PENINSULA FARMER

Farming with pride | The official newsletter of Peninsula Pride Farms

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Barry Bubolz of NRCS explains the value of cover crops by using a rain simulator.

Farm network partners kick off water, soil health efforts

By Peninsula Pride Farms

Farmers in Kewaunee and southern Door counties have teamed up with multiple partners to study and demonstrate conservation practices to protect groundwater and surface water in the region.

The Door-Kewaunee Watershed Demonstration Farms Network is a partnership between the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Door and Kewaunee Land Conservation departments and Peninsula Pride Farms. The program was officially launched Sept. 7 at a field day at Deer Run Dairy near Kewaunee, one of four farms participating in the network. The other participants include Augustian Farms in Kewaunee, Brey Cycle Farm in Sturgeon Bay and Kinnard Farms in Casco.

The network of farmers will test, demonstrate and share information about leading-edge technologies used on their farms, including cover crops, reduced tillage, low-disturbance manure injection and other practices that improve soil health, increase organic matter in the soil and reduce soil erosion. Groundwater and surface water quality are top priorities for area farmers, who contend with shallow, fractured bedrock that can provide a direct path for contaminants from the surface to groundwater.

"The Demonstration Farms network allows farmers to take the lead in improving our water and soil health," said Lee Kinnard, owner of Kinnard Farms and a PPF member. "It also allows us farmers to have access to science and information like we've never had before. We are fortunate to have a great group of partners working with us."

Farmers will try out different methods, seeing the results in their fields, Tom Krapf of NRCS said.

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

PPF Annual Meeting
Wed. Jan. 31
Rendezvous of Luxemburg

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OUR MISSION:

As farmers and caretakers of the environment, we are committed to protecting, nurturing and sustaining our precious soil, water and air. To foster environmental stewardship, we promote practices with measurable outcomes that secure and enrich the future of our shared community.

Farm network *(continued from page 1)*

UW-Extension's Jamie Patton explains healthy soils.

"Working together, we can change or adjust what is being done," Krapf said. "This information can also be shared with other farmers so they can take steps that will help improve water quality while still maintaining agriculture as a strong industry."

As part of the field day, farmers and other agricultural professionals learned how to identify the traits associated with healthy soil, observed an NRCS rainfall simulator showing how soil with different groundcovers holds water and saw several pieces of equipment conduct low-disturbance manure applications.

"It's been exciting to see the different options in action that keep water the way it is supposed to be – clean," said Duane Ducat, a partner in Deer Run Dairy and also a PPF member.

During the presentation on soil health, Jamie Patton, an educator with the University of Wisconsin-Extension in Shawano County, climbed into a soil pit and pointed out the signs of healthy soil.

"Root channels allow air and water to get into the soil, which improves soil health and helps feed its organic matter," said Patton as she pointed out roots from the plot's cover crops. "Organic matter is the lifeblood of soil."

Patton said organic matter stores nutrients and water in the soil, which reduces runoff and improves plant productivity.

"There are three keys to healthy soil: cover crops, no- or low-tillage and manure," she said. "There are definitely steps we can take with a farm's soil and make it into something better."

Barry Bubolz, district conservationist with NRCS, used a rainfall simulator to demonstrate how cover crops can reduce runoff. He dug up four samples of soil, ranging from one that did not use cover crops at all to one that used a variety of cover crops. He then turned on the simulator, which added the equivalent of an inch of rain to the soil samples, and collected the runoff.

The soil with multiple cover crops growing had the lowest amount of runoff and the highest infiltration levels, Bubolz said.

"The sample without any cover crop had the most runoff," he said. "We want to share the message that if you keep the soil covered (with crops) that it is better for the soil and water."

Attendees also had the opportunity to view low-disturbance manure application equipment in action. Dave Eisentraut of Eisentraut Ag Services in Waldo demonstrated how a newly purchased Schuitemaker bar attached to his tractor allowed him to inject manure directly into the soil.

The bar creates a small trench where the manure is then applied.

"There is a great absorption rate and no pooling of manure on the surface," Eisentraut said.

Door-Kewaunee Watershed Demonstration Farms Network field days

The Door-Kewaunee Watershed Demonstration Farms Network is hosting tours and field days to showcase the work being done at each of the four demonstration farms. Event information will be posted at peninsulapridefarmsinc.org.

You can also sign up to receive text alerts for "Field Days on the Fly" by texting DKDemoFarms to 88202. Text alerts are encouraged as projects are often weather dependent. Standard messaging and data rates apply.

Demonstrating action through farm network

By Don Niles, PPF chairman

Greetings to all and Happy New Year!

I have been looking forward to wrapping up our first full year as an organization. We have accomplished a lot since launching a year and a half ago. This is also a good opportunity to peek under the curtain into 2018.

I think we all appreciated the fall season that Mother Nature provided us this year. We had very good conditions for getting crops off, applying nutrients and establishing more cover crops than ever before.

Most of our work in 2017 focused on surface water projects. By far our main efforts were directed to the launch of our Door-Kewaunee Watershed Demonstration Farms Network in cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and state Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. We started what will be a three-to-five-year program of partnership and experimentation with four member farms. The PPF farms participating in the Demo Farms program are Augustian Farms, Deer Run Dairy, Kinnard Farms and Brey Cycle Farms.

There have already been a handful of field days and tours associated with the Demo Farms program, with many more to come. One new tool we have been using to keep members abreast of what is going on with the project is a text notification of events. This is particularly handy for short-notice events that may be dependent on weather conditions or perhaps the availability of a specialized piece of equipment. If you are not on the list simply text DKDemoFarms to 88202.

At this year's annual meeting, to be held Jan. 31 at Rendezvous in Luxemburg, we will have a chance to review our main accomplishments from 2017 and look ahead to the coming year. We will be developing several projects designed to study and protect ground water on our peninsula. These programs will be introduced to our membership at the annual meeting.

We will also be looking for members' input into how we are doing as an organization. We would like to know what changes you might like to see. This meeting makes a great opportunity for members to speak up, both with their ideas as well as their vote, as the meeting includes our election process.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible. The meeting should be a great opportunity to talk and collaborate with other farmers who are also trying to navigate the challenging times ahead.

- Don

Demo Farms practices:

- **Augustian Farms:** Interseeding cover crops, applying manure to a growing crop, using management practices to handle leachate water, and seeding cover crops with manure application.
- **Brey Cycle Farm:** Cover crops and low-disturbance manure injection to improve soil health, reduce nutrient losses.
- **Deer Run Dairy:** Testing low-disturbance manure injection into a growing crop, cover cropping and a denitrifying bioreactor for tile lines.
- **Kinnard Farms:** Different types of manure applicators, planting into green crops in spring and planting cover crops.

How far we've come, where we are headed

Accomplishments in 2017

- Analyzing nitrogen and phosphorus loss to tile drainage systems, with UW Discovery Farms
- Analyzing nitrogen use efficiency to improve understanding of nitrogen loss, with Discovery Farms
- Creating education program regarding pathogens in the environment via partnership with healthcare systems and agricultural industry
- Partnering in new Natural Resources and Conservation Service Door-Kewaunee Watershed Demonstration Farms Network
- Cooperation with industry partner to evaluate potential for probiotics to reduce the levels of pathogens excreted in manure
- Mapping of sinkholes and depth-to-bedrock mapping
- Field days and events
- NRCS Demo Farms kickoff (LDMI, cover crops, nitrogen use)
- Composting
- Continuation of Water Well

Work plans for 2018

- Conservation evaluation that looks at phosphorus reductions from new practice implementation and soil vantage
- Conservation assessment
- Yahara Pride Farms model of evaluation, assessment and certification
- Further development of pathogens in the environment education
- Demonstration Farms Network field days and continuing efforts
- Discovery Farms continuing efforts
- Other field days, events
- Continuation of Water Well assessment and certification

Farmers unified on clean water, healthy community

By MaryBeth Matzek, Midwest Agriculture Almanac

As dozens of farmers and others poured into a room overlooking a state-of-the-art rotary milking parlor at Kinnard Farms, Don Niles felt moved with emotion.

Farmers rarely have down time. So, it was heartening to see nearly 100 dairy community supporters show up for an 8:15 a.m. press conference on Nov. 28 in support of five farms going through a permit renewal process.

"In this day and age, with so many people busy taking care of their own responsibilities, it was amazing to see such warmth and enthusiasm," said Niles, a local dairy farmer and veterinarian. "The people packed into that room not only understood what farming means to our county, they also appreciated the energy and enthusiasm we farmers are putting into modernizing and improving management in all aspects of our operations."

The gathering was a show of unity and of commitment to agriculture, the environment and the Kewaunee County community.

"What many don't understand is that we are all on the same side — to make our community better and to protect our water," said dairy farmer Lee Kinnard, who hosted the group and a dozen journalists. "We believe agriculture, a healthy environment and a thriving community can co-exist."

"For our part, farmers have been entrusted with this responsibility for generations and we are asking for the community's continued support and trust," Kinnard said.

The gathering was held in advance of a public meeting at which the state Department of Natural Resources collected comments about water discharge permits for the large farms.

Nathen Nysse, an agronomist and owner of Tilth Agronomy, works with farmers in the county.

"We have very progressive farmers in this area because they use science in farming," Nysse said. "Farmers are innovators by nature and those I work with on a daily basis are always asking how they can improve. And they are willing to try something new — that is key."

A dozen journalists covered the Nov. 28 press conference at Kinnard Farms.

Continuous improvement is at the heart of Peninsula Pride Farms, which was launched in March 2016 as farmers joined together to share and promote environmentally sustainable practices, said Niles, president of the organization.

"We know we need to do things differently and are using science and technology to help point the way," Niles said. "We definitely believe that safe drinking water and the agriculture industry can co-exist."

During the past two years, Peninsula Pride Farms has heavily promoted the use of cover crops, which improve soil and water health, Nysse said.

"In 2017, we had four times the number of cover crops planted over 2016. Farmers definitely see the benefit of using them," he said.

Membership in Peninsula Pride Farms is growing. In addition to dozens of farmers, the organization has business members and partnerships with The Nature Conservancy, local health systems, county, state and federal agencies, and others.

"We all recognize that clean, safe water is a community issue," Niles said, "and we all have the same goal."

Lee Kinnard (right) talks with a reporter at the press conference.

Save the Bay initiative pushes forward

By U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher

I'm proud to be from Northeast Wisconsin. Here, we treat everyone we meet with kindness and respect. We stand by our veterans and help those in need. And we work hard every day to, in our own small way, hold the line and leave our little part of the world better than we found it.

Our character is shaped not only by our traditions of kindness and decency, but also by our land. From our rivers and streams, to our forests and rich farmland, the natural abundance of Northeast Wisconsin shapes and defines who we are as a people.

Perhaps most significantly, we are home to the largest freshwater system in the world: the Great Lakes.

These waters are tied directly to 1.4 million jobs, including the tourism industry that sustains many of our coastal communities. The lakes give drinking water to 40 million people each day and provide water for our crops that feed people around the world.

But Northeast Wisconsin and its resources do not just belong to us — they belong to future generations as well. It's our moral obligation to ensure those who live in our communities long after we are gone will continue to enjoy the lands and waters, which have given so much to our families and communities.

This is why I was honored to inherit the Save the Bay initiative from my predecessor, Reid Ribble.

Our team — comprised of stakeholders from agriculture, businesses, academia, local government and nonprofits — meets regularly to find ways we can reduce the excess phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment flowing into the waters of Green Bay and Lake Michigan.

We share new techniques and discuss our successes and challenges in implementing conservation farming and nutrient management strategies.

Gallagher speaking at Save the Bay meeting.

The farming community in Northeast Wisconsin has really stepped up to the plate to address water quality concerns related to runoff.

There is no simple, quick fix, but producers who have invested their time and resources in new soil health practices are encouraged with the results. Demonstration farms in the Lower Fox River basin and in Door and Kewaunee counties have hosted field days throughout the year to share new practices on cover crops, minimum tillage and low-disturbance manure application.

> *"The farming community in Northeast Wisconsin has really stepped up to the plate to address water quality concerns related to runoff."*

Cooperatives, agronomists and other organizations have organized events where farmers can learn about new strategies and potential challenges when implementing conservation practices.

While it won't happen overnight, widespread use of these practices, coordinated with the many efforts by other industries and concerned citizens, can help turn the tide for the impaired waters in our area.

Every farmer can implement practices, large or small, to help Save the Bay.

While it may feel overwhelming to change long-held family farming practices, the Save the Bay team can serve as a resource and support network.

There is still plenty of work before us. But as long as we keep working together, I believe Save the Bay will be successful in building a viable community that achieves clean water and sustains a healthy Lake Michigan. In doing so, my hope is that future generations will feel as lucky as we do to call Northeast Wisconsin home.

Worldview

Peninsula Pride Farms garners international interest

By MaryBeth Matzek for PPF

Don Niles was a bit surprised when he received an email from an English agronomist and farm adviser asking to visit his Casco dairy farm, Dairy Dreams. The man's stated purpose: Learn more about Peninsula Pride Farms, a farmer-led organization Niles heads up that focuses on improving farming practices to better protect water quality in Kewaunee and southern Door counties.

Tim Stephens, a senior catchment adviser for groundwater for Wessex Water in Dorset in southwest England, is traveling to different parts of the world as part of his Nuffield Farming Scholarship, which is awarded annually to 20 United Kingdom researchers who focus on various topics. Stephens chose to study the different ways dairy farms around the world work to ensure clean water. As part of his research, he decided to visit Wisconsin and after doing basic research about the Dairy State, Peninsula Pride Farms captured his interest.

"One thing that my travels to different countries has shown me is that all around the world farmers are searching for ways of improving environmental stewardship," Stephens said.

> *"I wanted to find out how the members of PPF had taken ownership of the issues and subsequently led the way on finding solutions to it."*
>
> *-Tim Stephens*

Niles was excited to show Stephens around a couple Kewaunee County farms in late October and meet with PPF members to share what they have learned since the organization started less than two years ago.

"It was fascinating talking with him. There was so much give and take," Niles said. "It is interesting that farmers in England deal with some of the same issues we have here."

In England, farmers use nutrient management planning, growing cover crops, water quality monitoring and cost-share programs to improve water quality and soil health, Stephens said. Through his own observations, he noticed that when farmers are involved in the planning and process, implementation levels increase. That drew him to PPF.

"I wanted to find out how the members of PPF had taken ownership of the issue and subsequently led the way on finding solutions to it," Stephens said.

'Very impressed'

During his week-long visit to Wisconsin, Stephens also met with officials from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, UW Extension, the USDA Research Station in Marshfield and UW Discovery Farms. In Kewaunee County, Stephens was eager to see the UW Discovery Farms

tile drain project.

"I was very impressed by what Don Niles and his fellow leaders have achieved in just 18 months," Stephens said. "In this short space of time, they managed to get a great many farmers on board with the initiative and reached out to engage with a wide range of stakeholders."

PPF board member Nathen Nysse of Tilth Agronomy Group enjoyed comparing notes about soil and crops with Stephens, a trained agronomist.

"It was interesting to hear what they grew there. For example, they don't grow alfalfa at all – they use a lot of grasses in addition to their corn," Nysse said.

Managing manure

Just as in Wisconsin, manure management is a top concern in England, Stephens said. He wanted to learn how state farmers collect, treat, store, handle and apply manure. At Dairy Dreams, for example, Niles took Stephens on a tour of the farm's biodigester.

"There are some very good examples of (manure management) in Wisconsin so I was keen to see these for myself," Stephens said.

Stephens and PPF leaders plan to stay connected via email. Stephens also offered to host interested PPF members if they wanted to come to Wessex and see how English farmers deal with some of the same issues Wisconsin farmers face.

Next up for Stephens is a visit to New Zealand in February where he will also meet with farmers on environmental issues. "It will be interesting to see if there are any similar groups to PPF there," he said.

After his visit to New Zealand, Stephens will write a report for the United Kingdom agricultural industry about what he learned.

"I am certain that the farmers I work with will be interested in PPF and how it is operating, as it is a model which could be replicated elsewhere," he said.

PPF farmers join Discovery Farms tile project

Aaron Pape

By PPF

Five members of Peninsula Pride Farms are among numerous farmers in Brown, Door, Kewaunee Manitowoc and Shawano counties participating in a University of Wisconsin Discovery Farms tile project.

Water quality in and around drain tile in fields are being analyzed. Data collection began in the fall, said Aaron Pape, tile drainage education coordinator for UW Discovery Farms.

Monitoring sites include one centrally located site in each county that has intensive edge-of-field monitoring and several surrounding satellite sites where periodic grab sampling is taking place, Pape said. Results from sampling sites will then be related back to intensive sites.

"This collaboration will lead to great advances in water quality. We can learn a lot from each other," Pape said. "UW Discovery Farms benefits from the information collected and the farms benefit from getting an opportunity to trial different techniques that will improve the quality of their water and soil."

Learn more by going to uwdiscoveryfarms.org and click on "On-Farm Projects"

DISCOVERY FARMS WISCONSIN

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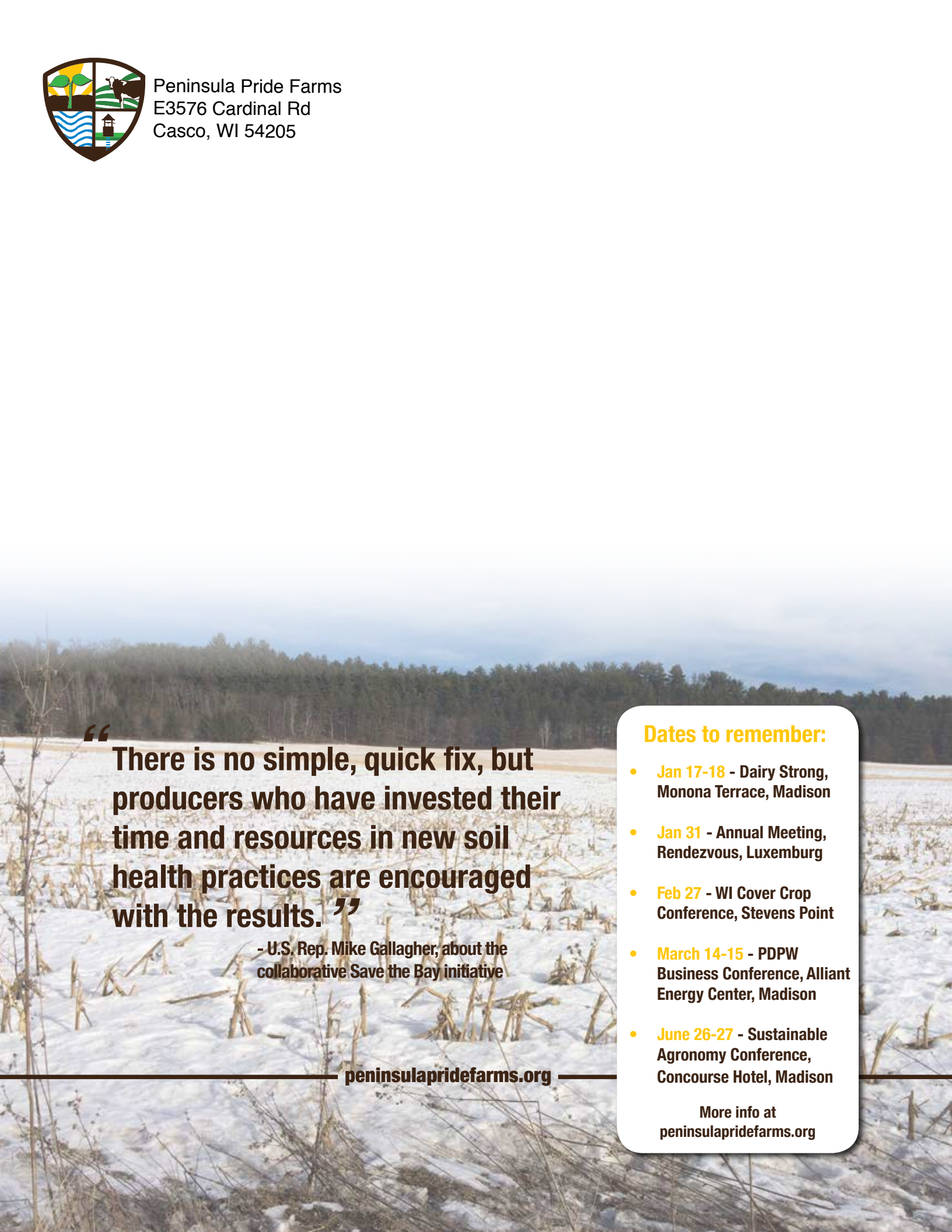

> “There is no simple, quick fix, but producers who have invested their time and resources in new soil health practices are encouraged with the results.”
>
> - U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, about the collaborative Save the Bay initiative

peninsulapridefarms.org

Dates to remember:

- Jan 17-18 - Dairy Strong, Monona Terrace, Madison
- Jan 31 - Annual Meeting, Rendezvous, Luxemburg
- Feb 27 - WI Cover Crop Conference, Stevens Point
- March 14-15 - PDPW Business Conference, Alliant Energy Center, Madison
- June 26-27 - Sustainable Agronomy Conference, Concourse Hotel, Madison

More info at peninsulapridefarms.org