



SARE Cover Crop Research on Northeast Community College Farm

February 11, 2021, Advisor panel meeting, 6:30pm

Ben Wolken, Caleb Zohner, Devon Johnson, Rob Thomas, and Sarah Sellin all present

Re-introductions, exchanged pleasantries, Sarah refreshed the advisory panel on what the project goals are, and what the panel discussed last year, what has changed since then.

Rob went into detail on some of the issues that happened with moving the field, and some of the unplanned issues that came up (such as, how the current SARE plot does have a bit of a water drainage issue)

Working Dinner; as we ate, the panel discussed all the new advances in soil health that are more readily available in our area now (such as bio-char and humectants).

Committee came prepared to talk about some of the needs they are seeing in the area of ag education. A quick discussion involving all panel members about how to involve local FFA chapters in the NECC farm took place. Ben gave a quick recap of a project he hopes to do with popcorn and Battle Creek...he has a local field that he would like to give them to operate about 2-3 acres to grow the popcorn, harvest, clean, market, and use in their concession stand. This type of small project could be replicated at Northeast Community College (NECC) with other crops, to help build agronomic principles with economic principles.

Devon stressed the need to Northeast to continue to have our students talk to producers...they are knowledgeable in their information, but not being able to speak to producers effectively can hinder their job performance. He would like us to pursue requiring students to bring a producer on campus, for the student to teach

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a management practice to. He believes that it will strengthen the student confidence and abilities. He also believes this will get producers on to our college farm, where they can learn about different practices and applied research that we are currently doing (such as the SARE plot).

Ben is working towards making some contacts, so we can possibly utilize something like bio-char on the SARE field. He was not sure what the cost of product, application, or transportation was at this time, but he will check it out for us, and let us know. He also wanted to encourage Northeast to keep using second year students to make decisions (such as the species selection of cover crop on the SARE field). Rob mentioned we should try to apply to grow Kernza again, and Ben wholeheartedly agreed. The panel did agree that we need to fix the very acidic pH on the SARE field before increasing soil organic matter can happen. The soil samples that are taken this spring should reflect a pH improvement due to the manure application.

Caleb would like us to do an “open house” once the new college farm is completed. He believes once we get producers here (even if it is to see the new farm), we can have trolleys go around to the different fields to showcase them (Devon added this would also be a great time to have students talk to producers). I mentioned idea is very similar to what the UNL Haskell Lab in Concord does every August. Caleb thinks once we let producers know what is going on here with the “different” applied research projects, it might inspire some to try something on their fields, or to turn to the college to find answers to common agricultural problems in the area. It could also become a yearly outing, with activities for youth, presentations, alumni gatherings, welcoming freshman students, etc.

Goals to work on throughout this year:

- Utilize students to make more decisions/sampling on the SARE field
- Try to get more soil sampling data in place
- Continue with the NECC intern working on the SARE field, to collect data, images, etc
- Try to harvest barley for grain, possibly feed it back to the cow herd
- Engage students to practice speaking to producers more; increase their confidence
- Work towards developing an “open house” for the public to start a relationship with them

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