

Wisconsin 19-20 Plan of Work

Final report for NCWI19-001

Project Type: PDP State Program

Funds awarded in 2019: \$130,000.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2021

Grant Recipient: University of Wisconsin

Region: North Central

State: Wisconsin

State Coordinator:

[Diane Mayerfeld](#)

University of Wisconsin Madison

Project Information

Abstract:

In Wisconsin Extension, NRCS, and Land Conservation Departments are the primary agencies providing technical assistance to farmers and the principal audiences targeted by Wisconsin's SARE professional development program. In addition, staff from the technical college system, NGOs, state agencies, and others involved in agricultural outreach are often included in SARE outreach efforts.

Recent SARE professional development in Wisconsin has focused on soil health and management, as well as perennial agriculture, and supported work in organic agriculture and local food systems. We will continue to support professional development in these areas and will add an initiative on working with beginning farmers.

Extension in Wisconsin has undergone a major reorganization in response to deep budget cuts. Budget cuts have also affected sustainable programming in other state agencies. These budget cuts make the resources offered by SARE even more valuable to agricultural professionals, but they also make it more difficult for educators to explore new programming and have encouraged many experienced educators with sustainable agriculture expertise to leave state employment. In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic also greatly affected programming.

Project Objectives:

Initiative 1: Cover Crops and Soil Health

Outcomes: (Short term) Increased knowledge among agricultural educators about specifics of cover crops management and managing for soil health. Increased knowledge about the role of soil health and cover crops in maintaining water quality and regulating infiltration and base flow.

(Intermediate) Continued programming by 15 or more educators on soil health and cover crops, with more in-depth information on practices.

(Long term) Increased use of cover crops in the state.

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Activities:

- Solicit mini-grants focused on cover crops and/or soil health.
- Follow up on past cover crops and soil health mini-grants.
- Provide support to the cover crops/soil health working group in UW Extension.
- Deliver a workshop on the relationship between soil health, perennial crops, and water quality and quantity, and how sustainable agriculture can improve resiliency in extreme weather events.
- Deliver a soil health workshop for high school and/or technical college instructors at the WAAE conference, with activities that can be incorporated into existing classes.

Evaluation

- The number of agriculture educators participating in cover crop and healthy soils professional development and responses to end-of-program evaluation
- The number of educators programming in cover crops and soil health, including conducting research or demonstration projects, and where available, the number of farmers reached through this programming
- If the CTIC cover crop surveys continue, the amount of cover crop use in Wisconsin over time

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Initiative 2: Agroforestry and Perennial Agriculture

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Outcomes: (Short term) At least 30 Wisconsin agricultural educators will increase their understanding of various approaches to maintaining perennial living cover on agricultural land, including managed grazing and agroforestry.

(Intermediate) 20 educators will provide outreach on agroforestry, pollinator habitat, grazing, or other perennial agriculture practices to 60 farmers and educators through field days, workshops, technical assistance, and other methods.

(Long term) Farmers will establish windbreaks, riparian buffers, alleycrops, silvopasture, and prairie "STRIPS", maintain and increase management of permanent pasture, and incorporate beneficial insect habitat and other perennial crops into the agricultural landscape.

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Activities:

- Continue to build a network of agriculture and forestry professionals and farmers interested in agroforestry.
- Work on rebuilding grazing support system in collaboration with NRCS, Land Conservation, UW, NGOs, and state agencies.
- Provide training in organic grazing management in coordination with the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems and Organic Valley.

- Organize “intro to grazing” training for Extension and Land Conservation educators.
- Work with NRCS, Extension, and Land Conservation to provide training and outreach on grazing dairy heifers.
- Deliver workshop on the relationship between soil health, perennial crops, and water quality and quantity, and how sustainable agriculture can improve resiliency in extreme weather events.
- Provide SARE scholarships for perennial agriculture events, including Grazing Conference scholarships to high school and tech college instructors.

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Evaluation:

- The number of agriculture educators and foresters participating in events focused on agroforestry, perennial pollinator habitat, grazing, and other professional development related to perennial agriculture
- The number of farmers and landowners reached by grazing, agroforestry, and other perennial agriculture outreach efforts

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Initiative 3: Beginning Farmers

In order to participate in the NCR-SARE regional initiative for 2019-20, one of our initiative focus areas will be on beginning farmers and ranchers.

Outcomes: (Short term) Seven Wisconsin agricultural educators will increase their understanding of strategies for supporting sustainability of beginning farmers.

(Intermediate) 5 educators will provide outreach to at least 40 beginning farmers and educators through field days, workshops, technical assistance, publications, and other methods.

Activities:

- Send 5 to 7 educators to a regional training event organized by NCR-SARE on beginning farmers and ranchers in 2019. Educators who travel to this regional training will be asked to provide educational programming to other educators and/or beginning farmers and ranchers
- Develop and compile fact sheets, videos, and curriculum on basics of sustainable poultry and pig production
- Update compilation of beginning farmer resources.
- Reach out to LCO, Menominee, Oneida, IAC, Bad River, Red Cliff, Ho Chunk to ask what resources, if any, they would like from WI SARE for beginning farmer support.

Initiative 4: Extending Sustainable Agriculture Knowledge and Practice

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Background: SARE needs to continue to support professional development and educator action for a wide range of sustainable agriculture practices and approaches that SARE helped initiate in Wisconsin, including organic agriculture, climate and energy, and local foods. In addition, the state SARE professional development program needs to be able to respond to emerging opportunities in sustainable agriculture.

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Outcomes: (Short-term) 30 educators will increase their knowledge of sustainable practices and approaches such as local food systems, organic agriculture, composting, working with underserved farmers, and responding to climate change.

(Intermediate) 10 educators will provide information and programming on grazing, organic agriculture, local food systems and other sustainable agriculture topics to 100 farmers and others involved in agriculture.

(Long-term) More farmers will adopt sustainable practices from grazing to managing for diversity, and farmers will improve their management of sustainable approaches.

Activities:

- Offer SARE scholarships to conferences, workshops, and other professional development opportunities in sustainable agriculture.
- Administer SARE mini-grant program.
- Assist agricultural educators with organizing, providing, and funding professional development in sustainable agriculture.

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Evaluation:

- Number of SARE scholarship recipients and types of outreach resulting from SARE scholarships. Scholarship recipients will be sent a questionnaire 6 to 12 months after the event asking them how the scholarship influenced their work.
- Number of educators involved in mini-grants, and types of outreach resulting from mini-grants. Mini-grant recipients will submit reports on their projects.
- Number of agricultural educators participating in events co-sponsored by SARE. Evaluation of workshops will be developed in cooperation with planning partners and will include the number of people attending as well as how they intend to apply the information gained.

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Education

Educational approach:

Wisconsin relies on a mix of strategies in its sustainable agriculture professional development. At the core of our efforts is support for self-directed professional development through scholarships and mini-grants. We also offer occasional workshops for educators on topics within our core initiatives. Finally, we provide one-on-one technical support to educators seeking to expand their sustainable agriculture programming.

Education & Outreach Initiatives

Cover Crops and Soil Health

Objective:

Increase the ability of agricultural educators to provide support to farmers seeking to improve soil health while maintaining economic viability.

Description:

Provide support to educators to increase their capacity to support use of cover crops and other practices to support soil health through mini-grants, scholarships for professional development, and workshops.

Outcomes and impacts:

(Short term) 24 high school and technical college instructors increased knowledge about soil health and cover crops at a soil health session at their annual in-service. 3 agricultural educators increased their knowledge of cover crops through scholarships to the WI cover crops conference.

(Intermediate) 16 of 17 instructors who filled out end of workshop evaluations said they would be able to apply what they learned in their classes (the 17th said maybe). 3 educators who had received SARE scholarships hosted cover crops field days that drew 39 agricultural educators, 11 crop advisors, and 90 farmers. WI Extension educators held at least 7 additional cover crops events in 2019, as well as the state cover crops conference that attracted about 400 attendees (about 300 farmers and 100 educators). The WI cover crops conference in February 2020 had a similar number and distribution of attendees.

In 2020 two Extension educators who received SARE mini-grants on cover crops held a webinar for educators on factors affecting feed quality of winter rye and triticale and coordinated a regional SARE Partnership Grant application to continue working with farmers and educators in Wisconsin on using continuous living cover to address forage challenges for dairy. One of those educators has taken a position outside Extension, but there is now a working group of four educators committed to continuing that research.

In 2020 two other Extension educators involved with SARE through mini-grants and through the state advisory group helped initiate a farmer-scientist collaboration to collect better information on cover crop utilization and challenges in different parts of Wisconsin. [CCROP Citizen Science Report For Farmers 2020 FINAL](#) summarizes the results from the first year of this collaboration.

WI SARE awarded one soil health mini-grant in 2020 to hold a soil health field workshop for educators. Due to the pandemic and the desire to have the event be in-person, the field day has been postponed to 2021, however, the site has been identified, soil health testing has been initiated, and there is already interest in Extension to collaborate on additional similar field days.

(Medium to Long Term) UW-Madison Extension's Agriculture Institute now has an official working group focused on soil health, with 20 to 25 members. This group has coordinated several professional development webinars on soil health topics, and assuming we don't get reorganized again in the next few years I think the group will integrate soil health concepts throughout our crops and soils programming.

2020 COVID impact: The soil health workshop planned for the Wisconsin Association of Agriculture Educators conference was canceled along with the in-person conference. We anticipate offering the workshop in summer 2021 either in-person or via webinar.

Agroforestry and Perennial Agriculture

Objective:

Increase the ability of agricultural educators to help farmers introduce and manage perennial cropping systems, including agroforestry practices.

Description:

Help educators increase their capacity to support perennial cropping systems through mini-grants, scholarships for professional development, and workshops.

Outcomes and impacts:

(Short term) In 2019 32 Wisconsin agricultural educators participated in the initial meeting of the revived "G-team", a network of Wisconsin's grazing educators. This initial meeting was supported by a SARE mini-grant and resulted in the decision to continue networking for grazing educators. A follow-up meeting in November (supported by a regional PDP grant) had more than 40 attendees.

4 Wisconsin educators received SARE scholarships to participate in grazing professional development. SARE supported two workshops in 2019 for educators on organic pasture management that drew a total of 48 attendees.

In 2019 silvopasture outreach at conferences and through a webinar reached an estimated 30 to 40 educators. In 2020 a silvopasture panel at the GrassWorks Conference in January reached 45 people (estimated 40 farmers and 5 educators), and 3 silvopasture webinars each had 45 to 55 viewers. Published an [article on silvopasture information needs](#) of farmers and educators in the Association for Temperate Agroforestry fall 2020 newsletter.

In 2020 as an outcome from a SARE mini-grant awarded to the Savanna Institute, NRCS partnered with the Savanna Institute and Wisconsin Land and Water to offer three agroforestry webinars for educators, which were viewed by 20 to 36 participants.

In 2020 one educator received a scholarship to attend the Savanna Institute Perennial Gathering.

Developed a factsheet on managing heat stress in grazing systems [Dealing-with-Hot-Weather-in-Grazing-Systems](#).

(Intermediate) Scholarship recipients used what they learned to answer client

questions, assist with farm plans, and enhance their regular programming. Grazing programming by scholarship recipients reached 30 farmers.

Extension educators who attended the G-Team meetings held at least 8 grazing events in 2019, with attendance ranging from 27 to 85 farmers. In 2020 the G-Team hosted several webinars, which drew up to 70 attendees.

(Long term) As a result of a mini-grant awarded to the Savanna Institute, WI NRCS is working with the Savanna Institute and SARE on revising EQIP standards to be more supportive of agroforestry practices.

Quote from scholarship recipient: "The information I gleaned from the Grassworks conference this year, and the relationships I made, will be beneficial for years to come. COVID threw off our plans this year, but I intend to conduct casual and educational field days for farmers with Rachel Bouressa, our grazing specialist, when we are able to feel more comfortable meeting in person in groups. The speakers I heard at the conference really gave a diverse range of things to consider when working with farmers to promote grazing. I feel more prepared to converse with farmers on the topic of grazing."

Beginning Farmers

Objective:

Increase the ability of agricultural educators to help beginning farmers succeed.

Description:

Increase educator ability to help beginning farmers with business planning, production questions, access to resources, and social and environmental sustainability. Assemble a team to attend regional training and work on beginning farmer support at least through 2020.

Outcomes and impacts:

(Short term) Nine Wisconsin agricultural educators and one graduate student attended regional Beginning Farmer Training.

In December 2020 we funded a mini-grant to create videos based on portions of the Center for Integrated Farming Systems School for Beginning Market Growers and School for Beginning Cut Flower Growers. We will report on those outcomes in 2021.

(Intermediate) In 2019 work began on an updated Extension website of resources for beginning farmers. A list serve of 30 educators interested in working with beginning farmers has been established, and has resulted in potential collaboration on a Beginning Farmer or Rancher Development grant proposal.

In 2020 an Extension web page focused on resources for beginning and transitioning farmers was launched at <https://farms.extension.wisc.edu/article-topic/beginning-farm-enterprise-development/>

Extension began an informal partnership with American Farmland Trust and other groups and individuals to look at barriers and pathways to land access for BIPOC farmers in Wisconsin.

Extending Sustainable Agriculture Knowledge and Practice

Objective:

Agricultural educators will acquire the knowledge they need to help farmers transition to organic, respond to climate change, increase food sovereignty, and adopt other sustainable practices.

Description:

SARE continues to support professional development and educator action for a wide range of sustainable agriculture practices and approaches that SARE helped initiate in Wisconsin, including organic agriculture, climate and energy, and local foods. In addition, the state SARE professional development program needs to be able to respond to emerging opportunities in sustainable agriculture. Offer PD scholarships and mini-grants and support for sustainable agriculture programming.

Outcomes and impacts:

(Short-term) In 2019 5 educators received scholarships to attend the Organic Farming Conference, the Indigenous Farming Conference, and the Carolina Meats Conference (focused on local markets for sustainably raised meat). Presentations and work groups on agriculture and climate change reached 5 to 10 educators. One mini-grant on industrial hemp production resulted in increased knowledge for 11 Extension educators and 1 technical college educator. More outreach to educators is planned for February.

In 2020 8 educators and 7 students received scholarships to attend the Organic Farming Conference.

In 2020 Wisconsin SARE awarded mini-grants for professional development in agricultural plastics recycling, printing a resource booklet to help educators address farm stress, developing a program for working with youth on gardening and food sovereignty, and connecting farmers and food coops. COVID delayed and hindered implementation of all the mini-grants. In February 2021 a webinar on strategies for agricultural plastics recycling reached 25 educators. The resource booklet on farm stress was printed and distributed early in 2021. The Garden in a Box Program partnered with 5 local educators and recruited 25 youth (including 13 Tribal youth) for summer 2020. Educators could not visit youth projects in person, and only 12 youth (including 3 Tribal youth) completed the program. The program has been extended through 2021. The workshop on connecting farmers to coops will take place virtually in March 2021.

(Intermediate) Scholarship recipients used what they learned to answer client questions, make new contacts, assist with farm plans, enhance their regular programming, and develop new programming, reaching 17 farmers, 6 educators, and 5 crop advisors in 2019 and 85 farmers, 68 educators, and 20 crop advisors in 2020. The hemp mini-grant resulted in outreach to 195 farmers in 2019.

Educational & Outreach Activities

20 Consultations

1 Curricula, factsheets or educational tools

9 Minigrants

2 Published press articles, newsletters

20 Travel Scholarships

8 Webinars / talks / presentations

4 Workshop field days

PARTICIPATION SUMMARY:

32 Extension

20 NRCS

25 Nonprofit

10 Agency

200 Farmers/ranchers

47 Others

Learning Outcomes

80 Participants gained or increased knowledge, skills and/or attitudes about sustainable agriculture topics, practices, strategies, approaches

50 Ag professionals intend to use knowledge, attitudes, skills and/or awareness learned

Project Outcomes

1 Grant received that built upon this project

70 Agricultural service provider participants who used knowledge and skills learned through this project (or incorporated project materials) in their educational activities, services, information products and/or tools for farmers

Additional Outcomes:

See the 3rd comment from a scholarship recipient below.

Success stories:

Sample comments from educators who received scholarships:

2019. Attending this conference was very useful and relevant to my work. I was able to apply what I learned in the rotational grazing and organic grain sessions when working directly with producers. These topics were and will continue to be, particularly relevant for public agency folks who are working with farmers given the down farm economy, as many farmers search for alternative crops and markets. I also attended some policy sessions, which were useful to help put into context some of the details of the Farm Bill programs that I work with very frequently.

2019. This Scholarship was the main reason I was able to attend the state cover crops conference. In the end, this conference was perhaps the most valued. I learned new concepts, met all kinds of practitioners, and innovators and was able to connect with like-minded colleagues and producers. This conference was a big motivator and catalyst to holding two educational events back in my counties related to cover crops and soil health. It also gave me more confidence in this up and coming practice of helping farmers look at new ways of doing things.

2020. My focus in attending this conference was to be able to further decolonize and decenter whiteness in my curriculum and focus on food justice issues. I have been able to take the knowledge gained at MOSES and incorporate it into my curriculum that I deliver to approximately 100 youth each year. In addition, I am writing a curriculum for the ag ed classroom that incorporates these principles which will be disseminated to ag ed instructors across the country.

Face of SARE

Face of SARE:

Outreach to educators: In 2019 I had one-on-one phone conversations or meetings with 8 newly hired Extension educators about SARE. In addition I gave a brief presentation about SARE grants and resources at one of our monthly web meetings, which reached 45 educators. In 2020 I provided brief announcements about SARE grants and resources at several Extension on-line meetings, which reached an estimated 90 educators.

Outreach to farmers: 2019 - Two workshops on grants for farmers (30 farmers and 5 educators), a brief summary of SARE grants and resources at the Perennial Farm Gathering (200 farmers and 50 educators), an [article](#) about Farmer-Rancher grants in *Wisconsin Farmer*. 2020 - Three 1-hour webinars on applying for grants with attendance of 23 to 30 people at each webinar. Presented a short description of SARE grants and resources at the virtual Perennial Farm Gathering (about 150 people).

Brought the SARE display to the WI Grazing Conference, WI Cover Crops Conference, WI Aquaculture Conference, World Dairy Expo, and Perennial Gathering in 2019 (attendance at these conferences ranged from 200 to over 1000). Brought the SARE display to the Wisconsin Grazing Conference and Wisconsin Cover Crops Conference in 2020 (attendance around 400 for both conferences).

The estimate below of farmers reached does not include those who may have seen the display or read the article.

300 Farmers received information about SARE grant programs and information resources

80 Ag professionals received information about SARE grant programs and information resources

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or SARE.



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