State University. His research group studies relationships among plants, invertebrate herbivores, and natural enemies to understand factors that regulate populations of herbivorous insects and slugs. The

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long-term goal of his research is to exploit ecological interactions for sustainable insect pest management.

Managing Low Profitability Zones on the Farm (Jason Stegink, Wide Angle Agriculture)

Session description: In a season of tightening margins, do we know what variables are impacting profitability? Where can we save and what items remain in our management program? Jason will review low profitability zones and the management considerations they require by utilizing on farm data to help preserve profit margin and ROI opportunities.

Bio: Jason Stegink, CCA, owner of Wide Angle Agriculture. I am an independent crop consulting business located in SouthWest Michigan. I service livestock, row crop and vegetable operations with precision ag services, crop planning, scouting and monitoring programs. My wife and I have four children (one + triplets!). I grew up on a small beef/hay operation that raises Hereford beef cows and pumpkins.

Farmer Perspective: Profitable Conservation (Marc Hasenick, Hasenick Farms)

Session description: Using on farm data to work smarter, not harder. Marc will cover how the systematic adoption of conservation practices has simplified large scale crop production and increased profitability. No-till, cover cropping, rotation diversification, removing acreage from production, native plantings, grazing cattle and other tactics are all up for discussion, so bring questions!

Bio: Marc farms with his father and brother in Springport MI. The Hasenick farm is a 100% no-till operation, growing 5 crops and has either a crop or cover year-round on all 4800 acres. Never satisfied with the status quo, and a willingness to get creative, has yielded the profitable adoption of many alternative practices. With the ultimate goal of leaving a more durable system for the next generation, the decision making paradigm is guided by a blend of ROI and conservation.



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SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: LIVESTOCK TRACK

Grass-Finishing Livestock (Jeremy Sweeten, Understanding Ag)

Session description: Grass finishing livestock can be a challenging art. A better understanding of soils aggregation, adaptive grazing, and brix content can help produce a better, profitable grass finished product.

Bio: Jeremy Sweeten is a first generation farmer from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He has seen first hand how regenerative farming practices can improve soils, livestock and profitability. He is passionate about helping farmers solve problems through his practical experience and education. Jeremy also has dual Bachelor of Science degrees in agricultural systems management and agronomy as well as a Master of Science degree from Purdue University in agronomy. Before becoming a full time farmer, Jeremy worked in Indiana for CISCO Seed as a forage agronomist.

Diversified Markets & Sheep Rotational Grazing (Kalli & Matt Hensley, Hoddinott Acres Farm)

Session Description: Matt and Kalli Hensley are the owners of Hoddinott Acres which specializes in sheep and goats for both meat and wool production. Largely using rotational pasture management, Hoddinott Acres raises both Suffolks for club lamb sales and meat, and their prized Lincoln sheep for their high end wool and hides. During this session Matt and Kalli will talk about their farm, rotational grazing, and the work they have been doing with the National Sheep Improvement Program, and their unique avenues for wool sales in a consistently down market.

Bio: Located in Adrian, Michigan, Hoddinott Acres is a family-run farm owned by Matt and Kalli Hensley, along with their two daughters. The Hensley family specializes in raising registered Suffolk and Lincoln sheep, focusing on both club lamb and wool sales. With a dedication to the integrity of the breed, the Hensleys have actively participated in the National Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP), investing significant time and effort into enhancing the United States based Lincoln sheep breed through genetics sourced from the United Kingdom. The Hensleys have also strategically developed a unique market to sell their premium sheep fiber and ensure that their

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flock grazes on rotated pastures throughout the year. Rotational grazing at their farm not only promotes sustainable farming practices but also supports animal health and welfare. Matt's extensive experience as a sheep shearer, Ag Education Instructor, complemented by his farm's participation in events such as the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, allows him to bring valuable insights to fellow sheep enthusiasts and aspiring farmers. Committed to fostering community engagement and education, Hoddinott acres aims to leverage their knowledge and experiences to assist members across the state.

Starting from Scratch: A Grass-Fed Journey (Bob and Rob Egly)

Bob and Rob Egly of Egly Land and Cattle Company share their inspiring journey of turning a dream into a thriving, multi-generational farm. Located in Paw Paw, Michigan, Egly Grass Fed Beef is a "birth to beef" operation, raising Red Devon cattle their entire lives using humane animal management and rotational grazing—long before these practices became pillars of regenerative agriculture. In this session, Bob and Rob will recount the challenges and triumphs they faced while building their family business. They will discuss their commitment to natural, environmentally friendly farming methods, including raising cattle without pesticides, hormones, or chemical fertilizers. Certified by the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP), their farm stands as a model of sustainable agriculture. With Bob now preparing to pass the reins to the next generation, they will also share the steps they've taken to ensure a smooth transition and a secure future for the farm.

Bio: Bob and his son, Rob, run Egly Grass Fed Beef, a cornerstone of Egly Land and Cattle Company in Paw Paw, Michigan. This multi-generational, "birth to beef" farm has been raising Red Devon cattle their entire lives, practicing rotational grazing and humane animal management long before these methods were labeled as regenerative agriculture.

Bob's dream of raising cattle began in 2001 and has since grown to involve Rob, his wife Chris, and their children. At Egly Land and Cattle, they prioritize natural, environmentally friendly farming practices. Their cattle are raised without pesticides, hormones, or chemical fertilizers, ensuring high-quality, all-natural beef. Certified by



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the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) for both land and livestock, Egly Grass Fed Beef is a testament to sustainable farming and family tradition.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS: PERENNIAL TRACK

Converting Unproductive Ground into Pollinator Habitat (Brook Wilke, KBS LTAR)

Session description: Most farms have areas that are not profitable or are inconvenient to manage. Whether it is a low spot on a fruit farm that freezes often, a powerline corridor, or a field border that has wildlife damage or large trees that compete with crops, consider adding a prairie planting to the farm. Adding native prairie in these spots provides pollinator habitat, reduces erosion and nutrient losses, increases soil health, and adds aesthetic value to the farm. But, just like managing crops, establishing and maintaining prairie plantings takes patience and specific techniques to be successful. Learn from Dr. Wilke how to identify areas on the farm, establish and maintain native prairie, and access different funding sources to help make your farm more biologically diverse.

Bio: Dr. Brook Wilke earned a Ph.D. in Agroecology at the Kellogg Biological Station in 2010 and has served KBS in the role of Farm Manager (2013–2020) and Associate Director of the KBS Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) Program (Present). Brook oversees agronomy and science activities for KBS LTAR and conducts research on agronomic innovations that enhance efficiency and sustainability of cropping systems. In addition to growing up on a family scale crop and livestock farm, Dr. Wilke has extensive experience in agricultural systems ranging from organic vegetables and local markets to pasture-based livestock and cropping systems, including educational activities related to these systems.

Regenerative Ag for Specialty Crops (Jeremy Sweeten, Understanding Ag)

Session description: Specialty crops don't always follow the path of conventional agriculture systems. Perennial crops, fast rotations, and unique harvesting methods all provide challenges to implementing regenerative agriculture. This presentation will help provide a shift of paradigms towards implementing regenerative ag.



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Bio: Jeremy Sweeten is a first generation farmer from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He has seen first hand how regenerative farming practices can improve soils, livestock and profitability. He is passionate about helping farmers solve problems through his practical experience and education. Jeremy also has dual Bachelor of Science degrees in agricultural systems management and agronomy as well as a Master of Science degree from Purdue University in agronomy. Before becoming a full time farmer, Jeremy worked in Indiana for CISCO Seed as a forage agronomist.

Managing Invasives on Your Farm and Forest (Abbie Bristol, VBCD)

Session description: Invasive plants and insects love farms. Whether it's honeysuckle in windbreaks, Phragmites along irrigation lines, or tree of heaven looming near crops as a beacon to the invasive spotted lanternfly, invasive species show up somewhere on the farm. In this talk, we'll discuss the most common invasive species around farms and options for effectively managing them. We'll go over some of the common mistakes when managing invasive species and how to avoid making those mistakes. By the end of this talk, attendees will better understand the invasive species that may be around their farm, what makes invasive species so persistent, and how to counter that persistence. Attendees will also leave with resources on managing invasive species either on their own or with a contractor.

Bio: Abbie Bristol is the Strike Team Coordinator for the Van Buren Conservation District invasive species team. She coordinates a small team to detect and manage invasive insects and plants throughout Van Buren, Berrien, and Cass counties. Abbie graduated from Western Michigan University where she studied Biology and has been managing invasive species for the last six years.



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