

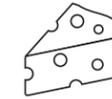
**Farmers of the Sugar River
Green County LWCD
1627 4th Ave. West
Monroe, WI 53566**

Happy
New Year



2026 Events Planned

Group Tour of National Historic Cheesemaking Center Museum-
2108 6th Ave, Monroe
Tues. Jan 20th at 1pm



Biological Farming Interest Group meeting-
Mon. Jan 19 & Feb 16



meet at noon at USDA Service Center, Monroe- lunch and chat

A meeting for farmers that want to learn more about certain organic or more biologically-based farming practices that could be drawn from to create better systems. Farmers share and learn from each other on things they've picked up from conferences and other sources.



Roundtables- Jan 14 & Feb 5

You are invited to one or both to chat with other farmers- talk about what went well in 2025 and what you hope to do or change in 2026 and a good chance to ask questions on how to make something work in your system.

**Wed. Jan 14th- Noon- meet upstairs at
Ohana Kitchen, New Glarus (200 5th Ave) (we'll buy lunch)
Thurs. Feb 5th- Noon at Spring Grove Town Hall
N2475 Hwy GG, Brodhead (Please RSVP to Tonya for lunch count)**



Annual Meeting- Wed. February 18 @ Albany Lions Club,

402 N Cincinnati St, Albany

Doors open at 9:30am

Starts at 10am and conclude by 3pm

planned topics to discuss: collared grazing (virtual fence), high oleic soybeans, coexisting with beavers & statewide cover crop study



**Shop Talk- March 17- Seed lubricants & Biologicals in
setting up corn planters**

@ Jake Kaderly's shop, Giese Rd.- more details to be announced

For more information and RSVPs contact Tonya Gratz @ 608-426-2218 or
Tonya.Gratz@wi.nacdnet.net

2026 NEWSLETTER

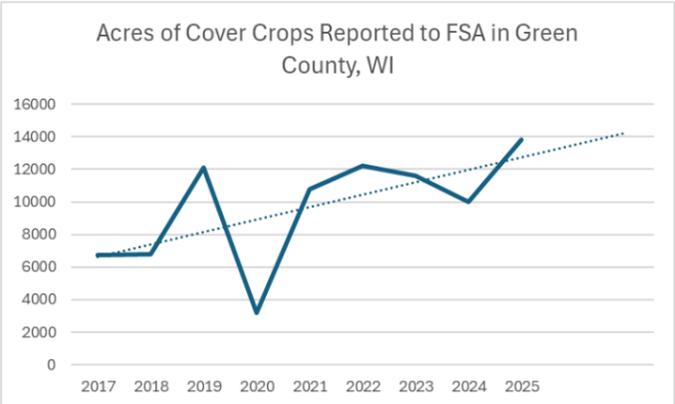


A cover crop and planter showcase was held Aug 7 at Nick Faessler's. A cover crop mix of flax, rapeseed, cabbage, mustard, buckwheat, sunflower, okra, millet, sorghum sudan, foxtail millet, cowpeas, mung beans, soybeans and sunn hemp was planted by various drills and planters after wheat harvest. Unfortunately we didn't have a follow up field day to see the results. But to the casual observer, the drills and planters that did a little more disturbance at planting had quicker germination and emergence. After a month, no difference could be seen as all methods caught up. The field was clipped in early September to curtail a noxious weed - waterhemp - from making seed.

<https://greencountywcd.com/plans-summaries/>
 Is our webpage that has links to past presentations, handouts and resources going back to the start of the group in 2018 or just google "Farmers of the Sugar River"

Cover Crops Used in The Sugar River Watershed
 by Tonya Gratz, Soil Conservationist

Cover crops are gaining popularity for many reasons. Top five reasons that I hear from farmers as to why they are using them is for suppressing weeds, minimizing erosion, improving soil organic matter, reducing compaction and improving soil structure. The most commonly used cover crop used in our watershed and in the area is cereal rye. Many farmers buy certified seed to plant as a cover crop, but some keep a few acres to mature and harvest seed. Then they have their own "bin run" seed to use for their cover crop needs in fall. If not stored properly, the germination could be effected, it's always a good idea to have a germination test run on the seed (for about \$15). If you find really cheap seed, low germination could be the reason- take this into consideration when choosing seed. Cereal rye is very versatile and hearty. It has the lowest germinating temperature of all the commonly used cover crops at 34 degrees. It creates very fibrous roots- making more soil aggregation potential and infiltration capabilities. Of the cover crops that were cost shared this past year, nearly half were exclusively planted to cereal rye. The next most popular at almost 20% was a winter wheat mix- with rye or brassicas and other broadleaves. Sometimes farmers choose to use wheat as a cover at times to not have to worry about volunteer cereal rye contaminating their wheat crop if they choose to grow it in the rotation. And it's ok to let the volunteer small grains grow- it's providing a living root and cover to the soil. Planting cover crops has become more common. I summed FSA's reporting acres for cover crops in the chart below for recent years. 2020 throws things askew, but if ignoring that wonky Covid year, there has been a steady increased in acres. The solid line is actual acres and the dotted line is the trend line. And not all cover cropped acres are reported!



Sand County Foundation - Farmer Led Fund Grant Supported planting 1,855.15 acres of cover crops. \$55,918.80 was paid (average of \$30.14/ ac) in 2025. There is still \$29,081.20 to support cover crop planting in 2026. Payment is structured to incentivize earlier plantings. Eligibility requires that no federal cost sharing has been made on fields of interest in the past. FSA paperwork needs to be up to date. The planting will need to meet NRCS specs. The fields need to be in the Sugar River Watershed. See Farmers of the Sugar River website or Tonya for more information and an application.

2026 plans for demonstrations in the watershed

- Alvin Francis will be planting green into cereal rye to suppress white mold in soybeans. This field had had past issues with white mold in soybeans. This idea is coming from the thought that winter wheat and other small grains form an early season canopy that creates conditions for the fungus to germinate prematurely. The hope is by the time the soybeans bloom (the time they usually contract white mold) the white mold fungus is already spent.
- Dan Truttmann be evaluating yield and economics to determine if starter fertilizer is needed in a manure system. Corn will be planted with and without starter fertilizer in 2-3 acres of plots, soil sampled and then yield checked at the end of the growing season to evaluate if the starter made an economic impact. Results will be presented at the 2027 annual meeting.
- Ron Mandel is converting cropland to managed pasture on 90 acres. He is moving from a low input crop system to a grazing enterprise to show the feasibility in economics. The idea is to make this farming system more tangible for more farmers in the area- planning to host a field day in spring.

I am Soil - A poem by #Youth4Soil's
 Eliseus Bamporineza

Yes, I am soil,
 I live beneath your feet,
 Feeding seeds that will keep you fit.
 I am the womb that births your worth
 After you have impregnated me with your toil.
 I am the depth from which every growth springs forth.

I am the nitrogen that nourishes the roots of fruits you enjoy.
 I am the worm that wriggles, giving the dead life again.
 I am the water that carries nutrients you find in your food.
 I am the bacteria that make your crops rise for good.
 I am a rock that anchors your sustenance, not a toy to annoy.
 I am a book that carries the tales of your existence, a treasure not to stain.

See, I am not a dumping site to litter and spoil.
 Just like you, I need to be covered against floods and storms.
 I need to be healed and cared for your land to bloom.
 Don't let your greed overexploit or burn me for you'd waste your toil.
 Just as a mother needs to eat to feed the baby,
 I too must be fed to feed you or else your life finds its doom.
 Let protecting me become your hobby.

"Essentially, all life depends upon the soil ... There can be no life without soil and no soil without life; they have evolved together." --- Charles E. Kellogg, USDA Yearbook of Agriculture, 1938

"LAND, THEN, IS NOT MERELY SOIL; IT IS A FOUNTAIN OF ENERGY FLOWING THROUGH A CIRCUIT OF SOILS, PLANTS, AND ANIMALS." --- ALDO LEOPOLD, A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC, 1949

Please pass this on to a neighbor or friend and invite them along to a meeting! If you are interested in learning more or to get on our email list (more frequent communication) please contact Tonya Gratz via email Tonya.Gratz@wi.nacdnet.net or by phone (608)325-4195 ext. 2684 or 608-426-2218