

Re: Soil Health Initiative Update

Date: 8/22/2023

You may recall an email from Groundswell Conservancy announcing our Soil Health Initiative (the “Initiative”) back in April. In it, we announced that Groundswell was joining a national effort led by American Farmland Trust (AFT) to engage and support land protection organizations, like us, in promoting soil health practices on permanently protected agricultural land. AFT created and assembled a truly impressive array of training resources to launch this initiative so that we could begin to support the farmers who own and manage the agricultural land we’ve permanently protected.

Much of our initial effort was focused on internal staff training and education. In the spring, I spent time studying the extensive resources put together by AFT. They included expert led webinars, demonstration videos, case studies, economic analyses, a field day in June, and so on. With some basic education under my belt, I initiated conversations with several farmers (V. Treinen, P. Allen, P. Maier, J. Meyers) around the topic of soil health and was rewarded with the experiences and knowledge that was shared.

To begin developing a network of agency personnel, I scheduled meetings with soil conservationists in the Dane County Land & Water Conservation Department in March. At the May 24th Board meeting I gave a brief presentation to introduce the Initiative. I’ve met virtually with an NRCS Resource Conservationist in the Madison office to discuss easement related issues. On August 16th I met with one of our farming landowners to get his thoughts on soil health for an article in our next newsletter. Finally, I attended a field day focused on soil health organized by the Soil Health Collaborative in late September.

Moving forward, we plan to develop a web page dedicated to the concepts, practices, and benefits of an agricultural system focused on soil health. It will also identify funding sources available through county, state, and federal agencies for technical and financial support. And we plan on continuing to make this a focal point as we acquire new easements and work to provide farmland access to historically disadvantaged farmers.

We view this Initiative as the next step so that *Farmland can stay Farmland*. Protecting agricultural land in perpetuity is step one. Helping ensure it is farmed profitably and sustainably in the face of a changing climate is the next.