



# COLUMBIA COUNTY

Land & Water Conservation

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112 East Edgewater Street  
Portage, WI 53901

## **Nominator:**

Kurt Calkins & Todd Rietmann  
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## **2023 Conservation Farm Family of The Year Award Nomination**

### **Nominee:**

**Nominee Name(s):** Dave Schoepp, Nancy Schoepp and Ron Schoepp  
Dave, Nancy and Ron Schoepp of Schoepp Farms LLC,  
N2007 East Harmon Road, Lodi, WI 53555  
**Main Contact:** Ron Schoepp (608) 576-5585  
**Email:** [rschoepp84@gmail.com](mailto:rschoepp84@gmail.com)

- 1. Give a brief biographical sketch of nominee(s). Include their conservation accomplishments, community involvement, commitment to conservation and other relevant information.**

Schoepp Farms LLC is operated by Dave Schoepp, Nancy Schoepp, Ron Schoepp, and family. They are a well-diversified grazing and cash grain operation that grows over 500 acres of corn, soybeans, winter wheat, and alfalfa, as well as 110 acres of grass pastures dedicated to custom raising 200 dairy heifers, 30-50 dry cows, and 15 grass-fed beef. This operation is in the town of West Point in Columbia County adjacent to Lake Wisconsin, where it could be said the cattle have the best view of the lake.

The operation's conservation ethics go back decades, beginning with Dave and Nancy Schoepp developing a Conservation plan in the 1980's and enrolling in the Farmland Preservation Program in 1988. In reality Ron, always says his dad's conservation ethic goes back even further to the 1960's when the plow was always picked up through the waterways while the neighbor just plowed through them. Then later Ron was always reminded by his dad to shut the sprayer off for the waterways. So it was no surprise that the Scheopps added No-tilling in 1991 for their operation, with the complete conversion to all no-till by 1995. Cover crops were then brought into their operation in 1997 when they frost seeded red clover into a winter wheat field. Dave and Nancy's son Ron also introduced rotational grazing to the

operation in the 1990's. During all these years of implementing conservation practice the conservation education and demonstration of these practices also had an equal importance to them. They have hosted numerous educational events, research studies, field days, and farm tours to promote and educate others on the importance of conservation with farming to enhance the farming operation while allowing and promoting a healthy environment for all the animals and insects at the same time ensuring soil health and water quality are protected.

The organizations the Schoepps have worked with include the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Columbia, Dane, and Sauk County Land and Water Resource Conservation Departments, two Producer-Led Watershed groups, the Sauk Soil and Water Improvement Group and the Lake Wisconsin Farmers Watershed Council, the Sand County Foundation, Grasslands 2.0, Green Lands Blue Waters, Rive Alliance of Wisconsin, Lake Wisconsin Alliance, University of Wisconsin Extension, and the University of Wisconsin Nelson Institute.

Conservation programs that the Schoepps have worked with include the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, Conservation Security Program, Land and Water Resource Management Program, Farmland Preservation Program, and both Sauk and Columbia County Grazing Networks. On their own and through these conservation programs the Schoepps have installed the following conservation practices for their farm: a barnyard runoff control system, roof gutters, underground outlets, heavy use protection, vegetated treatment area, diversion, access road, animal trails and walkways, fence, stream crossing, no-tilling, cover crops, nutrient management planning, conservation cover, field borders, rotational grazing, wildlife structures, pollinator plantings, and grassed waterways.

**2. Describe the nominee's projects and approaches to land and resource management. Include the impact on conservation and/or management of natural resources.**

The Schoepps have always put conservation, environment, and soil health principles as the most important components of their operation. More importantly when they take the next step, they want to show and educate others that these conservation and soil health principles can be a very viable part of a farming operation.

Their 30-plus years of no-tilling crops and rotational grazing has ensured that soil erosion is almost nonexistent in their operation. Water infiltration and retention have been significantly improved while crop residue and organic matter increases act like a huge sponge, which has allowed the farm to weather droughts and extreme rains with minimal yield losses. Their no-tilling techniques have also helped to preserve the microbial and fungal communities within the soil, which has contributed to the overall health of the soil.

Their grazing practices have allowed portions of the pasture to remain untouched annually until July 15, allowing for grassland birds to nest and produce offspring. The 60-day grazing rotation also allows native pollinators to continuously bloom and supply habitat for pollinating insects. The simple practice of making sure the cows defecate before being moved to the next paddock to ensure well-distributed nutrients for all pastures demonstrates the care the Shoepps have for their land.

They believe that compaction of the land is a critical part of their overall soil health, so tractors and cattle will not be on the land when excessive moisture is present in the soil. During these times, the tractors remain in the sheds and the cattle are in their heavy use areas and barnyard control systems to ensure any dirty runoff is properly filtered through the vegetated treatment area. Simultaneously, they must ensure that their roof gutters and diversion systems are in good working order to keep clean water clean. Proper maintenance of conservation practices, including ensuring that their nutrient management planner remembers to account for manure distributed from grazing animals and not just the manure hauled to the fields, shows their approach to land and water resources.

In the winter, the farm outwinters or grazes their cattle as late as possible on cover crops grown on row crop stover. This helps to reduce nitrogen loss in manure, which can reach up to fifty percent compared to when cattle are wintered in the barn. This practice also stops the chemical reaction between urine and manure, converting the urea into ammonia while at the same time distributing the manure over the landscape and limiting the amount of manure hauling. Also included are images of cow pies on corn stover to demonstrate how manure applied to the land in this manner does not runoff as much as hauled and spread manure.

Cover crops are an important part of the Schoepp operation; They started by frost seeding red clover into winter wheat. Since then they have also aerial applied, drilled in, and interseeded single mix and 10+ multiple species cover crops onto their fields. They want to ensure covers or residue are always in place to protect the soil, but at the same time feeding the living organisms in the soil to ensure the soil health of their land is there for water infiltration and protection.

Overall, Schoepp Farms has utilized their land and water conservation practices and soil health principles to make a resilient operation that is economically sound while at the same time striving to educate others that the practices they have implemented are critical to conserving land and water for all of us. The collaboration and willingness to work with numerous groups to promote conservation and soil health principles is evident in their everyday farming practices.

It is truly difficult to emphasize everything that the Schoepp's have done to protect land, water, and wildlife integrity for no other reason than genuinely caring about doing. They have generously given countless hours and donated their own money towards hastening conservation-related public outreach events. Despite everything that they are already doing and the steps they take each and every day for land

and water resources, they are always asking questions and wondering “how can this be improved or whether this demonstration plot will be something of interest to others.”

**3. List any other specific factors why the nominee should be given this award. Include any other activities, capabilities, innovative techniques or outreach efforts where they have demonstrated leadership.**

Schoepp Farms LLC hosted its first Field Day in 1997. The subjects of this event included no-till corn, soybeans, and alfalfa, as well as frost seeded red clover in winter wheat. In 2001, they hosted their first pasture walk, held in Sauk County. Schoepp Farms partnered with UW Extension to host a Soil Quality Field Day in 2005, where they dug soil pits in their grazing and row crop fields, and had a classroom session set up in their shed for attendees to learn about compaction effects from land tillage. Ron Schoepp presented at the Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin (PDPW) conference about raising dairy heifers on grass. He has also presented at multiple grazing conferences for both Grassworks and Columbia County Grazing Network. Since 2009, Schoepp Farms has been a tour stop for the UW Nelson Institute Orientation Tour for the new cohort of graduate students. From 2010 to 2016, the Schoepp Farm hosted numerous pasture walks, and in 2017, they had the pleasure of hosting the International Nuffield Farm Scholars Visit. During this visit, Schoepp Farms was privileged to collaborate with farm scholars from all over the world about different conservation practices. In October of 2020, the farm hosted the Columbia County Board, showcasing some of their practices. In April 2021, Schoepp Farms hosted Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes and DATCP Secretary Designee Randy Romanski, and others to show their conservation practices in preparation for Earth Day.

In June of 2021, the Columbia County Moo Day Brunch was held at Schoepp Farms. Also in 2021, Schoepp Farms hosted Conservation Day by the Lake for three producer-led watershed groups, Sauk Soil and Water Improvement Group, Lake Redstone, and the Lake Wisconsin Farmers Watershed Council, as well as the Sand County Foundation, where soil health practices and principles were demonstrated through grazing cover crops, low disturbance manure injection, roller/crimper use, and planting green. In 2021 Schoepp Farms began participation in a research grant received by the Sand County Foundation from the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program in regards to a three-year economic benefit of grazing livestock on cover crops with farmers in the Wisconsin’s Baraboo River watershed.

In 2022 Conservation Night by the Lake, featuring a walking tour of Schoepp Farms to showcase several sustainable agriculture practices, including cover crops and rotational grazing, with the goal of

engaging non-farming families and community members occurred. This event had Lake Wisconsin Farmers Watershed Council farmers give tours of the Schoepp farm explaining the soil health concepts and practices to tour participants.

Ron Schoepp has held several leadership positions throughout the agricultural community. He served as a Farmer Advisory Board Member for the Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trial (UW Agronomy) for 5 years. Ron was a Town of West Point Planning Commission member for 6 years. He is an organizing member and current committee member of the producer-led watershed group SSWIG, the Sauk Soil Water Improvement Group, which began in 2019. In 2020 Ron assisted in the development of the Lake Wisconsin Farmer Led Watershed Council producer led watershed group, and is currently a board member of this group. In 2022, Ron was asked by Dana Christel, Producer-led Watershed Protection Grant Program Manager with the Department of Ag Trade and Consumer Protection, to become a producer-led watershed mentor for the program which he has accepted.

As shown above Schoepp Farms has, over the years, constantly looked for ways to promote and utilize conservation practices and soil health principles in their operation. Their willingness to allow events on the farm such as field days, pasture walks, and research projects, demonstrates that they want to ensure that every person knows that farming and nature do go together.



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112 East Edgewater Street  
Portage, WI 53901

December 5th, 2022

Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association  
121 Pinckney St., Suite 420  
Madison WI 53703

Subject: 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the Year Award

Dear Selection Panel:

It is a pleasure for the Columbia County Agriculture, Extension, & Land and Water Conservation Committee to recommend a nomination for Schoepp Farms for the 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the Year Award.

Dave, Nancy and Ron Schoepp of Schoepp Farms, in rural Columbia County, have been an example of how a conservation ethic becomes a dynamic component in the management of their farming operation. Being adjacent to Lake Wisconsin, the Schoepps feel conservation is a very important component of their 500 acres of row crops; and 110 acres of pasture; for a custom raised dairy heifer operation.

The Schoepps have implemented no-till practices for over 30 years and now being all no-till since 1995. They have been in the farmland preservation program since 1987, and managed grazing has also been a staple of the Schoepp farm since the mid-1990's. Cover crops, barnyard runoff control, grassed waterways, conservation cover, field borders & bat houses, are just a few of the other practices they have implemented over the years.

The Schoepp family also feels that conservation education and promotion is a key component to help others discover the benefits from conservation practices. So, for over 20 years, they have been hosting pasture walks; soil/water conservation tours; research studies; and demonstration plots; for anyone to attend who has a desire to learn about conservation practices. Recently, they have been instrumental in the development of 2 producer-led watershed protection groups – "Sauk Soil & Water Improvement Group" and "Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council."

In this time, they have implemented not only conservation practices on their farm but have opened up their farm for educational opportunities that have led to not only local community improvements, but also influenced the lives of people from all over world to the benefits of conservation and farming together.

Sincerely

Mike Weyh, Chairman -Columbia County  
Agriculture, Extension, & Land and Water Conservation Committee

# SSWIG

SAUK SOIL & WATER IMPROVEMENT GROUP



December 12, 2022

Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association  
121 S. Pinckney Street, Suite 420  
Madison, WI 53707

To the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association;

The Sauk County Soil and Water Improvement Group (SSWIG) is sending this letter of support for the nomination of Ron Schoepp and Schoepp Family Farms LLC for the 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the Year. Ron has been highly involved with SSWIG since our group formed in 2019. He has also been instrumental in the creation of the Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council, which covers the watershed adjacent to SSWIG in Columbia County.

Ron continues to be an active leader in both producer-led groups. The Schoepp Family Farm, which is on a hilltop with a panoramic view of Lake Wisconsin, has hosted many well-attended conservation events over the last 25 years, including the Columbia County Board of Supervisors, UW-Extension Soil Quality Field Day, Conservation Day by the Lake, Columbia County Dairy Breakfast, Conservation Night by the Lake and annual field days for the UW-Nelson Institute Orientation Tour.

Ron has continued and expanded upon the range of soil health practices that his father has used for decades, including no-till, the use of cover crops and mob grazing. The Schoepp farm is also participating in the Sand County Foundation's ongoing research on grazing cover crops.

Ron and his family regularly host tours for researchers, students, agency representatives, and the general public to share their expertise and research ideas, advancing the sustainability of Wisconsin agriculture. Their generosity in sharing their farm and experiences has made a significant impact on both agricultural research and practice in Wisconsin.

The members of SSWIG believe that Ron and his family farm are well deserving of this award. Ron and his family are passionate advocates of using soil health practices and promoting their use by other farmers. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dale Gasser  
SSWIG Board Member

Ron Bula  
SSWIG Board Member

Darren Yanke  
SSWIG Board Member

Roger Bindl  
SSWIG Board Member



December 16, 2022

WI Land & Water  
121 S. Pinckney Street, Suite 420  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Selection Committee:

Lake Wisconsin Farmers Watershed Council is pleased to write this letter of recommendation in support of the nomination for Schoepp Farms for the WI Land & Water 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the Year

Ron Schoepp, along with his parents Dave and Nancy have been willing to make their farm available to the Lake WI Farmers Watershed Council numerous times for conservation education events.

Ron has been a key representative for our producer group but has also been highly involved with Sauk County Soil and Water Improvement Group.

The Schoepps have willingly worked with both groups to host a number of events. Conservation Day by the Lake in 2021 for local farmers in the area to learn about the soil health practices that are available to farms. Then in 2022 Conservation Night by the Lake was designed to invite lake homeowners to the farm to showcase what farmers in the Lake WI watershed are implementing to help soil health in the area. Also, the farm has been willing to host field day events to education people in regards to conservation practices such as cover crops, grazing and manure management practices.

The Schoepps over 25 years have been willing to open the farm to others to show how they implement conservation and now they have been a great resource for the Lake Wisconsin Farmers Watershed council.

We strongly recommend selection of Schoepp Farms as recipients of the 2023 WI Land & Water Farm Family of the Year.

Sincerely,

Joe Benish, President  
Lake Wisconsin Farmers Watershed Council



S5541 Glacier Drive  
Baraboo, WI 53913

December 16, 2022

To Wisconsin Land and Water 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the Year Committee:

I am honored to write a letter of recommendation for Schoepp Farms LLC to receive the 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the Year Award. As the State Grazing Lands Specialist (retired) for USDA-NRCS in Wisconsin and currently a grazing consultant, I have had the privilege of working with Ron Schoepp, who operates the farm with his parent's Dave and Nancy for the last 15 years. They are dedicated conservationists who share their passion and knowledge with the community. They have hosted numerous conservation field days, pasture walks, soil health workshops, tours, dinners, and the list goes on and on. Their farm is a showplace of conservation. It is located on a river terrace just above Lake Wisconsin and they pride themselves in keeping the lake free of runoff and sediment from their property. Over one half of their farmland is in perennial vegetation, grass and legume pasture, and the rest in annual row crops have been planted using no-till farming for almost 40 years. Their goal is to build soil health, enhance wildlife habitat, including pollinators, and improve the water quality of Lake Wisconsin.

They raise dairy heifers on pasture, grow row crops, and produce grass-fed beef on the farm. The livestock spend most of their time on pasture except when the weather is extremely wet, and the ground is soft. The cattle are put on a strategically placed concrete feedlot which drains into a large, vegetated basin through an extensive filter strip. All the run-off water stays in the soil profile in the basin and is taken up by the grassy vegetation. The lot is scraped daily, and a shade cloth is placed over the livestock during hot weather. The cattle walk to the pastures on dry access roads which are weatherized with gravel over fabric and topped with limestone screenings. There are no watering tanks in the fields in order to avoid a livestock concentration area around tank. The cattle are moved two to three times a day to achieve maximum grazing distribution.

Schoepp Farms, LLC has participated in many federal, state, and county conservation programs. They participated in the USDA-NRCS EQIP program on four occasions to implement prescribed grazing, nutrient management, heavy use area protection, and access roads. They have participated in the Conservation Stewardship Program on their whole farm since 2014. They worked with the County Land and Water Conservation Department to participate in the state conservation cost share program and worked with the Columbia County Extension in nutrient management planning.

For the last several years Ron has hosted the UW-Madison Nelson Institute's Graduate Student Agriculture tour on their farm to show students ecologically and environmentally sound farming practices and what each practice entails. In 2017 he hosted the Nuffield Tour, which included a group of international farmers and agriculture professionals, to highlight how farms in the U.S.A. implement environmentally sound practices. He has hosted many field days and pasture walks for the local watershed group and numerous grazing networks.

It is because of the care and concern that Ron and his family have for the land and natural resources on their farm that has inspired me in my profession as a grazing specialist and I know their passion has done the same for many of my colleagues in the conservation field. It is my pleasure to recommend them for this award.

Sincerely,  
Brian Pillsbury  
Grazing Consultant



Date: December 1, 2022

To: Members of the 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the Year Selection Committee

Sand County Foundation is very pleased to support Schoepp Farms, LLC as a candidate for the 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the Year award. Ron Schoepp and his family have been leaders in the world of Agricultural Conservation and related outreach and education for years, making them an outstanding candidate for this prestigious award.

Schoepp Farms has been involved in innovative approaches to conservation for years. They farm directly upslope of Lake Wisconsin, placing them in an environmentally sensitive area. Ron and his family take this very seriously and have concentrated on creating a farming system that has the protection of the lake as a priority. The Schoepp's have been at the forefront of the soil health management system concept since its beginning. Having practiced no-till, cover cropping and managed intensive grazing techniques for years. They are a staunch champion of the promotion of soil health and environmentally sound farming practices. Holding many field days and farm tours to demonstrate the what and why of how they farm in a soil health manner. Schoepp Farms has also taken a leadership role in both the well-established Sauk Soil & Water Improvement Group (SSWIG) and the new Lake Wisconsin Farmer Group. Ron has also become a frequent speaker and member of committees on agriculture and related conservation due to the respect the farming community has for him and his family.

In 2019, Sand County Foundation was blessed with the opportunity to work with the Schoepp Farm and other members of the SSWIG Farmer Group on a Cover Crop Grazing project funded by the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant system (SARE). Schoepp Farms has been a leader in helping with the design and manage this project to study the soil health benefits of integrating livestock grazing into cash-grain fields. Sand County Foundation is continuing to work with Ron on other endeavors and has even had him hold a farm tour for our Board of Directors to show off the Farm's Aldo Leopold Land Ethic based approach to land management. An approach that encompasses the heart of Sand County Foundation's mission.

Sand County Foundation is proud to recommend Schoepp Farms LLC for the 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the Year award for their whole-hearted commitment to Agricultural Conservation and its promotion at large scale.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Olson".

Greg Olson  
Field Projects Director  
Sand County Foundation



December 18, 2022

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing in support of the nomination of Schoepp Family Farms (Dave, Nancy and Ron Schoepp) for the award of Conservation Farm Family of the Year. As an educational outreach specialist with UW-Madison, I have worked with hundreds of Wisconsin farmers in the adoption of environmentally sound and profitable farming practices since 1991. I met the Schoepps just a few years into my career. A farmer-cooperator of mine, and a neighbor to the Schoepps, took me to a small field day they hosted showcasing a berseem clover cover crop planted following canning peas. This was a cover cropping practice being tried and demonstrated before cover crops were cool.

In the over 25 years since, I have observed Ron's passion for learning about, trialing and adopting advanced conservation farming practices such as no-till planting, diverse crop rotations with over-wintering cover crops and raising cattle with a mob-grazing approach to managed rotational grazing. The Schoepps have always strived for good stewardship of the rolling farmlands they run over-looking Lake Wisconsin in western Columbia County. They strive to be a good example of farming for both their farming and non-farm neighbors.

Ron, with help and support from Dave and Nancy, is continually observing, scrutinizing and evaluating his practices for success and modification. He collaborates with research projects conducted by both UW-Madison and the USDA Dairy Forage Research Center as well as non-profit organizations such as the Leopold Foundation, Wisconsin River Alliance and others. I have worked with Ron and his family on evaluation of cover crop options following winter wheat. We have learned from each other and formed a partnership that has generated information and experience shared with many others.

Ron genuinely strives to help other farmers recognize the need for and importance of conservation farming and works to connect his peers with educational and technical assistance resources. He has been a leader in the creation of two very active producer-led watershed groups in the last four years. Ron, Dave and Nancy have hosted numerous field days attended by farmers, conservationists, educators and students. Most recently, in June of 2021 the Schoepps hosted a Conservation by the Lake Field Day, in association with four producer-led watershed projects, attended by over 200 farmers and agricultural professionals. Then, in August of 2022, a Conservation by the Lake-Urban Edition was held at their farm, where farmers from the Lake Wisconsin Council producer-led group invited non-farm neighbors from the Lake Wisconsin community to attend. The event was a huge success that saw over 200 people attend to learn about what their farming neighbors were doing to protect soil and water quality in the watershed.

As I said near the beginning of this letter, I have worked with many farms in Wisconsin for many years in the trialing and adoption of environmentally sound and profitable farming practices. I can truly say that I have never seen any family more passionate about learning and sharing knowledge of environmental stewardship and soil and water conservation than the Schoepps. I wholeheartedly support their nomination for this important and prestigious award.

Sincerely,

Kevin B. Shelley, South Central Outreach Specialist

445 Henry Mall, Rm 318    Madison, WI 53706-1577    608-262-7486    email: [npm@hort.wisc.edu](mailto:npm@hort.wisc.edu)



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December 21, 2022

Dear Review Committee,

I am writing to provide my support for Schoepp Farms LLC to be awarded the Conservation Farm Family of the year award. The Sauk County Land Resources and Environment staff have had the pleasure of working with Ron Schoepp and Schoepp Farms LLC on various projects throughout the years. Although they are located just over the county line, Sauk County proudly claims Schoepp Farms LLC as one of our own!

Ron has been a vocal advocate for expanding conservation practices that support family farms while protecting and enhancing natural resources. He has played an important role in the foundation of and continued success of the local producer-led watershed protection group, Sauk Soil Water Improvement Group (SSWIG). Ron serves as a board member for SSWIG and also serves in a similar capacity with the Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council. Staff have enjoyed working with and learning from Ron through SSWIG. The success of SSWIG is because of the selfless work that the farmers, like Ron, put into it. He is actively engaged in grant writing, planning education and outreach programs, and implementing cost share programs to help neighbors successfully adopt conservation practices such as cover crops and no-till. This is just a small portion of what Ron provides for not one, but two groups, without compensation or hesitation. Ron is a true leader within our communities.

Ron is a gracious and enthusiastic host, welcoming all to the farm to learn, network, and share ideas. He has hosted state and local trainings for conservation staff and professionals along with community programs to bring lake and farmer groups together for common ground and shared goals. Schoepp Farms is an asset to Wisconsin agriculture and conservation in every way.

We encourage the committee to award the 2023 Farm Family of the Year Award to Schoepp Farms LLC. Ron and his family are most deserving of this award and truly exemplifies all aspects of outstanding leadership, innovation, and community support and education. Please contact me with any questions [melissa.schlupp@saukcountywi.gov](mailto:melissa.schlupp@saukcountywi.gov) or (608) 355-4838.

Sincerely,

Melissa Schlupp  
Conservation Manager



November 28, 2022

Wisconsin Land+Water Conservation Association  
121 South Pinckney Street, Suite 420  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Selection Committee:

I am pleased to write this letter in support of Columbia County Land and Water Conservation Department's nomination of Schoepp Farms for the Conservation Farm Family Award for 2023. I have known Ron Schoepp and his family since I served as Columbia County Extension Crops and Soils Agent from 1998 to 2006. I've known him to be a lifelong learner with a holistic approach to farming, always seeking out the sweet spot where profitability and conservation come together.

The Schoepps are very aware that for their farm, lying within sight of Lake Wisconsin, it is especially important to manage for water quality as well as productivity. They have always been up to that challenge! Schoepp Farms have been early adopters of a broad spectrum of conservation practices. They were no-tilling and using managed grazing when I first met them. During my Extension days, they hosted multiple pasture walks and an early soil health field day when soil health was a new idea. They continue to innovate and adapt, raising cover crops and annual forages as part of a diverse crop rotation and managing grazing on perennial pastures and annual cropland to evenly distribute manure nutrients for maximum efficiency.

It is not just the conservation practices they've adopted that make Schoepp Farms stand out. Perhaps the biggest contribution Ron and his family make to agricultural conservation is opening up their farm to help others learn. The Schoepps host multiple field days and events every year as well as participating in research and education projects and helping lead local and statewide organizations. As an advocate for agricultural conservation, Ron is articulate, enthusiastic and honest, effectively connecting with both farmer and consumer audiences.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for Schoepp Farms LLC for the 2023 Conservation Farm Family Award. I can't think of a more deserving candidate! Please let me know if you have any questions for me. My contact information is below.

Kindest regards,

Laura Paine  
Outreach Coordinator, Grassland 2.0  
608-338-9039  
[lkpaine@wisc.edu](mailto:lkpaine@wisc.edu)  
<https://grasslandag.org>



December 7, 2022

Todd Rietmann  
Columbia County  
Senior, Land and Water  
Resource Management Specialist

Dear Mr. Reitmann,

The Lake Wisconsin Alliance (LWA) supports without hesitation, the nomination of the Schoepp Farms, LLC for the 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the year award. Schoepp Farms clearly represents the kind of organization that LWA finds to be an integral part of their goals and objectives in educating community members in the role of environmental stewardship. Schoepp Farms is clearly passionate about doing their very best to help ensure water quality through their farming practices aimed at reducing runoff to our precious water resources.

LWA would also like to highlight the importance of Schoepp Farms efforts to not only protect our environment but their sincere efforts to help educate other farmers in the best practices to help assure water quality. We also would like to point to the efforts by Schoepp Farms to educate the non-farming community.

LWA not only supports the Schoepp Farms nomination but would like to thank them for their efforts in supporting our shared goal of providing safe waters for all of our community.

Sincerely,

David Kell  
President, Lake Wisconsin Alliance

Kirk Boehm  
Vice President, Lake Wisconsin Alliance

Educate • Inform • Advocate • Collaborate

PO Box 172 • Poynette, WI 53599  
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12 December 2022

To the Selection Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the River Alliance of Wisconsin to offer an enthusiastic recommendation that Schoepp Farms receive the 2023 Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Farm Family of the Year award. “Farmer” is an unhelpful descriptor for what Ron and his family do, though they wear that with pride as well. Ron Schoepp, who I’ve gotten to know through the Sauk Soil and Water Improvement Group (SSWIG) is a conservationist and steward of his land, and an artist about it. He and his family have a unified and experimental vision about what they do.

Aldo Leopold wrote, “If the land mechanism as a whole is good then every part is good, whether we understand it or not ... To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.” The Schoepps are intelligent tinkerers and one is swept up by that intelligence in speaking with them about what agriculture can do for the land.

I am the director of River Alliance’s agriculture program (Clear Water Farms). Ron has been a very helpful thought partner for our organization, and me personally, as we think about what is possible for an agricultural future grappling with climate change, economic uncertainty, and land that is in great need of protection. The Schoepps have dutifully served as a node to bring the conservation and farming communities together. Even when there’s disagreement about how to go about it, it is manifestly clear how committed they are to building a community that’s large enough to make a difference.

I’ll speak to the practical elements of his conservation work in a minute, but I place a huge amount of my assessment of Schoepp Farms on their leadership—in particular their ability to be compelling advocates for conservation and regenerative agriculture. There are a growing number of people who are doing better with their land. There are far, far fewer who are willing and able to articulate the vision behind this change and bring others along. It’s good for them to get credit, but it’s powerful for them to be pointed to as an example of what we should want other farm families—who are doing great conservation work, but too quietly—to do.

Rotationally grazing dairy heifers is a complicated activity. It requires a lot of ingenuity, trial, error, and tinkering. It is not as simple as letting the cows out into a field. But the primary element of Schoepp Farms’ systems, and the Schoepps’ vision for them, is to put the animals and crop system to work for building resilience on the landscape. The fact that they have done this in a way that is profitable compared to many conventional systems is a demonstration that the land ethic works. Schoepp Farms started no-tilling long before it was a commonly

understood term in the farming community. The integration of animals into cropping systems, mob grazing, outwintering in row crop fields, cover crops, 60-day grazing rotations, among other things make this a unique system. The complexity and innovation of it reflects the desire to mimic and use the natural “cogs and wheels” that keep nutrients and erosion in balance when there’s no intervention.

The technical details of the farm are fascinating, and the Schoepps will happily and patiently explain them to anyone. Which I think is every bit as important as actually doing them in the particular moment we’re in. And it’s for this aspect that I think most deserves to be recognized. The Schoepps are honest and open-minded advocates for the role of farming in advancing conservation. This is a subtle but important difference from much of what I hear from people working to extend agricultural conservation. Typically, people treat conservation as a correction, or as a way to minimize the negative effects of farming in “conventional” ways. Treating environmental protection as a central element of what the farm fundamentally does is a very different attitude, but one that reflects the land ethic directly.

Ron is very active in multiple farmer-led groups and, from my perspective at an environmental organization. In fact, we have recently asked him to join the River Alliance Board. The Schoepps are active participants in building an ecological community. This is voluntary. They don’t have to do it. But they do, enthusiastically, and that’s a very special sort of contribution. I’ve had conversations with Ron where he’s changed my mind or given me something very new to think about. I bring this back to my contacts with environmental organizations. He listens and is willing to consider views he might not agree with. These are traits that are essential to the agricultural land conservation movement. It succeeds or fails as a group activity.

River Alliance is very supportive of Schoepp Farms receiving the 2023 Conservation Farm Family of the Year Award. Calling them out as a model is, I’m sure, flattering, but it’s *valuable* to the rest of us who need leaders to point the way.

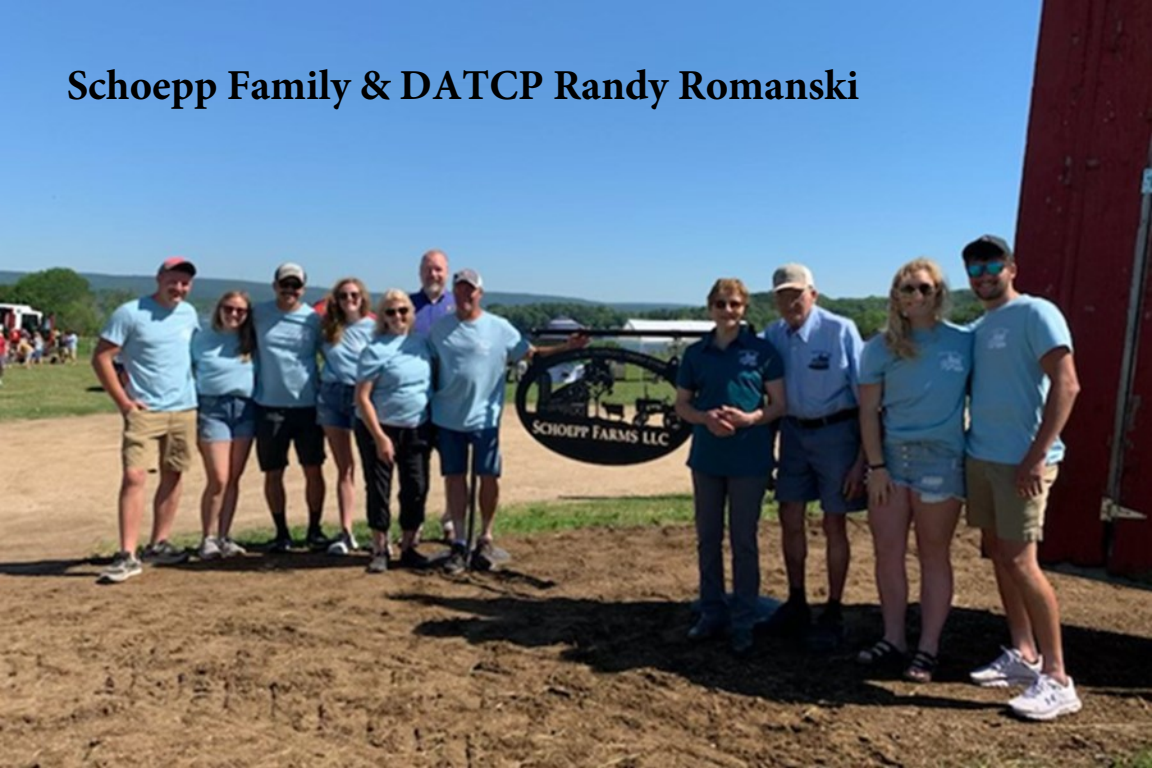
Please feel free to reach out with any questions,



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# Schoepp Family & DATCP Randy Romanski



# Schoepp Farm



# Ron Schoepp Discussing No-Till Practice



**Ron Schoepp speaking about grazing & pastures.**



# Front Row: Dave & Nancy Schoepp at Conservation Night By the Lake



# Pasture Walk at Schoepp Farms





# Cover Crops at Schoepp Farms





[https://www.hngnews.com/lodi\\_enterprise/news/local/lodis-schoepp-farms-to-host-columbia-countys-43rd-annual-moo-day-brunch/article\\_5b06fffd-5c6b-51b7-b2a6-10f13dfad763.html](https://www.hngnews.com/lodi_enterprise/news/local/lodis-schoepp-farms-to-host-columbia-countys-43rd-annual-moo-day-brunch/article_5b06fffd-5c6b-51b7-b2a6-10f13dfad763.html)

FEATURED

## Lodi's Schoepp Farms to host Columbia County's 43rd annual Moo-Day Brunch

plindblad  
May 24, 2021



Schoepp Farms in Lodi will host the 43rd annual Columbia County Moo-Day Brunch on June 19, from 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

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Columbia County's 43rd annual Moo-Day Brunch will be hosted by Schoepp Farms LLC of Lodi on Saturday, June 19, from 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Costs for the brunch are \$7 for those 11 years and older. For attendees between the ages of 4-10 years old, it's \$4, and the event is free for those ages 3 and under who are accompanied by a paying adult. Those who bring a non-perishable food item will get \$1 off.

Grilled-cheese sandwiches will be served, along with pizza, cheese, yogurt, milk and ice cream sandwiches.

Antique tractors will be on hand for viewing. There will also be a pedal tractor pull, as well as other entertainment. Alice in Dairyland will also make an appearance.

Schoepp Farms is a third-generation family farm in the Westpoint township. Fred and Elizabeth Schoepp, along with their son David Schoepp, moved from a farm on Van Ness Road to this location in 1949.

In 1959, David married Nancy Frey, of Roxbury, and they raised five children on the farm: Dan, Tom, Judy, Ron, and Al. At the time, they ran a typical non-Dairy farm, raising beef cattle, hogs, chickens, and crops.

In 1993, Ron, the second-youngest child of Dave and Nancy, married Tara. Dave and Nancy built a new home next to the farm, and Ron and Tara moved into the original farmhouse. In 1995, Schoepp Farms began raising dairy heifers. They've been raising dairy heifers from Enge's Meadowood Farm Inc., in Lodi, for 22 years, and recently began caring for their dry cows, as well.

In 2001, Schoepps began to rotationally graze these heifers, and in 2012, they built a heavy-use area, or feed lot, to hold the cattle when the ground is too wet for housing animals on the paddocks. In 1991, Schoepp Farms began to no-till their fields. They've been using cover crops for more than 20 years, as well, and have been able to reintroduce animals into their row-crop rotation.

Ron and Tara have three children, all of whom help around the farm. Their daughters, Lylia and Kami, now teach in the Lodi School District, and their son, Noah, works for Clemens Excavating Co., although he can often be found helping around the farm, as well. They are proud to have raised hardworking children who love to be near the farm and their family.

At 85 years old, Ron's Dad, Dave, still loves planting and harvesting almost every acre on the farm, and Nancy, 81, still enjoys tending to her large garden and feeding everyone who's at the farm for the day.

While Schoepp Farms may not be a traditional dairy farm, they're connected to the dairy-farming community and are very involved in conservation promotion and encourage and work with other farmers in regard to land-management practices that help retain soil on the land, and out of lakes and rivers.

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plindblad

NEWS

# Lodi family to host Columbia Co. Moo Day Brunch and more

**Gloria Hafemeister**  
Correspondent

June will be an unusually busy month for the Schoepp family of Lodi when they host the annual Columbia County Moo Day brunch and then, later the same day, a Conservation Day by the Lake sponsored by the Lake Wisconsin Farmer Led Watershed Council and others.

As if that isn't enough, the week before, Kami Schoepp, whose grandparents, Dave and Nancy, and parents Ron and Tara, who operate the third generation farm, will celebrate her wedding right there on the farmstead that overlooks Lake Wisconsin between Lodi and Prairie du Sac.

While this is not a traditional dairy farm with milk cows, the farm is an example of how farmers care for livestock and the land.

Schoepp Farms is a third-generation family farm located in Westpoint township. Fred and Elizabeth Schoepp, along with their son David Schoepp, moved from a farm on Van Ness Road to this location in 1949.

Ten years later, David married Nancy Frey of Roxbury, and they raised five children on the farm: Dan, Tom, Judy, Ron, and Al. At the time, they ran a typical non-dairy farm, raising beef cattle, hogs, chickens and crops.

In 1993, Ron, the second-youngest child of Dave and Nancy, married Tara. Dave and Nancy built a new home next to the farm, and Ron and Tara moved into the original farmhouse.

Ron and Tara have three children, all of whom help around the farm. Their daughters, Lylia and Kami, now teach in the Lodi School District, and their son, Noah, works for Clemens Excavating Co., although he is often found helping

around the farm, as well. They are proud to have raised hardworking children who love to be near the farm and their family.

At age 85, Ron's father, Dave, still loves planting and harvesting almost every acre on the farm, and Nancy, 81, still enjoys tending her large garden and feeding everyone who's at the farm for the day.

Since 1995, the family has been custom raising dairy heifers for an area farmer. Recently they began caring for the farm's dry cows as well. The Schoepp's do this along with raising crops using conservation tillage and cover crops to protect the soil and prevent erosion.

Twenty years ago, the Schoepps began to rotationally graze the dairy heifers, and in 2012, they built a heavy-use area (or feed lot) to hold the cattle when the ground is too wet for housing animals on the paddocks.

As for the dairy heifers and dry cows, the family believe their pasture system provides the exercise the animals need for easier calving. During the summer, the animals enjoy a sprinkler system and shade trees. There are wind breaks and shelters to keep them warm on the coldest days of winter.

### **Moo Day Brunch provides options**

The Moo Day Brunch will run from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. In past years, about 1200 visitors have attended the Columbia county event. This year's event will be a bit different with a drive through options where folks can pick up their pre-packed brunch or an in-person experience, where their brunch can be eaten right on the farm.

Cost of the event is \$7 for ages 11 to adult, \$4 for ages 4-10 and free for those 3 and under with a paying adult. Those bringing a non-perishable food item will receive a discount of \$1 off their admission.

Menu items will be individually packaged. Grilled-cheese sandwiches will be served, along with pizza, cheese, yogurt, milk and ice cream sandwiches.

Antique tractors will be on hand for viewing. There will also be a pedal tractor pull, as well as other entertainment. Alice in Dairyland will also be on site.

The Schoepp family will have their farm equipment on display for visitors to view. The farm is located at N2007 E Harmon Rd., Lodi. Signs will direct visitors off of East Harmon Road since traffic will be one-way through the farm for the brunch with separate lines for drive-through and those eating on the farm.

### **Soil pits and more**

Those attending the brunch will have the opportunity to check out the soil pits and other displays that will be available to view for those planning to eat at the farm. Social distancing and mask wearing will be recommended for the event except for during eating.

When the Moo Day Brunch has concluded the farm will switch gears, hosting “Conservation Day by the Lake”. Three local farmer-led watershed groups have joined together to bring Rick Clark, an Indiana farmer, to the event to share how he implements regenerative agriculture and cover crops to improve his soil health and sustainable cropping practices.

The event will also include three breakout sessions highlighting soil pits and rainfall simulator, cover crop planting and use of a roller/crimper, low disturbance manure injection and grazing of cover crops.

Since 1991, Schoepp Farms has been practicing no-tilling on their fields and have been using cover crops for more than 20 years. In that time they have been able to reintroduce animals into their row-crop rotation. Dave and Ron Schoepp will discuss their practices and visitors will see firsthand the results of this 30-year effort.

Having guests on the farm is nothing new for the Schoepp family who have hosted tours for classes at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, showing the

benefits of the practices that help to protect the soil from erosion and build soil health.

This event includes a dinner and a second presentation by Rick Clark. The last part of the day will provide opportunities for networking among the farmers in attendance.

To learn more about the brunch or the Conservation Day contact the local Extension or Land and Water Conservation Office or the Sauk County LRE, Justine Bula at 608-355-4842. Space is limited and reservations must be made by June

[https://www.agupdate.com/agriview/news/crop/lake-health-important-to-conservation/article\\_fe4510a1-2eae-5f95-8739-45114b821ac8.html](https://www.agupdate.com/agriview/news/crop/lake-health-important-to-conservation/article_fe4510a1-2eae-5f95-8739-45114b821ac8.html)

TOPICAL TOP STORY

## Lake health important to conservation

**Lynn Grooms**

Jun 30, 2021



Cattle graze a summer cover-crop mix of 11 species being evaluated by the Sand County Foundation. The organization is encouraging other farmers to show the conservation and economic benefits of rotational grazing on cover crops such as those featured here. Photo by Lynn Grooms/Agri-View

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Lynn Grooms



LODI, Wis. – George Koepp pointed to Lake Wisconsin from a Schoepp Farms hilltop.

“That’s why we’re here,” said Koepp, a University of Wisconsin-Division of Extension agriculture educator.

The watershed is environmentally sensitive. To recognize that, Conservation Day by the Lake was being held at Schoepp Farms near Lodi. The event was attended by several representatives of producer-led watershed-protection groups as well as other farmers interested in learning about improving soil health and water quality.

Schoepp Farms is operated by Ron Schoepp and his wife, Tara Schoepp, and his parents, Dave and Nancy Schoepp. Their farm overlooks scenic Lake Wisconsin – a 7,197-acre lake located in Columbia and Sauk counties. The Schoepps mob-graze about 200 dairy heifers and 50 dry cows as well about 30 head of grass-fed beef cattle. They also raise corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa.

Conservation Day attendees learned about grazing practices, reduced-disturbance manure injection, cover crops, soil health and more. Available to answer questions were representatives from the Lake Wisconsin Producer Led Watershed Council, the Sauk Soil and Water Improvement Group, and the Producers of Lake Redstone.

Ron Schoepp is a member of the first two groups. He and his family are making a positive difference in the environment with their conservation-farming practices, he said.

“We can do it on a small scale and still make a difference,” he said.

Cattle graze a cover-crop mix of 11 species – millet, sudangrass, oats, ryegrass, rape, Raptor hybrid brassica, sunflower, forage pea, hairy vetch, medium red clover and Balansa Fixation clover. The Sand County Foundation is demonstrating the conservation and economic benefits of rotational grazing on cover crops such as those featured in the mix. Schoepp is one of four farmers with whom the foundation is working.

Feedback from participating farmers will help reduce the trial and error of grazing cover crops for farmers elsewhere, said Heidi Peterson, vice-president of agricultural research and conservation for the foundation. Called “Onto Greener Pastures with Rotational Grazing and Cover Crops,” the three-year project has been awarded funding from North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education.

Schoepp doesn’t normally graze cover crops in the summer due to the way in which he manages his system. Instead he will plant a cover crop the first week of August and graze cattle on it in October and November.

He wants the summer paddocks to have a haybine-cut look and a manure-spread look, he said.

“I like the fact we get that look without ever starting a tractor, if grazing is properly managed,” he said. “Early-October-grazed cover crops can be taken that low because crops will normally grow back before dormancy.”

He plants three or four species that can overwinter. Those species could include clovers, cereal rye, volunteer wheat, kale and winter peas – the latter of which is good for adding nitrogen. But cover-crop performance is dependent on weather and time of planting. He said he’s seen significant differences between years.

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- 3 Corn prices good but drifting lower to end the year**
- 4 Soybean prices drifting higher as year-end nears**

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After about mid-November he moves cattle to graze in fields that had been planted to corn. The cattle graze corn stalks; their manure supplies nitrogen to the soil. Row crops the following spring benefit from that nitrogen.

Schoepp grazes cattle in long narrow paddocks surrounded by portable fencing. Before moving cattle he ensures they're standing up, and urinating and defecating so they don't do that in the new paddock. The process is key because it spreads out nutrients, he said.

The "mob" grazes the paddock and then the moving process begins again. Each paddock is allowed 60 days to regenerate, although cattle could probably be grazed there again in 45 to 50 days, Schoepp said. He has about 125 acres available for grazing but some of that land is used for producing hay.

Animal manure provides enough nutrients for cover crops so Schoepp doesn't need to apply purchased fertilizer. He moves fencing twice each day so cattle can walk to watering tanks, but they also find a great deal of moisture in the thick stand of cover crops.

Schoepp is planning to experiment with interseeding oats between corn rows at the same time the corn is planted, he said. He wants to see whether oats would have enough time to grow and go to seed. The oats could provide more biomass for grazing after corn is harvested.

Conservation Day attendees saw a reduced-disturbance manure-injector demonstration courtesy of Mike Benish and his son, Joe Benish. The two milk about 400 cows on their Lodi-area farm. They made the decision to purchase the manure injector after seeing how heavy rains in 2019 affected top spreading. Now they inject manure into the soil at a depth of 4 to 6 inches. There's less odor and little down pressure so there's little soil disturbance, Joe Benish said.

Rick Clark from Warren County, Indiana, told attendees he's transitioned from using chemical inputs to using regenerative practices such as no-till, planting cover crops and implementing a seven-crop rotation. That involves corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa, peas and milo. The seventh "crop" is cattle. Of the 7,000 acres he farms, 4,200 acres are in certified-organic production. The remainder of the land is in transition to becoming certified-organic.

Clark has been farming for 37 years. He's been no-tilling soybeans for 17 years and began no-tilling corn 12 years ago. He also began planting cover crops 12 years ago. Wheat or milo following a cereal crop is essential to his system, he said. He uses a warm-season cover-crop mixture of 16 species that he can chop for forage and feed to cattle. He plants corn or soybeans into living cover crops. Termination of the cover crops may not occur for as many as 30 days after planting, but he generally terminates them with a roller-crimper within five days. The system could be implemented in Wisconsin if cool-season cover crops are established early enough in the fall.

He plants soybeans before corn; he doesn't plant corn until after Mother's Day.

"You need to let legume packages grow, fix nitrogen and build biomass," he said.

The use of cover crops, he said, limits evaporation and maintains moisture in the soil. That's especially important when one is facing drought conditions. Cover crops also help suppress weeds while the crop begins to develop a canopy, further suppressing weeds. Clark has narrowed his row spacing to 20 inches for both corn and soybeans.

He's planting as well as harvesting some crops together. Farmers might consider harvesting together corn and faba beans, for example; faba beans could provide another protein source for animals, he said.

"Or you could plant soybeans with peas and harvest them together, increasing protein by 2 percent to 4 percent," he said.

In fall 2020 he planted winter wheat followed by winter-hardy peas. At the end of May this year he no-tilled soybeans into those crops, he said. He'll then harvest together wheat and peas, doubling crops to improve nutrient density.

Visit [datcp.wi.gov](http://datcp.wi.gov) and search for "**producer led**" for more information.

Lynn Grooms writes about the diversity of agriculture, including the industry's newest ideas, research and technologies as a staff reporter for Agri-View based in Wisconsin.