

Land Ethic Mentorship

Measuring Impact: Insights from the First Five Years

FEBRUARY 2026



Building Relationships, Improving the Land

Launched in 2020 by Sand County Foundation, the Land Ethic Mentorship program helps historically underserved farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners succeed by connecting them with trusted mentors, a supportive peer network, and national conservation resources. Through our work with mentees and conservation service providers, we've seen that **trusted organizations and individuals play a vital role** in helping farmers navigate conservation programs and practices, leading to more conservation practices on the ground. By ensuring they have someone to turn to for guidance, the program builds confidence, strengthens decision-making, and helps turn challenges into opportunities—creating **healthier land, stronger farms, and more resilient rural communities.**



“

This program made the pivotal impact making me believe my dream of being a successful, beginning, woman farmer a reality. Because of that support, I am actively working on that dream.

- MENTEE

Metrics of Success

- **Enrolled 148 historically underserved farmers and rancher “mentees”** across 34 states.
- **Created a trusted network** that helps mentees find clear, reliable guidance on conservation practices, technical assistance, and USDA cost-share programs.
- **Formed partnerships with over 20** national, regional, and local organizations.
- **Engaged 500+ participants in 36 Conservation Conversation** webinars.
- **Hosted 300+ farmers at 8 field days** in Alabama, California, Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, Virginia, and Wisconsin.
- **Supported 39 mentees with scholarships** to attend conservation conferences in Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Texas.



Building Leaders

88% said their **mentor improved** their **farming practices**

94% said their **mentor had a positive impact** on their **conservation practices**.

After participating in the LEM, **mentees engaged in an average of 2.9 new networks or connections**.

75% believed that the **LEM was very or extremely useful** to their farming practices.

67% explored new resources or opportunities because of the program.

79% feel more confident.

 Soil health has increased our production

Advancing Conservation

Land Ethic Mentorship participants improved their agronomics, protected water resources, and created wildlife habitat by adopting:

- Native Plantings & Specialty Crops
- Soil Health Management
- Silvopasture & Agroforestry
- Water Conservation Practices
- Nutrient Management & Herbicide Reduction
- Rotational Grazing & Pasture Improvements
- Organic Production & Marketing
- Composting Manure and other Organics

 I implemented a prescribed grazing plan to improve forage quality.



Scaling Impact

Mentees are a diverse group; they are farmers from across the country, working at different scales and with different crops and conservation challenges. What unites them is a shared belief: producing food, fuel, and fiber should not come at the cost of the land. This shared land ethic creates connections that transcend geography, production type, or farm size. We call it "**network disruption**". Urban vegetable growers exchanging ideas with rural row-crop farmers, or a mentee in Oklahoma exploring grass-fed beef and direct sales after talking with a Wisconsin-based mentor. By connecting across boundaries, our mentees gain **new ideas, networks, and opportunities**.

" I am using cover crop practices and have seen improvement in just one year. It has given me incentive to continue learning more about soil health and sharing with others in my community.

Catalyzing Change

The Land Ethic Mentorship is sparking real change. One mentee joined a land trust and launched a **7  acre farm**, while others are stepping into leadership roles on conservation district boards, expanding their operations, exploring new land opportunities, serving on grant review committees, and participating in conferences and meetings that extend beyond their local communities.

Learn More

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Sand County Foundation is a national nonprofit conservation organization that inspires and empowers farmers, ranchers, and other landowners to ethically care for water, soil, and wildlife.

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