

# Forward Farmer

The official newsletter of Yahara Pride Farms

Volume 5, Issue 2



Farmers, family and friends gathered at Henry Farms in Dane for the second of two Twilight meetings held around the watershed in August. Photo by YPF

## YPF hosts first 'Twilight' meetings

By YPF communications

Yahara Pride Farms hosted two Twilight meetings this past August: The first in the southern part of the Yahara watershed at Badgerland Grain Farm in Evansville, and the second in the northern part of the watershed at Henry Farms in Dane. Both Badgerland Grain Farm and Henry Farms have completed the YPF certification program. This program helps farmers document how their farm protects soil and water quality and identifies high-risk situations and practices that need to be modified.

The Twilight meetings were organized to encourage new farmer participation in both the northern and southern areas of the watershed, to update farmers currently involved on new projects and to have candid discussion about conservation practices.

Current projects were discussed such as the composting pilot program, manure equipment rental and the upcoming paid

for performance program.

“We chose to host evening twilight meetings because we wanted to create a place where farmers could to get together and casually share ideas about conservation practices,” said Bob Uphoff, vice chairman for Yahara Pride Farms.

Between the two meetings, more than 100 farmers and allied partners engaged in discussion about conservation practices and opportunities to grow participation in Yahara Pride Farms' cost-share and certification programs.

A key takeaway from the meeting was that results from conservation practices will vary from farm to farm. It takes a bit of trial and error to find out what practices suit each farming system. Farmers coming together to share experience and expertise provides the opportunity for growth within each farmer's conservation plans and

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## UPCOMING EVENTS:

Feb. 20  
Cover Crop conference  
Holiday Inn, Stevens Point

March 7  
Watershed conference  
Comfort Inn & Suites, DeForest

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## 2017 By the numbers

**35**  
FARMS CERTIFIED  
**13,150**  
ACRES OF CONSERVATION  
**18,900** lbs  
PREDICTED PHOSPHORUS  
REDUCTION

9,281 lbs  
PREDICTED PHOSPHORUS  
REDUCTION  
from COVER CROPS alone  
THAT'S  
**7,500** ADDITIONAL lbs  
IN 2017, COMPARED TO 2016

### YPF releases 2017 Phosphorus Report

By YPF communications

Yahara Pride Farms released its annual report this summer which documents information and research on the reductions in phosphorus delivered to nearby surface waters by farmers in the Yahara watershed in 2017. YPF has measured on-farm results for five years, and this is the second year that an annual report has been compiled to share program outcomes with the public. In 2017, Yahara Pride Farms documented nearly 19,000 lbs of phosphorus delivery reduction.

The 2017 phosphorus reduction represents more than a 60% increase over 2016. Aided in part by cost-share dollars, farmers have made changes to their farming practices in order to help make a difference in the watershed.

“Farmers are progressively putting phosphorus reduction practices to work on their farms despite the difficult farm economy,” said Jeff Endres, YPF chairman. “Farmers continue to prioritize conservation practices even through difficult times where resources can be cut short.”

#### Highlights of the report include:

- » *A commitment by farmers to reduce soil loss and phosphorus to the Madison chain of lakes*
- » *Documentation about how specific farming practices are reducing phosphorus*
- » *The data set is made up of farms in the Yahara watershed, all numbers are from the Yahara watershed*
- » *Data shows that farms are reducing phosphorus losses from their fields*
- » *Long-term, this report provides hope and assurance that agriculture nutrient losses are being addressed*
- » *More than 18,000 lbs. of documented phosphorus reduction in 2017*
- » *There are barriers to water quality in Dane County, such as legacy phosphorus, that are beyond farmer's control*

In 2017, five practices were promoted by YPF: Strip tillage, low-disturbance manure injection, low-disturbance deep tillage with cover crops, cover crops and headland stacking of manure. Additional

data was collected for combining practices, continuing a practice for multiple years and combined practices over time.

The report breaks down phosphorus delivery reduction achieved, along with the number of acres and the cost per pound of phosphorus for each practice. It is important to note that conservation techniques endorsed by YPF have been adopted as best-management practices for farmers in the program. For each practice, the number of acres without cost-share far exceeds the number of acres with cost-share.



**Cover crops contributed 9,281 lbs to phosphorus reduction in 2017.**

Photo by UW-Extension

## YPF Announcements

### Save the Date! YPF Watershed Conference - March 7

Plans are underway for another exciting March conference. Watch your email, social media and mail for more details and the full agenda. Registration opens in late January. The event is FREE thanks to support from our partners below.

#### DETAILS:

Thurs., March 7  
10 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.  
Comfort Inn and Suites, DeForest

### Thank you to our 2018 Partners in Pride

Alliant Energy	Insight FS
Clean Lakes Alliance	Madison Community Foundation
Compeer Financial	The McKnight Foundation
Dane County	Monona Bank
Dairy Business Association	McKnight Foundation
Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Dairy Strong Sustainability Alliance	The Nature Conservancy
Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative	SARE
Endres Insurance Agency, Inc.	Vita Plus
Farmer's Implement	Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Fund for Lake Michigan	Yahara WINs
Grande Cheese	
The Growmark Foundation	

## Twilight *(continued from page 1)*

ultimately keeps the nutrients, such as phosphorus, in the farm fields and out of waterways.

Farmers learned about specific practices currently included in the cost-share program such as strip tillage, low disturbance manure injection (LDMI), cover crops, headland stacking, composting manure and combining multiple practices.

"We are concerned with the conservation of our land. We live on the farm, we raised our kids here and we want to use the best practices so that our community can enjoy this land for generations to come," said Joe Henry, co-owner of Henry Farms and host of the northern twilight meeting. 🌿

“  
*We are concerned  
with the conservation  
of our land. Yahara  
Pride Farms is doing  
their research as well  
as taking initiatives to  
educate people about  
conserving the land.*”

- Joe Henry, Henry Farms

## Leadership message

By Jeff Endres, YPF chairman

This year has been filled with many challenges. The weather tested our patience at every turn. Our costs exceed any profits. But farmers persevere.



Every year has its own set of challenges and risks, and we do our best to turn them into successes while being the best stewards to our land that we can.

This past August we were able to see first-hand the importance of farming in this region. The heavy rains left the Madison metropolitan area flooded and caused millions of dollars in damage. The Isthmus was in danger of a mass flood with the Tenney locks bulging.

The farm fields were at work holding back a one-hundred-year storm event. The corn, soybeans and alfalfa fields acted like a huge sponge and absorbed the abundance of water. This all went unnoticed by the majority of the public.

The fertile soils in this watershed along with high organic levels in the soils due our history as a livestock region, allowed this to happen. I wonder what it would have looked like if we had no farms and instead only houses, concrete and asphalt?

As we approach Thanksgiving, it's only fitting to thank the farmers for our abundance of food. This is often overlooked, and instead farmers are often criticized for production methods.

To the farmers - you should be prouder than ever! You have again met another year's challenges and succeeded. In this watershed, we are fortunate to have productive farms, managed by progressive people, who understand the benefits of conservation. Yahara Pride Farms continues to focus on farm practices that add to your bottom line and protect the environment. It's the win-win's that will make the most difference. Happy Thanksgiving to all! 🌿

Sincerely, Jeff

## YPF at Breakfast on the Farm

By YPF communications

Yahara Pride Farms, in collaboration with the Farmers for the Upper Sugar River, provided an educational exhibit at the Dane County Breakfast on the Farm held on June 9 at Hensen Bros. Dairy in Waunakee.

The “Farmers protecting water quality tent” was an opportunity for farmers in both groups to explain the conservation practices that are currently taking place in Dane County and answer any questions that people had.

One of Yahara Pride Farms’ goals is to build relationships with members of the community and help them understand what conservation practices impact water quality in the Yahara watershed. Since Breakfast on the Farm is a big event with large public attendance, Yahara Pride Farms created a fun activity for kids and families to draw parallels between

farming and gardening.

New this year, Yahara Pride Farms provided a seed planting station where attendees could plant their own seed to take home. Volunteers sprinkled composted manure on the top of the freshly planted seed and explained the benefits of fertilizing a plant with compost. The activity was a huge success with more than 600 plants taken home by families across Dane County and the surrounding areas.

“We want the public to know that we are in this together and we also want a great community to live in” said Scott Maier, board member for Yahara Pride Farms.

This year’s Dane County Breakfast on the Farm was hosted by Hensen Bros. Dairy. Owner Will Hensen serves on the Yahara Pride Farms board of directors.



The tent activity connected farming and gardening. Photo by YPF



## Dane County cover crop update

By Heidi Johnson, crops and soils agent, Dane County UW-Extension

It has been a tough fall for getting crops harvested, creating a very tough fall for getting cover crops and wheat planted. Luckily many Dane County farmers had scheduled the airplane to plant their cover crops, saving them the headache of trying to figure out how to get them drilled. Most of the cover crops that were airplane seeded are doing very well. Some got a little bit beat up during silage harvest but the majority look great!

We did find strong evidence of the importance of nitrogen in cover crop growth this year. The photo here are barley cover crops from two fields, across the road from each other, same farm, seeded on the same date but one field had a manure application, the other did not. The deluge of rain that we received in late August likely washed away most of the residual nitrogen from the corn crop, resulting in a shortage for covers.

I am conducting a research trial this year on a Dane County farm to evaluate surface vs. low disturbance

injected manure applications to cover crops and which results in less erosion and phosphorus losses. We applied the manure to the covers in mid-October and will run three rainfall simulations to measure sediment, nutrient losses and phosphorus losses. More to come!

Interest in cover crops and other cropping practices that improve soil health and reduce nutrient run-off



remains strong across Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Cover Crop Conference that took place this past February was attended by 400 people, the majority of which were farmers.

Planning is well underway for the 2019 event. It will be on Feb 20, 2019 in Stevens Point at the Holiday Inn. We have added more sessions and topics to this year’s conference and an added bonus of a night before dinner called ‘Bugging out on Soil Health’ where we will have UW Microbiologist Thea Whitman talk about the diversity and function of soil microbes and how that impacts soil health.

We also have Blake Vince, a farmer from Ontario, Canada, coming to talk about how his concern for Lake Erie and desire to improve the resiliency of his farm led him to adopt no till and cover crops on his farm.

For more info and to register, visit [fyi.uwex.edu/covercrop/](http://fyi.uwex.edu/covercrop/).

Contact Heidi Johnson at (608) 669-6246, or [Johnson.heidi@countyofdane.com](mailto:Johnson.heidi@countyofdane.com).

## Partnership recognized for collaborative conservation efforts

By Martin Griffin, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District



As we round out the second half of 2018, the Yahara WINS partnership has demonstrated the incredible results we can achieve by working together, sharing our knowledge and pursuing opportunities for progress toward common goals. Yahara Pride Farms plays a key role in our progress.

This summer, Yahara Pride Farms chairman Jeff Endres participated in the strategic dialogue at the U.S. Water Alliance Water Summit in Minneapolis. The panel featured national agricultural leaders from California to Iowa who have put conservation and water sustainability ideas into practice in their own farms while engaging in productive watershed scale partnerships.

Jeff did a superb job highlighting the partnership Yahara Pride Farms has with Yahara WINS and sharing his knowledge and ideas. Thanks to Jeff, Yahara Pride Farms and all of the Yahara WINS partners for fostering an atmosphere that encourages us to learn from each

other and pursue common goals.

Our partnership also gained national acclaim this summer, earning the prestigious U.S. Water Prize at the Minneapolis event. Our work together is now recognized as a national model for building trust, identifying workable tools for farmers and forging productive partnerships that produce lasting results.

So what have our results been like? As we wait for the results of 2018, I'd like to share a little bit of the success we saw in 2017. Yahara Pride Farms and the rest of the Yahara WINS partners kept more than 40,000 pounds of phosphorus from entering area surface waters. This includes almost 19,000 pounds that were held out of area surface waters by the farmers of Yahara Pride Farms.

The large and repeated storm events in our area during August and September point to the need for engaging urban as well as rural partners if we are to continue improving regional water quality. Variability in precipitation, timing of storms and the severity of runoff from spring thaws all affect phosphorus



The Yahara WINS partnership was honored in Minneapolis this summer. Photo from Yahara WINS

loading. To improve regional water quality, all sources of nutrients must be addressed.

The Yahara WINS partnership relies on hard work by farmers to keep soil and nutrients in the fields and in turn strives to provide recognition to the farmers and organizations that are delivering great results. In addition to hearing about your successes, we'd also like to hear about your challenges and how we can work together to better assist your efforts. For more information on Yahara WINS, visit [madsewer.org](http://madsewer.org) and search "Yahara WINS."

*Martin Griffin can be reached at [marting@madsewer.org](mailto:marting@madsewer.org)*

## Setting a winning agenda for our lakes

By Adam Sodersten, Clean Lakes Alliance

Recent flooding and historically large cyanobacteria (blue-green algae blooms) are symptoms of heavy/intense rain events and a harder, less resilient landscape. At Clean Lakes Alliance we know that we all need to do our part for healthier lakes.

In our annual accounting of phosphorus reduction practices, farm initiatives have advanced us 32 percent of the way toward the phosphorus goals of the Yahara CLEAN plan for rural areas. In urban areas, where the cost per pound to reduce phosphorus runoff is much higher, we are 25 percent of the way to our goal. This is great progress but we

need additional improvements to how we manage the landscape surrounding our homes, farm fields and city streets to accommodate the weather patterns of our region.

One important step forward comes from the work of the Dane County Healthy Farms Healthy Lakes Task Force. The Task Force was created by the Dane County board to generate a better understanding of the issues and needs affecting agriculture and lake quality.

Recommendations range from assisting farmer-led groups in the watershed by increasing farmland preservation initiatives and cost-share availability to

updating County ordinances to meet state standards. To see the full list of recommendations visit our website at [cleanlakesalliance.org/task-force](http://cleanlakesalliance.org/task-force). We believe these action goals represent practical ways to protect both agriculture and water quality.

Clean Lakes Alliance appreciates farmers working alongside government and non-profit leaders, crafting practical ways to protect both agriculture and water quality. If you are interested in finding out more about our advocacy work and our involvement in these recommendations, please follow us on Facebook or visit our website



## Sponsor in the spotlight: The Nature Conservancy

By YPF communications

YPF has an extensive list of sponsors and supporters. Without their assistance, YPF could not offer the level of programming available to farmers and the public. We sat down with The Nature Conservancy to talk about what drew them to YPF.

### AS AN ORGANIZATION, WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO YPF?

The Nature Conservancy was impressed by the outcomes that Yahara Pride Farms (YPF) achieved year after year and their willingness to share their story in Madison and beyond. If we are to be successful in achieving conservation goals, we need leadership from those closest to the land, such as the farmers involved with YPF.

### WHAT SERVICES DO YOU PROVIDE THE AG COMMUNITY?

The Nature Conservancy works with agriculture across the globe to foster

innovations in technology, collaborate with communities to use resources more efficiently and promote policies that enable sustainability. In Wisconsin, we work with a diverse set of partners to support on-the-ground conservation efforts to improve soil health and water quality. We also help farmers tell their stories about the changes they are making and how those changes are improving soil health and water quality.

### WHAT IS SOMETHING ABOUT TNC YOU WISH EVERY FARMER KNEW ABOUT?

The Conservancy works with corporations across the globe on sustainability efforts throughout their supply chain. Global brands like General Mills, Pepsi, Kellogg's and Cargill work closely with TNC to engage and support their producers in on-the-ground conservation innovation. We look forward to opportunities to work with

such companies and dairy processors in Wisconsin.

### WHAT IS THE NATURE CONSERVANCY CURRENTLY DOING TO ASSIST FARMERS DURING THE DOWNTURN?

Think of conservation practices, such as cover crops and no-till, as a long-term investment. They may seem tough to justify in the short term when you are struggling just to keep up with operational costs but, given time, these practices could pay dividends by improving soil health, infiltration and water holding capacity – especially during extreme weather events. The Conservancy is providing funding to groups like Yahara Pride Farms to be used for cost-share incentives to help alleviate some of the initial financial burden of trying a new practice. Keep learning, trying new things and sharing your stories!



**Background: Otter Creek at Baxter's Hollow in Sauk County. TNC owns 5,752 acres in the Baraboo Hills. Photo by Mark Godfrey. Foreground: Lulu Lake in Walworth County. TNC owns 553 acres in the Mukwonago River watershed. Photo by Clint Farlinger.**

## PLEASE GIVE A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

The Nature Conservancy is a non-profit conservation organization founded in 1951 with a mission to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. We work in all 50 states and 75 countries. With generous support from our members, we have helped protect more than 100 million acres of land and 5,000 miles of rivers. In Wisconsin alone we have protected more than 233,000 acres of Wisconsin's most beautiful and diverse natural areas. Our vision is a world where the diversity of life thrives, and people act to conserve nature for its own sake and its ability to fulfill our needs and enrich our lives.

## WHAT ARE SOME RECENT HIGHLIGHTS FOR TNC?

Some of our recent accomplishments include helping get a new farmer-led group up and running in Sheboygan County. In their second year, the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers have more than 20 members and are following the model that YPF established by providing incentive packages and farmer education opportunities. We also continue to tell the story from the Pecatonica River paired watershed project in southwest Wisconsin. This 10-year collaborative research study showed a 55 percent reduction in phosphorus delivery by implementing conservation practices on a targeted set of farm fields.

YPF take heart, the practices you are doing can make an impact! But, keep engaging new farmers to address those fields that are most vulnerable to surface run-off of phosphorus and sediment. Getting conservation practices on these fields will provide a greater impact. We are also excited about our work with the

Dairy Strong Sustainability Alliance that allows us to support groups like Yahara Pride Farms. Agriculture and dairy are important parts of our state, and we are proud to work collaboratively with groups like the Dairy Business Association to promote sustainable practices in fields, barns and inside the processing plant.

## HOW CAN FARMERS CONTACT THE NATURE CONSERVANCY?

Visit [nature.org/Wisconsin](http://nature.org/Wisconsin) to learn more about the work of The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin. Contact Steve Richter at [srichter@tnc.org](mailto:srichter@tnc.org) or Paige Frautschy at [paige.frautschy@tnc.org](mailto:paige.frautschy@tnc.org) to learn more about our agriculture projects in Wisconsin.





Yahara Pride Farms  
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[yaharapridefarms.org](http://yaharapridefarms.org)

## Rent the YPF tractor, manure tanker and toolbar!

Surface applications of manure can increase nitrogen and phosphorus runoff to rivers and streams. Injection places manure below the surface where it doesn't interact with runoff water during storms. However, on steep slopes, injection of manure can erode soil.

Low-disturbance manure injection (LDMI) is a farming system that incorporates manure into the soil with minimal soil disturbance. This equipment also works well with no-till farming systems and allows farmers to experiment with new methods of preserving nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium to save on fertilizer costs.

In addition to providing cost-share of \$20 per acre for up to 50 acres to farmers who implement LDMI on their farms, YPF has a Case IH MX 240 CVT

tractor, 5,300 gallon Houle manure tanker and Bazoooka toolbar available for rent to farmers in the watershed. The fee to rent this equipment is \$500/day for a short haul or \$600/day for a long haul.



*Tanker and toolbar made possible by a grant from Dane County, Yahara WINs and the Clean Lakes Alliance. Special thank you to Farmers Implement for supplying the tractor.*

## Dates to Remember:

- **Dec. 12 - UW Discovery Farms conf., Wis. Dells**
- **Jan. 23-24 - Dairy Strong, Monona Terrace, Madison**
- **Feb. 20 - Cover Crop Conf., Stevens Point**
- **March 7 - YPF Watershed Conference, Deforest**
- **March 13-14 - PDPW Conference, Madison**

More info at  
[yaharapridefarms.org](http://yaharapridefarms.org)