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SDSHC Presents Awards During Memorable 2021 Soil Health Conference

By Stan Wise

The virtual 2021 Soil Health Conference held Jan. 6-7 offered more than 400 attendees the chance to hear conservation advice and encouragement from an excellent lineup of soil health experts and innovators.

World Food Prize Winner Dr. Rattan Lal spoke about the importance of soil carbon, the role it plays in our lives and the benefits of sequestering it in the soil. Oklahoma farmer and rancher Jimmy Emmons gave advice on how to reduce tillage and implement good soil health practices. Iowa farmer and equipment innovator Loran Steinlage talked about the benefits of interseeding cover crops. Nebraska agronomist and author Dale Strickler explained how to build drought-resistant soil. Jorgensen Land and Cattle CEO Nick Jorgensen of Ideal, S.D., spoke about using virtual fence collars in livestock for ease of grazing management. Montana State University Billings Director of Student Health Services Darla Tyler McSherry spoke on the topic of how to help agricultural producers who are struggling with stress.

Participants also heard a summary of the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition's 2020 research trials on wide-row corn interseeded with cover crops. A summary of SDSHC's 2020 research trials can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/60in-corn-summary>.

In addition to these presentations, conference attendees also got a chance to pose their questions to panels of producers including the SDSHC Board of Directors. The quality of the questions asked indicated this year's conference had an engaged audience committed to learning more about soil health practices.

Annual awards

In 2019, the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition created the Legacy Award in memory of Al Miron of Crooks, S.D., one of the founding members of the Coalition and a shining example of a conservationist. During this year's SDSHC annual meeting, Jim and Carol Faulstich of Highmore, S.D., were presented with the 2021 Legacy Award for their long and tireless devotion to promoting conservation practices.



Jim and Carol Faulstich



Lon Tonneson

Continued on Page 2



Conference Speaker Shares Interseeding Benefits

Iowa farmer and equipment innovator Loran Steinlage spoke on the benefits of interseeding cover crops and equipment modifications for soil health practices during the 2021 Soil Health Conference, Jan. 6-7.

Read the article on Page 4 to learn more.

"I've known Jim for about 15 years," SDSHC Board member Doug Sieck said. "I would be hard pressed to find someone in the list of people that I know or have been around that have done more, that have given more of their personal time and effort in the interest of enhancing conservation and the stewardship of the soil, the grasslands, the wildlife, and the environment in general."

"There's a lot of reasons why this is a very special award and greatly appreciated," Jim Faulstich said. "It's special to be associated with this group of people, so my hat's off to everything, and I can't say thank you enough for this award."

The SDSHC Board of Directors also presented longtime Dakota Farmer editor Lon Tonneson with the 2021 Friend of Soil Health Award for his coverage of soil health and agriculture. Speaking of his recent retirement and all the trends he had seen over the course of his career, Tonneson said, "I wish I had a front-row seat on what the next big thing is going to be in agriculture. I got a feeling it's probably going to come from groups like yours, what you're doing — intercropping, companion cropping, just a whole host of things."

New Board member

Three seats on the SDSHC Board of Directors were up for election during the annual meeting. Dennis Hoyle and Doug Sieck were re-elected to their seats. Bryan Jorgensen declined to run for his seat again, and Van Mansheim, a producer from Colome, S.D., was elected to fill the vacant spot on the Board of Directors.

Mansheim operates ManBull Farming LLC with his brother Kirk Mansheim and nephew Heath Bullington. Together they custom graze cattle and grow corn, winter wheat, oats, soybeans and alfalfa.

"I'm honored to be on this board," Mansheim said. "I've had some great mentors out of this group, and I look forward to continuing the mission of the group and helping other producers with their journeys."

Contest winners

The South Dakota Soil Health Coalition conducted student essay and photo contests in conjunction with the Soil Health Conference. First place winners in each contest will receive \$400 cash scholarships, and second place winners will receive \$200 cash scholarships.



Megan Stiefvater, a student at McCook Central High School, won first place in the 2021 Soil Health Conference Student Photo Contest with this photo of a milpa garden. Photo courtesy of Megan Stiefvater.



Steve Sigdestad won a photo contest for 2021 Soil Health Conference attendees with this shot of corn planted on 60-inch rows and broadcast seeded with an 8-species cover crop mix. Photo courtesy of Steve Sigdestad.

Lorie Steiner, a student at Lake Area Technical College, won first place with her essay comparing soil to a painter's canvas. Lynn Foster, a student at Brookings High School, won second place for an essay explaining the importance of reducing tillage.

Megan Stiefvater, a student at McCook Central High School, won first place in the student photo contest with her photo of a milpa garden, and Ella Stiefvater, a homeschooled student in Salem, S.D., won second place with her photo of a rotational field currently growing grass for grazing.

The winning entries in the student contests can be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/2021-student-winners>.

SDSHC also conducted an additional photo contest for conference attendees. Steve Sigdestad won a \$200 gift card for his photo of corn planted on 60-inch rows and broadcast seeded with an 8-species cover crop mix.

The South Dakota Soil Health Coalition thanks all speakers, panelists, and attendees for making this year's virtual conference a success. The Coalition also thanks the following sponsors for their generous support of the 2021 Soil Health Conference: Ducks Unlimited, Inc., U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service South Dakota, South Dakota Stockgrowers Association, Agassiz Seed and Supply, James River Water Development District, AGVISE Laboratories, Millborn Seeds, Ward Laboratories, Grossenburg Implement Inc., Green Cover Seed, Wild Dutchman Sunflower Seeds, Dot's Homestyle Pretzels, South Dakota Farmers Union, Soil Health Partnership, Organic Farm Team, Pheasants Forever, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, Working Cows, South Dakota State University, and Cattle Business Weekly.

For more information about the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition and its events, visit <https://www.sdsolhealthcoalition.org>.

Membership Minute: Andrew Snyder

Andrew Snyder is a livestock producer in Tilford, S.D., whose family's 75-year-old operation includes cow/calf, heifer development, backgrounding and grazing yearlings, and growing perennial and annual forages for feed and grazing.

While the family has long strived to be good stewards of land and livestock through grass management and crop rotation, they have made some notable changes in recent years. As Snyder has learned more about soil health practices, the operation has put more emphasis on cross fencing native range pastures, developing water sources, and improving grass management. The family has also incorporated no-till practices, solar-powered water pumps and electric fencing, remote water tank monitoring systems, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service Grazing Tool.

"By being involved in organizations such as the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition," Snyder said, "I was able to ask the right questions, consider our needed improvements, and ultimately make those improvements on the ranch which have led to healthier range and crop fields."

Snyder said that growing season-long, diverse cover crops has helped the family achieve several goals such as extending their grazing season well into the winter as well as growing crops with more drought resistance and fewer inputs. The uneaten portion of the cover crops also creates armor for the soil and provides a snow catch, he said.

"Improving the soil just feels like the right thing to do," Snyder said. "In addition, it helps out the pocket-book with fewer inputs."

Snyder's long-term goals have transitioned from a focus on crop ground to a strong emphasis on native range management. His wants to raise more pounds of beef on each acre while improving the soil, the water, and the health of his livestock.



Andrew Snyder's long-term soil health goals are focused on native range management. SDSHC photo

Upcoming Soil Health Events

February 1

Black Hills Stock Show
SD FFA Speaker Series
Soil & Range Health
Rapid City, SD

February 3-5

Digging Deeper into
Holistic Management:
A Next-Step School with
Joshua & Tara Dukart
Faith, SD

February 7-13

Ag Horizons
Virtual Conference
Online

February 16-19

SDSU Extension
Crop Hour Webinar -
Soil Health/Cover Crops
Online

February 23-24

Farming and Ranching for
the Bottom Line: Linking
Soil to Well-Being
Online

August 25-27

2021 Soil Health School
Mitchell, SD

Access Our Events

Calendar [HERE](#).

SDSHC Elects New Board Member

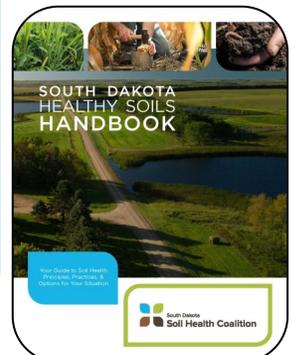
Producer Van Mansheim of Colome, S.D., was elected to the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition Board of Directors in January 2021. He attended Northern State University and operates ManBull Farming LLC with his brother Kirk Mansheim and nephew Heath Bullington. Together they custom graze cattle and grow corn, winter wheat, oats, soybeans, and alfalfa. Mansheim's operation has been no-till since 2010, and they have been growing and winter grazing cover crops since 2014. They have planted into green cover crops since 2017 and have been using a roller crimper since 2019. They began twice-over rotational grazing cattle on rangeland in 2019 and started winter bale grazing in 2020.

Mansheim's soil health goals include remaining profitable while mimicking Mother Nature, continuing to increase his soil's water infiltration rate and sequester carbon by following the Five Principles of Soil Health, and finding ways to decrease his dependency on synthetic fertilizers and chemicals.



Complete the 2021 Soil Health Conference Survey!

[https://
bit.ly/3snMIFy](https://bit.ly/3snMIFy)



Soil Health Conference Speaker Shares Many Benefits of Interseeding

By Lura Roti for South Dakota Soil Health Coalition

Mechanic is among the many hats most farmers and ranchers wear.

“Every farmer and rancher modifies equipment—it’s the nature of the game,” explained Paul Winkler, a Newell, S.D., rancher.

Always eager to learn more, Winkler was among many who tuned in to Loran Steinlage’s South Dakota Soil Health Coalition presentation, “Life Beyond Tech Support,” during the organization’s 2021 Virtual Soil Health Conference January 6-7.

“Every farm or ranch is different, but the concepts can be applied,” Winkler said. “He gave a lot of practical information.”

A second-generation West Union, Iowa, farmer, Steinlage has always relied on his mechanical wit and abilities. But when he began embracing soil health practices, like interseeding of cover crops and relay cropping—modifying and redesigning equipment became essential to field success.

“Figuring out key pieces of equipment has opened doors for us,” said Steinlage, who—together with his family—farms 750 acres of extremely diverse crops. Recognized by machinery manufacturers for his talents, Steinlage also works in equipment design.

Throughout his presentation, Steinlage shared many images of modified equipment, but he focused most of the presentation on the why. He shared how soil health practices beyond no-till, like interseeding cover crops and companion crops, improved his overall farm and became the motivation behind many of his equipment modifications.

Steinlage began focusing on interseeding and relay cropping when he realized “weeds enjoy soil disturbance.” From that point forward,



West Union, Iowa, farmer Loran Steinlage was among many soil health experts who presented during the SD Soil Health Coalition’s 2021 Virtual Soil Health Conference January 6-7. Courtesy photo.

he added interseeding to existing no-till practices. Reducing weed pressure through interseeding has allowed him to dramatically reduce the use of herbicides and pesticides. And because of the soil health benefits from companion cropping, he has also reduced nutrient inputs. “Interseeding is a gateway drug. It opened doors for me...as soon as we saw success, we started scaling up,” he said.

Steinlage shared how interseeding helps control pests in two ways. First, fields planted to a diversity of crops attract a greater number of beneficial insects. During his presentation he shared this example. “I had interseeded soybeans with buckwheat, intent on harvesting as a companion crop, and there were sweat bees eating pregnant soybean aphids.”

Results of field scouting showed no aphid larvae. “I never sprayed and got a food grade premium.”

In some cases, Steinlage said interseeding can create “the flypaper effect. As bugs come into a field to attack, the beauty of interseeding is they are always looking for the easy score, and most often, the cover crop is the easy score.”

When deciding what plants to interseed, Steinlage suggests looking to nature for guidance. “Pay attention to nature. It will tell you what you need to be interseeding. Go around to your native pasture and see what thrives,” he said.

Additional interseeding tips Steinlage also shared are:

- Planting timing: Look at the weather forecast more than stage of growth. “If we are in a cool, dry growing season, we take the time and wait. If we are in a hot, humid growing season, we push ahead a bit.”
- Roll crimp, don’t shred: “When we roll something, we create a matt. Shredding breaks down too quickly.”
- What to plant: If planting into a corn-on-corn field, Steinlage focuses on legumes and brassica mixes. If planting into a corn-going-into-soybean field, he focuses on grasses. And if he’s planting into a soybeans-going-into-corn field, he plants winter wheat and barley.
- Uniformity is key: “Pay attention to details.”

Twin Brooks farmer David Kruger can relate to the challenge of getting details right when interseeding. Since 2018, Kruger has participated in an interseeding study for the South Dakota Soil Health

Continued on Next Page



Twin Brooks farmer David Kruger was among many who tuned in for the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition 2021 Virtual Convention January 6-7. Courtesy photo.

Coalition.

“Plant spacing in 60-inch corn is more crucial than 30-inch. This has been a lot of my problem. My problem is a normal planter can’t plant accurate enough at that high of a population.”

Kruger appreciated Steinlage’s talk. He says learning from others focused on soil health when managing their acres gives him not only new information, but it often confirms possible solutions.

“Hearing someone else confirm the root of an issue gives me more confidence to invest in the solution. For me to go and get a different corn planter to get accuracy, which I may need to do if I continue with 60-inch corn, may mean I need to spend, \$80,000 to \$120,000,” Kruger explained. “That information helps me determine whether I feel that is a wise investment or is there a better way to accomplish the goals we are trying to accomplish with 60-inch corn.”

Connecting growers like Kruger and Winkler with other growers, soil health resources and information is a mission of the SDSHC and its annual conference, SDSHC Coordinator Cindy Zenk explained.

“Farmers and ranchers have a strong desire to make their land better,” Zenk said. “Like all of us, they are busy. So, we work to maximize their time through this annual two-day conference which brings many soil health experts and resources together.”

To connect with SDSHC resources, visit the organization’s website: www.sdssoilhealthcoalition.org. The website provides access to many online resources and staff who are available to work one-on-one with those eager to learn more.



Paul Winkler, pictured here with his family, is a Newell, S.D., rancher. Always eager to learn more, Winkler was among many who tuned in to Loran Steinlage’s presentation, “Life Beyond Tech Support,” during the organization’s 2021 Virtual Soil Health Conference January 6-7. Courtesy photo.

SDSHC Releases New Children’s Book, Donates Copies to Schools and Libraries

The South Dakota Soil Health Coalition has released a fun, educational and agriculturally accurate children’s book titled, “The Soil Quilt.” Geared for third graders, the book uses the metaphor of a patchwork quilt that layers the planet to explain how a healthy soil covers the landscape.

“SDSHC did a survey with vocational ag teachers and students, and one of the take-aways was that the earlier we start teaching students about soil health, the greater impact it will have,” SDSHC Coordinator Cindy Zenk said. “So we decided to create a book to help children learn about the importance of soil to our lives and our communities. We hope children will learn that what happens in the soil not only produces our food but also creates the diverse landscape we enjoy, strengthens our families, and builds our communities.”

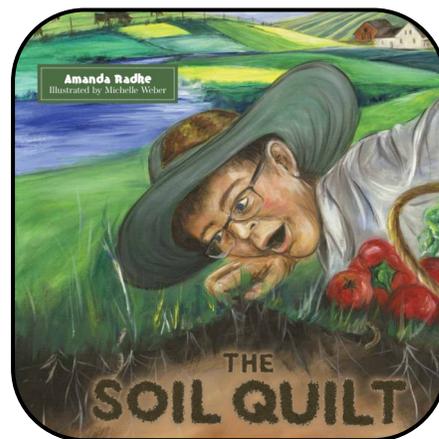
Published by Ag Storytellers, “The Soil Quilt” was written by Amanda Radke of Mitchell, S.D., and illustrated by Michelle Weber of Lake Benton, Minn.

“The Soil Quilt” is designed to be enjoyed at home and in the classroom. With a glossary of new vocabulary words to study plus a hands-on learning activity, the book is the perfect way to launch discussions about how everyone can play a role in promoting soil health.

With the generous financial support of Millborn Seeds, the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition will make sure that elementary schools and community libraries in South Dakota receive copies of the book in 2021 so that children can learn the importance of good land stewardship at an early age.

“At Millborn Seeds, we are dedicated to leading a land use movement by promoting conservation practices and soil health,” Millborn Seeds President Matt Fenske said. “We understand the importance of educating today’s youth on what it means to take care of the land and preserve the resources we have, as well as the benefits of reading from a young age. For these reasons, we are excited to partner with South Dakota Soil Health Coalition and Ag Storytellers to bring ‘The Soil Quilt’ to the next generation.”

The new book is available for purchase on Amazon at <https://tinyurl.com/soil-quilt>.





South Dakota

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SDSHC 2020 Wide-Row Corn Interseeded with Cover Crops Research Summary Available

In 2020, the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition partnered with farmers in Eastern South Dakota to conduct plot trials of corn planted on 60-inch rows and interseeded with cover crops. A summary of the research results is now available.

Cover crops interseeded between corn rows have the potential to improve soil health while providing valuable forage for livestock post-harvest. However, as 2020 demonstrated, there are various challenges to making this plan work. Due in part to lack of moisture, weed pressure, and seed-spacing challenges, our plots resulted in significant yield losses in the wide-row corn. Producers wishing to explore this management practice are advised to start with small plots.

The full research summary can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/60in-corn-summary>.

Did you miss the 2021 Soil Health Conference?

You're in luck!

It's not too late to watch the presentations!

As long as you are a member of the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition, you can still watch recordings of the 2021 Soil Health Conference presentations.

If you registered for the conference, just log in to the Whova site, click on "Agenda," and choose the session you want to watch. If you're a member but you never registered for the conference, just contact the Coalition at sdsoilhealth@gmail.com or 605-280-4190, and we'll get you registered for the conference Whova site so you can watch the recordings.

Don't forget to complete the Conference survey at <https://bit.ly/3snMIFy> to help us make next year's conference even better!

Have you renewed your SDSHC membership?

Start the new year off right by renewing your South Dakota Soil Health Coalition membership! Donations are also welcome! The SDSHC is a 501(c)(3) organization, and donations are tax deductible.

Just visit www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org/memberships-donations to renew your membership or make a donation.