

Agroforestry Technical Service Program

The Savanna Institute offers free technical support to farmers and landowners in Illinois, as well as Wisconsin. Our Technical Service Program is designed to help landholders achieve their business and conservation goals through agroforestry. Our Illinois Technical Service Providers work one-on-one with clients to plan, design, fund, implement, and ensure success of tree-based systems on working farms.



Agroforestry in Illinois



SAVANNA INSTITUTE

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HEADQUARTERS:
Spring Green, WI
and Champaign, IL

608.448.6432
info@savannainstitute.org
savannainstitute.org

The Savanna Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization headquartered in Illinois and Wisconsin that works with farmers and scientists to lay the groundwork for widespread agroforestry adoption in the Midwestern US. Inspired by the native savanna ecosystem native to the region, the Savanna Institute conducts research, education, and outreach to support the growth of diverse, perennial agroecosystems. We envision a multifunctional agriculture in the Midwest based on agroforestry systems of integrated trees, crops, and livestock that fosters ecological resilience climate stability, economic prosperity, and vibrant communities.

What is Agroforestry?

Agroforestry describes time-tested farming practices that integrate trees, crops and animals together in ways that create a cascade of benefits for the ecosystem. In Illinois and across the upper Midwest, agroforestry resembles native oak savanna: widely spaced trees, diverse forages, and grazing animals. This approach to farming with trees is consistently ranked by scientists as the top land use practice to address climate change. Trees draw carbon out of the atmosphere, store it in their woody biomass and sink it into the soil via deep perennial root structures. Tree roots also help to filter water and prevent erosion, building farm resilience to flooding. When farmers integrate tree crops, such as hazelnuts, black currants, chestnuts or elderberries, on their land, they can increase yield and diversify farm income all while regenerating the ecosystem.

Illinois Demonstration Farms

The Savanna Institute runs a network of Demonstration Farms in the Midwest to show farmers agroforestry in action at the scale of a commercial farm. Our Illinois Demonstration Farms serve as accessible hubs to educate farmers and the public, provide tree crop germplasm repositories and variety trials, and show how agroforestry can be practiced within the region.



MEMORIAL 4-H CAMP AT ALLERTON PARK – MONTICELLO, IL
Memorial 4-H Camp is a 35-acre alley cropping demonstration operated in partnership with the University of Illinois, 4-H, Lourash Farms, and the Savanna Institute. This alley cropping system features rows of short-term and long-term timber producing trees grown between “alleys” of conventional grain production, along with groundcover and management experiments designed to track soil health, tree production, labor, and ecosystem benefits of different designs.

This demonstration is designed to showcase the power of trees integrated into agricultural fields, instead of just on the edges. Savanna Institute worked closely with Lourash Farms to ensure continued high productivity for his farming operation while establishing trees for long-term profit, carbon sequestration, water quality, wildlife support, and soil health.



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS RESEARCH & DEMONSTRATION PLOTS- URBANA, IL
In 2022, Savanna Institute took over management of multiple long-term agroforestry research projects located at the University of Illinois. These plots represent some of the longest-running agroforestry experiments in the nation and Savanna Institute is committed to ensuring years of work and data continue to inform and shape agroforestry in North America.



HUDSON FARM- URBANA, IL

Hudson Farm is a 120-acre agroforestry demonstration farm located in Champaign country featuring a 20-acre windbreak, and 100 acres of both annual and perennial alley cropping. Working in partnership with a local landholder, local row crop farmer, USDA NRCS, and Canopy Farm Management, this farm boldly illustrates how transitioning row crop land to agroforestry can sink more carbon, boost soil health, improve water quality, build habitat, and diversify farm income.

The alley cropping systems at Hudson Farms feature: conventional grains, hazelnut, elderberry, heartnut, pollinator habitat, and cover cropping. The windbreak showcases multiple designs to illustrate the different ways farmers and landowners can use windbreaks to help them reach their business and conversation goals. Hudson Farm is a prime example of how farmers and landowners can utilize historic USDA investment in climate-smart agriculture and innovate how agriculture can be a tool of resilience.



FIELDS RESTORED – OREGON, IL

Fields Restored is a 166-acre row-crop farm near Oregon, Ill., owned and operated by the Williams family. The family first worked with Savanna Institute to transition 20 acres to alley cropping in 2015. After seeing the rapid revitalization of this parcel, they are now committed to converting more of their farm into the primary agroforestry demonstration farm of Northern Illinois.

Recent additions include a 5-acre multi-functional designed to rehabilitate a degraded waterway, improve water quality, and produce salable products and an innovative silvopasture by additional experiment trialing the establishment of “tree islands” within pasture for livestock comfort and increased forage health.

Examples of Agroforestry in Illinois

Videos

Memorial 4-H Camp Demonstration Farm Virtual Tour
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZICGyr6POoU&t=157s>

Partnering for Agroforestry: Delight Flower Farm in Champaign, IL
Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gVuCjOCIoY>
Handouts <https://www.savannainstitute.org/partnering-for-agroforestry-downloads>

Article

Shipman, K. (Feb 10, 2022) “Integrating trees into crop mix adds economic, environmental benefits, FarmWeek”
https://www.farmweeknow.com/environmental/integrating-trees-into-crop-mix-adds-economic-environmental-benefits/article_042dbcba-885e-11ec-8ac5-ebb754c853ae.html

Forthcoming Report

Adams, K. (2023) Building Agroforestry Through Community in East-Central Illinois
Advance Copy https://drive.google.com/file/d/192IipJM5P__EjiwtzqsvxDDdSIDRxb6/view?usp=sharing

Presentations

2021 Conservation Cropping Seminar Presentation, University of Illinois Extension
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqO6_lGxqF4&t=5083s

The Agroforestry Series: Planning and Design, Savanna Institute
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9goq_IPxWeM