



Leadership for Midwestern Watersheds

**THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER 4, 2025
ONLINE**

1:00 PM TO 3:30 PM CENTRAL

A NETWORK FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AMONG AGRICULTURAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

Navigating Change through Innovative Partnerships:

Reductions in federal funding invite innovative and collaborative solutions. Join us via Zoom to explore how industry partnerships, farmer involvement, and state-led efforts are creating new pathways for impactful conservation.

**REGISTER
HERE**

1:00 PM - 1:15 PM | Introduction

Speakers:

Haleigh Summers and Craig Ficenec
Sand County Foundation

1:15 PM - 2:00 PM | Industry Sustainability Partnerships

Speakers:

- **Kelsey Ryan**, Nestlé Purina
- **Kelsey Swango Billings**, Field to Market
- **Tricia Verville**, Sand County Foundation
- **Chelsea Zegler**, McCain Foods

Moderator:

Heidi Peterson, Sand County Foundation

Learn about the partnerships necessary to meet corporate sustainability commitments. This session explores how companies identify projects, what they need from on-the-ground partners, and how local efforts can align with industry priorities. Speakers will share their experience with farmer/industry partnerships, followed by audience Q&A.

2:00 PM - 2:10 PM | Break

2:10 PM - 2:50 PM | Emerging State Efforts

Speakers:

- **Jean Brokish**, American Farmland Trust
- **Alexa Davis**, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources
- **Dani Heisler**, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
- **William Jaquinde**, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Moderator:

Craig Ficenec, Sand County Foundation

Discover innovative state-level programs designed to advance soil health and conservation through farmer leadership. Speakers will share unique approaches and lessons learned, followed by an interactive Q&A session.

2:50 PM - 3:15 PM | Breakout Discussions

Choose your conversation! Join one of several breakout topic themes including: Engaging Farmer Leaders, Industry Partnerships, and Innovative Incentive Opportunities, with additional groups announced at the session.

3:15 PM - 3:30 PM | Report Back & Closing Remarks

Moderator:

Haleigh Summers, Sand County Foundation

Breakout groups share key takeaways followed by closing reflections for watershed partnerships.

Presented by Sand County Foundation with support from:



SPEAKER BIOS



Jean Brokish - Deputy Director for the Midwest Region, American Farmland Trust

Jean provides leadership and coordination for programs advancing conservation cropping systems. Key initiatives include the Illinois Sustainable Agriculture Partnership, the Illinois Cover Crop Initiative, and farmer-led water quality programs. Jean grew up on a dairy farm in southwest Wisconsin, has a Bachelor of Science in agronomy from the University of Wisconsin at River Falls, and a Master of Science in soil science from Purdue University.



Alexa Davis - Soil and Water Programs Coordinator, Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment

Alexa works directly under the agency director helping to communicate agency wide activities and implement statewide programs focusing on soil. Alexa holds two Bachelor of Science degrees from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (UNL) in Water Science and Environmental Restoration Science, as well as a Master of Science in Natural Resources.



Dani Heisler - Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program Manager, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Dani supports 50 producer-led groups throughout Wisconsin in her role with Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. In addition to sharing her passion for agricultural conservation, she practices the art and science of managed grazing in Wisconsin's Driftless Area. Dani grew up on a beef operation in western Wisconsin, and received a Bachelor of Science, studying animal science, agronomy, and food science at the University of Wisconsin at River Falls.



Will Jaquinde - Regenerative Agriculture Resource Specialist, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Will manages the Regenerative Farmer Network Grant and the Veteran Regenerative Agriculture Demonstration Farm. He previously farmed at the Farm at Trinity Health Ann Arbor, educating the community on agriculture and healthy eating, and created a beginning farmer training program as Sustainable Agriculture Instructor with MSU Extension. Will earned his Master's in Community Sustainability at MSU and is passionate about supporting Michigan farmers and educating beginning farmers.



Kelsey Ryan, Ph.D. - Senior Manager of Environmental Sustainability, Nestle Purina

Kelsey is a food and nutrition professional with experience in research, product development, operations, nutrition, and sustainability. She is a Senior Manager of Environmental Sustainability at Nestle Purina North America, leading ingredient strategy to promote a resilient food system. She drives progress on environmental sustainability by supporting work on nature, regenerative agriculture, and emissions reduction in the value chain, considering future product and supply needs.



Kelsey Swango Billings - Vice President of Innovation and Stakeholder Engagement, Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture

Kelsey leads efforts to advance sustainable agriculture through collaboration and innovation. Previously, she was Senior Director of Industry Affairs and Sustainability at the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives (NCFC), overseeing sustainability initiatives, climate policy, and member engagement. Kelsey holds an MBA from Indiana University's Kelley School of Business and an M.S. in Agricultural Economics from Purdue University.



Tricia Verville - Director of Agricultural Systems, Sand County Foundation

Tricia plays an active role in Sand County Foundation projects across the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins. She works with farmer-led groups to achieve water quality and climate resiliency goals. She previously served as a research project manager and safety lead for the Soil Health Partnership, a project of the National Corn Growers Association. Prior to that, she worked as a crop specialist, and as a deputy conservation warden for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.



Chelsea Zegler - Agronomy Manager, Central & Sustainability, McCain Foods

Chelsea leads a team focused on advancing potato production through agronomy strategy, regenerative agriculture, and grower engagement. Her work includes supporting research and extension efforts, guiding sustainability and crop protection initiatives, and driving progress toward McCain's 2030 regenerative agriculture goals. Chelsea holds both Bachelor's and Master's of Science degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and brings over a decade of experience in agronomy research and outreach.