KANSAS
Soil Health
ALLIANCE

KSSOILHEALTH.ORG

Improving and protecting Kansas soils through farmer and rancher led education and resources.

Partnership News

The Kansas Soil Health Alliance is partnering with the Sand County Foundation, Kansas State University, and others on a three-year on-farm demonstration to study how soil management affects the soil's ability to infiltrate and retain water longer into the cropping season.

We are inviting 30 farms or ranches across southeast Nebraska and northeast Kansas to participate in the project. Each farm will be paired with an adjacent farm with similar soil, but different management (i.e., cover-crops versus no-

cover crops; tillage versus no-tillage; diverse row crop rotation versus corn after corn; rotational grazing versus continuous grazing). Farms selected to participate in the project will receive $2,000/year as well as access to real-time soil moisture and soil temperature data throughout the growing season on their phone or computer, and annual soil health data - including aggregate stability and PLFA. At the end of the three years, each participant will receive a personalized report to keep with the study outcomes (no names will be used).

If you farm or ranch in the designated areas and are interested in participating in the project, contact Jennifer Simmelink at jennifer@kssoilhealth.org or 785-545-5628 as soon as possible to allow project representatives the opportunity to learn more about your farm by the end of January.

Upcoming Events

Kansas Soil Health Alliance Events Calendar

Whether soil health education is a new year's resolution, or you want to gain more knowledge in a specific area, we hope you take advantage of the multitude of conferences happening in the next few months. Be sure to keep an eye on our event list in order to plan for future conferences. Many winter conferences have been added to our website, and additional dates and details will be added as they are announced. Our website's events calendar contains all local and virtual events we find that are talking about soil health. There are a variety of great conferences and workshops to help expand your soil health knowledge and grow your peer network. Take time now to review the calendar and plan your next learning experience!

Do you know of an event that isn't on the calendar?
Contact Joanna@KSsoilhealth.org to get it added.
Upcoming Events – Kansas Soil Health Alliance (kssoilhealth.org)

Where to Find Us

Stop by and say hello! We will have our booth at these conferences:
- January 20-21: No-Till on the Plains in Wichita, KS
- February 3-4: High Plains No-Till in Burlington, CO

We are also co-hosting the event below!

Kansas Soil Health Partnership Forum

Join us in 2026 as we continue our monthly webinar series. "The Kansas Soil Health Partnership Forum," is a monthly one-hour webinar hosted by the Kansas Soil Health Alliance featuring farmers, ranchers, educators, and ag professionals providing insightful views and sharing personal experiences on how they are working to improve and protect Kansas's soils. It will be held via Zoom on the last Thursday of the month from noon to 1pm.

Stay tuned for more information as we confirm our first few speakers of 2026. If you have a speaker or topic suggestion, please contact us. **Please note-** We have

updated the link for the new year, so be sure to register again for access and reminders for the full list of 2026 webinars.

Register here using the updated link for 2026.

In the meantime, you can find all of the 2025 webinar recordings by visiting the Resources Section of our website.

Here is a list of topics & speakers from **2025**:

- February- Dr. Gretchen Sassenrath: Soils of Kansas
- March- Marlon Winger: CEMA 204 Program
- April- Dr. Lance Gunderson: Interpretation of the Haney Soil Test
- May- Candy Thomas: Nutrient Cycling in a Soil Health Management System
- June- Ryan O'Neill & Bill Buessing: Tuttle Creek Reservoir WRAPS Program and Local Farmer Partnerships
- July- Jerry Hatfield & Kevin Morrill: Measuring the Effect of Biological Amendments on Pastures Through Kansas-Wide On-Farm Research
- August- Brooklyn Armijo: Nitrates in Groundwater
- September- Brady Burks: Practical Applications of Drones in Agriculture
- October- Brian Rast: Nature-Based Solutions and Modeling

Conservation District Events

Many local conservation districts are planning a variety of events this year. Here are some events that may be in your area:

- **Annual Meetings**: These are held yearly to give a summary and an update about the Conservation District offices and to recognize Conservation District Award Winners. These meetings are generally held in January and February, so keep an eye out for news from your county.
- **Farmer to Farmer Discussions**: These are designed to be casual, farmer led discussions about water and soil conservation practices and topics.
- **Management Unit events**: These are collaborative events discussing soil health topics hosted by several conservation districts working together.

Each conservation district's discussion schedule is different. To learn more about your local conservation district's meeting schedule, you can contact the office and/or follow them on Facebook. Unsure which conservation district you are in? Look here: Conservation Districts | Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (kacd.net)

Soil Health Opportunities

Attention Ag Lenders!

Are you an Ag Lender or do you know an Ag Lender who would like to connect with other Ag Lenders to discuss soil health topics? If so, contact us and we'll help you get in touch with others like you!

Soil Health Bucket Owners!

We have made some updates to the instructions that accompany our Soil Health Buckets. If you would like to be emailed an updated copy of the instructions, contact Jennifer at jennifer@KSsoilhealth.org.

Conservation Connector tool

The Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) has unveiled a new tool, the *Conservation Connector*. By providing transparent access to incentive opportunities and direct contact with local support, the *Conservation Connector* (Connector.ag) aims to be a trusted, one-stop shop for producers looking to implement or expand soil health and conservation management practices.
The tool features a searchable directory that allows users to filter programs by crop type, conservation practice, and geographic region, offering a customized experience that matches producers with programs that fit their operation.

Kansas Grazing Exchange

The Kansas Grazing Exchange helps match available forage with livestock producers for mutually beneficial grazing relationships. If you have available grazing or you're looking for grazing, consider posting a listing. It's free and easy to use.

"No-Till Farmer" magazine subscription opportunity

The Conservation Ag Foundation, founded in January 2024 is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on equipping farmers with the knowledge and tools to adopt conservation agriculture practices such as no-till, strip-till, and cover cropping. These practices enhance soil health, protect water quality, and ensure the long-term sustainability of agriculture.
As part of this initiative, Kansas Soil Health Alliance has been awarded a scholarship from the Conservation Ag Foundation (CAF) in partnership with "No-Till Farmer," providing our members a FREE 1-year subscription to "No-Till Farmer" magazine. To claim your complimentary 12-issue subscription, please complete this form to confirm your eligibility.

FarmTender

This new service helps match farmers using regenerative practices with willing landowners. Go to www.FarmTender.us to learn more. It is free to browse, and, for a nominal annual fee, you can register and read the profiles of landowners and their land parcels, or of regenerative farmers, or post one yourself!

Voluntary Surveys- Your Input is Welcome

National Women in Agriculture Study

This survey is open October 15, 2025 - March 31, 2026 and is open to individuals age 18 and older in the U.S. and Puerto Rico who have an interest or involvement in agriculture, including those who work in production agriculture, agribusiness, education, advocacy, or related fields. The survey takes approximately 12 to 18 minutes to complete and will be available in English and Spanish.
Depending on background, participants may see different sets of questions:
- Women in agriculture will be asked about their work, leadership interests, challenges, and the kinds of engagement they find helpful.
- Others, including men in agriculture or individuals outside the industry, will be asked for their perspectives on women's roles and leadership in agriculture.

Results from the study will be shared at the International Year of the Woman Farmer ACE Summit to be held in Washington, D.C. in June 2026, and a public summary of results will be made available on the Farm Bureau website.
This study is sponsored by the American Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee and is funded by CoBank and JBS. This survey is not associated with the Kansas Soil Health Alliance.

Take the survey here.

Digital Agriculture & Artificial Intelligence (AI): Educational Needs

Assessment Survey for Farmers and Producers

Help shape the future of Kansas agriculture-- farmers and producers are invited to take a short, confidential survey on digital agriculture and AI needs. The information collected will be used to develop a targeted curriculum designed specifically for the needs of Kansas Agriculture. This survey is not associated with the Kansas Soil Health Alliance.

Take the survey here.

Kansas State University Survey on Cover Crops

Kansas State University, in collaboration with the Colorado Conservation Tillage Association (CCTA) and the Kansas Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) have created a survey evaluating the use of cover crops in the semi-arid Great Plains region. Your insights will help researchers develop innovative projects and publications exploring how cover crops affect soil health and crop productivity.
For questions regarding information in this survey, please feel free to contact Dr. Augustine Obour (KSU Soil Scientist) at 785-625-3425 ext. 215 or abour@ksu.edu and Dr. Logan Simon (KSU Southwest Area Agronomist) at 620-276-8286 or lsimon@ksu.edu. This survey is not associated with the Kansas Soil Health Alliance.

Take the survey here.

Cornell University Survey on Rye

A team of researchers at Cornell University has created a survey to understand the many ways farmers are growing and using cereal rye, including for grain, forage, and as a cover crop. Their team is also developing new rye varieties and want to understand important breeding priorities for different end uses. Participation is voluntary. At the end of this project, research results will be shared through presentations, published in peer-reviewed publications, and shared with stakeholders via a white paper and farmer/industry publications.
For more information about the research, contact the project leader, Virginia Moore at vm377@cornell.edu. This survey is not associated with the Kansas Soil Health Alliance.

Take the survey here.

Job Opportunities

Conservation Jobs in Kansas

There are various open positions at county conservation districts around the state as well as positions with the Kansas Department of Agriculture. Currently, the USDA-NRCS is under a hiring freeze. Once lifted, all vacancy announcements for USDA positions can be found online at usajobs.gov.

Featured openings:

- Soil Conservationist in Hodgeman County.
- Conservation Agronomist in Washington County.
- Conservation District/Watershed District Manager in Butler County.
- Soil Conservation Technician in Scott/Finney County. Visit the Scott County Conservation District Facebook page or the link below for more information.
- Conservation District Manager in Montgomery County. Email mgcocd@gmail.com or stop by the office for an application.

You can learn about additional positions here.
https://www.kacd.net/jobs.cfm

Additional Opportunities

- Kansas Rural Center website features a collection of educational and career opportunities curated to suit those in Kansas interested in agriculture, ecology, and community building. Visit the KRC website for more information.
- Kansas Forest Service is hiring a Fire Protection Specialist. Learn more at kansasforests.org.
- Visit the Human Resources page for employment opportunities at the Kansas Department of Agriculture.
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment has several job opportunities available. Visit their website for more information.
- Missouri Department of Agriculture is hiring for several positions. Visit their website to search for available opportunities.

- Haskell County Conservation District (Oklahoma) is hiring a Farm Bill Specialist. Send cover letter, resume, and references to haskellccd@conservation.ok.gov.

Featured Stories

How Teachers Are Helping Grow the Next Generation of Land Stewards

Kansas teachers, Emily Mong and Marvin Green (left) observe differences in soil cover during an experiment.

(Photos by Kinzie Reiss, American Farmland Trust)

With the average age of farmers in the U.S. reaching over 58 years old and nearly half reaching retirement age, farmland ownership will continue to turn over at significant rates in the next few decades, creating new land stewardship opportunities for younger generations. That shift presents both a challenge and an opportunity: to ensure the next generation not only stewards the land but has the knowledge and skills to improve it.

Our mission at American Farmland Trust (AFT) has always been about keeping farmers on the land and promoting sound farming practices. This work doesn't just start when a farmer enters the field but can be started with agricultural education in America's classrooms. Today, more than one million students across the country are enrolled in agricultural education programs taught by over 13,000 teachers. Yet despite that reach, one crucial topic has been missing: soil health and regenerative agriculture.

Regenerative agriculture promotes practices that focus on the health of the whole ecological system, not solely on high production yields of crops. Learning about living soil underneath our feet can encourage this focus for many.

To bridge that gap, AFT was awarded a Secondary Education, Two-Year Post Secondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom Challenge Grant (SPECA) from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in 2023. Using the funds, we developed a five-week soil health and regenerative agriculture curriculum for high school teachers and their students.

These efforts brought together partners from across states and sectors: the Kansas Soil Health Alliance (Jennifer Simmelink, Executive Director), the Ohio State University (Dr. Stephanie Karhoff, Assistant Professor), Candy Thomas, a former NRCS regional soil specialist and AFT staff. Together, we created and piloted a hands-on curriculum in Kansas and Ohio — guided by an advisory committee of educators and soil health experts.

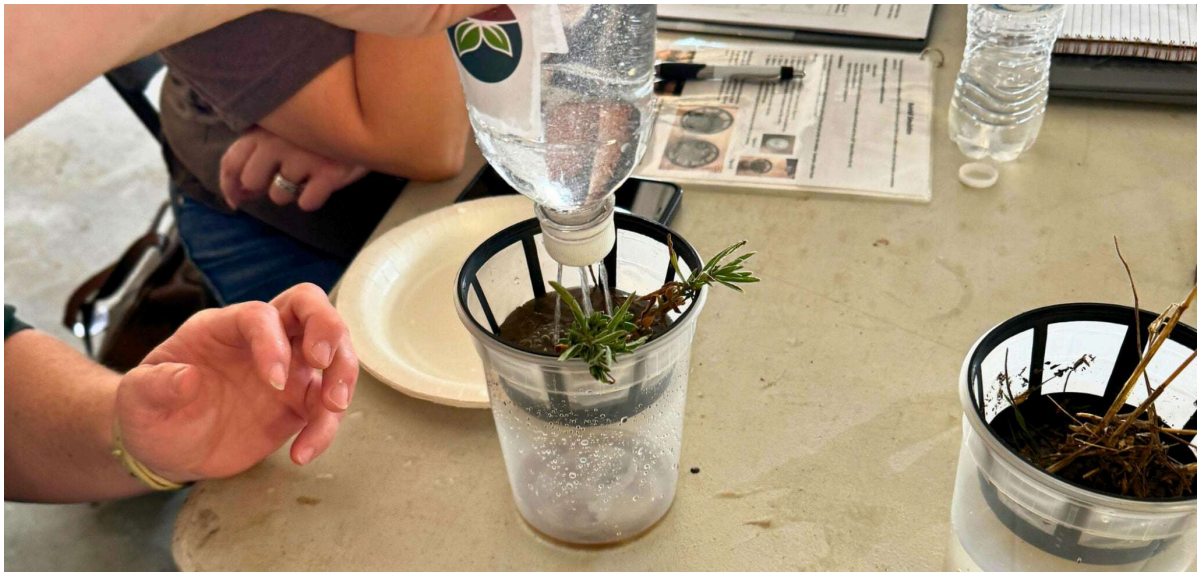
Nine teachers served as the first round of pilot teachers for the 2024-2025 school year. Representing both rural and urban districts, they participated in in-person trainings and received all materials, including soil health kits for their classrooms.

This past summer, we surveyed those teachers to improve the curriculum, and the results speak for themselves:

- 100% of the pilot teachers reported increased confidence in teaching about regenerative agriculture and soil health.
- 100% would recommend the curriculum to others.

We look forward to training the next round of pilot teachers in 2026 and helping fill the boots of retired farmers in the coming years. The final curriculum will be free and available for all teachers by late 2026.

If you are interested in serving as a pilot teacher, please reach out to Kinzie Reiss, Program Manager, at kreiss@farmland.org. If you are interested in receiving the free curriculum, once finalized in 2026, please sign up here.



Teachers conduct an experiment to understand how rainfall affects soil with ground cover.

(Photo by Kinzie Reiss, American Farmland Trust)

About American Farmland Trust:

American Farmland Trust believes in thriving farms and ranches. AFT protects agricultural land, promotes environmentally sound farming practices, and keeps

farmers on their land. It is the only national agricultural organization of its kind recognizing the connection between land, practices, and farmers. Because of AFT, millions of acres of farmland that otherwise would have been converted into house lots and shopping malls remain in farming, and tens of thousands of farmers and ranchers have adopted better farming practices. Learn more and become a member at farmland.org.

This article was funded by and published on AGDAILY on behalf of American Farmland Trust. Written by Kinzie Reiss, Agriculture Conservation Innovations Program and Communications Manager, American Farmland Trust

Cover Crops Can Heal Soil, But Need Time to Take Root

Macauley Kincaid reconnects a hood to part of his mill Aug. 7 at his family farm in Jasper, MO. Kincaid is the second generation in his family to farm crops for seed production. He still uses the same gear his uncle bought 40 years ago. (Photo by Sophie Chappell, Missouri News Network)

Inside a barn in southwest Missouri, Macauley Kincaid operates a massive contraption of wood and metal affixed with pipes, pulleys and wheels.

“This was like state of the art for its time. I mean, this was the bee's knees back in the ‘80s,” he said.

With the help of gravity, recently harvested barley seeds sift through four levels of screens in the mill. Kindcaid is the second generation in his family to cultivate

crops for seed production, and he's still using the technology his uncle invested in 40 years ago.

"For every crop we clean, they have different recommended screen sizes and different air pressure that you run on each seed ... you get larger seeds very clean and little to no weed seeds," he said. "That's where you want to be."

Kincaid conducts the laborious seed testing and cleaning process so his product can be certified. From the sorting elevator, the seeds are bagged and sold to be planted by farmers throughout southwest Missouri and the Midwest. But they won't be harvested.

Kincaid sells cover crops — vegetation that grows in the offseason to keep otherwise bare ground covered to reduce erosion and retain moisture.

Need for regenerative farming

After decades of industrial scale farming, Midwestern soil is suffering. That's on top of increasingly severe weather caused by climate change putting farmers at risk.

Many are turning to conservation methods such as cover crops to revive the soil and increase farmland resiliency. It's a movement called regenerative agriculture.

Kincaid sells a product that can launch farmers into a new way of cultivating the land. An essential part of his job is to answer questions and provide guidance for those new to this practice, which he feels comfortable doing because he has firsthand experience with the crops he's selling.

"I think a lot of the reason why I have repeat customers is because they know that when they call Mac, I'm going to give them the honest truth of the information," Kincaid said.

He describes his farm as "100% regenerative" and aims to farm in a way that heals nature.

"We just believe that this is the way of the future, and it will help our farm financially," Kincaid said. "It will help the environment, whether that's wildlife ... the insect life ... it helps the atmosphere, it helps water quality. We also help the fishermen downriver from us."

Results may vary

Although cover crop adoption has been growing, the practice is deployed on only about 5% of U.S. farmland acres, according to the most recent census of agriculture.

There are a variety of reasons farmers may be hesitant to plant cover crops. There is the upfront cost and labor of buying and planting a second crop that won't yield an immediate monetary return.

Jennifer Simmelink, a farmer and executive director of the Kansas Soil Health Alliance, an organization that promotes sustainable farming practices, said it comes down to this:

“Can the operator, and can the farm, absorb the risk that comes with doing something new, knowing that it might take a few years for the full profitability to be seen?”

She said the transition from conventional farming methods to regenerative ones can be challenging. Even if cover crops result in long-term gains for soil health, they could be a short-term disaster if the cover crop doesn’t align with weather, soil and climate conditions.

In an industry with slim margins, farmers aren’t incentivized to take that risk.

“It's so hard to put out: if you plant this, this will be your results, because it can vary,” Simmelink said.

Regional research

The University of Missouri Center for Regenerative Agriculture is now leading a national project with more than 40 researchers looking to decrease that variance. Scientists are working with farmers to test how cover crop species perform across 14 different regions. This fall, the project expanded to include participants in over half of U.S. states.

“Our objective is to improve cover crop varieties and release new cover crop varieties that improve on the existing ones,” said Solveig Hanson, who coordinates the national cover crop breeding network.

The project aims to boost overall cover crop usage by exploring the scientific, economic and social barriers farmers face. Researchers hope to bolster the industry by creating new seed varieties that can thrive in certain regions, climates and soil conditions.

“Then we plant them in nurseries, we observe them, we select the best ones and advance them,” Hanson said.

Researchers hope their tests will give farmers more assurances that certified seeds will work on their land, specifically. These “named varieties” — a kind of name-brand seed — could be less of a gamble than untested, uncleaned seed mixtures of unknown quality, colloquially referred to as “bin run seed.”

But convincing farmers to use name-brand seed as opposed to cheaper, uncertified seed mixtures, which they can buy from a neighbor, depends on the ability of researchers and seed companies to prove the potential results are worth the higher price.

“What there's market space for really translates into what farmers see value in, and what they see enough added value in to pay whatever additional cost there is for a named variety,” Hanson said.

Long-term gain, short-term risk

Thirteen years ago, farmer Ben Cramer decided to try planting cover crops.

“At that point, I wasn't sure it was going to work, but we knew it could,” Cramer said.

The brutal 2012 drought that hit much of the Midwest meant the cover crops he planted in dry western Kansas didn't take off.

"It didn't work great those first two years, and we learned maybe we got to rethink this a little bit," he said.

Cramer and his father, with whom he farms, didn't plant cover crops for a few years after that. When they returned to the practice, they planted different species, deeper rooted varieties and drought tolerant crops that can handle the heat.

"And (we) found that that worked significantly better for us," Cramer said.

More than a decade since that disastrous first year, Cramer is now helping others find success in sustainable farming practices through a regional farmer education network called No Till on the Plains.

He said he thinks adoption of cover crops is growing — and so is the understanding that people need support to get over the initial hurdles.

"Producers are, for the most part, willing to share their successes and their failures ... so that helps cut that learning curve down significantly," Cramer said.

Over time, healthy soils require less chemical fertilizers to produce a crop. Reducing the "inputs" farmers need to buy saves them money.

But the time it takes for those savings to come to fruition can deter farmers from making changes. Simmelink of the Kansas Soil Health Alliance said long-term environmental benefits can be harder to see than a monetary return on investment.

"It's easier to see money gained than money saved," she said. "We understand that there's bills that need (to be) paid and there could be loans ... you need to make sure that you're maintaining profitability while taking these steps."

Cramer said the financial barriers to changing farming practices stack up on top of the cultural ones.

"You've been doing something a certain way for a long time, and it's maybe been working fairly well for you. Maybe not perfect, but fairly well. It's hard to change," he said.

As leaders of farmer support organizations, Simmelink and Cramer regularly get asked about what cover crops they're planting and what varieties they recommend. But they say that's not exactly the right question.

"What are your individual goals for what you want that cover crop to do? Do you want it suppressing weeds? Do you want to graze it? Do you simply want it keeping your soil in place," Simmelink said.

"What's the end goal here?" Cramer said. "If you can figure that out, then you can work backwards from there."

Bang for the buck

Zach Louk is a salesman and handles purchasing for Green Cover, a cover crop seed company based in Nebraska. Every fall he fields questions from farmers about how to successfully deploy cover crops.

"Once the combines start rolling, the phones really start to ring a lot," Louk said.

That’s because for soil to retain nutrients and moisture, it needs to contain a living root for as long as possible. Meaning that once the cash crops such as wheat, corn or soybeans are harvested, cover crops must be planted immediately thereafter.

Green Cover specializes in cover crop seed, and the company’s sales team is spread across the Midwest and Great Plains.

“Our goals are to help those producers care for their land, make it healthier, so that the next generation of those producers can benefit from that,” Louk said. “It's a longevity type approach to farming.”

Louk estimates that 15% to 20% of Green Cover customers are new to using cover crops. The company is participating in the Mizzou-led national research project because, as Louk says, successful sales are based on trust with the customer and a consistent product.

“I'm directly very interested in that information and how things work ... our customers are as well,” he said. “It's really important to know what you're buying and it's really important to know that quality does matter.”

Much of what farmers already grow can be used as a cover crop — wheat, barley, rye, clover, radish — so long as it suits the environment.

Kincaid in southwest Missouri is experimenting with a mix of sunflowers, kale, legumes, okra, watermelon and more. He said his cover crops improve the health of his soil, reduce erosion and contribute to a robust ecosystem on his farm. It also provides food for his cattle.

The cover crop seeds he grows, cleans, certifies and sells are the brand name varieties. He’s also helping the national cover crop project test about a dozen crops.

As a proponent of the regenerative agriculture movement, Kincaid winces when he’s called a salesman.

He said it's not his job to just sell seed. But rather, to show farmers a way to revive their land.

Seeds cascade from the back of a truck at Macauley Kincaid's family farm (left). Before the seeds are bagged and sold to farmers throughout southwest Missouri and the Midwest, Kincaid tests and cleans the seeds so they can be certified. A cow and her calf (right) stand in one of Macauley Kincaid's cover crop fields Aug. 7 at his family farm in Jasper, MO. Many farmers are turning to conservationist methods, like cover crops, to revive their soil and increase their land's resilience. (Photos by Sophie Chappell, Missouri News Network)

This article was published on the KBIA website as part of the KBIA News Series: The Next Harvest, reported and produced by Jana Rose Schleis.