

| 2025 Impact Report

BEFORE THE ACRE BUILDING SYSTEMS THAT SCALE REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

**MIDWEST
ROW CROP**
COLLABORATIVE

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FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

2025 marked an important moment of evolution for the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative (MRCC) as we leaned into the complexity of turning commitments into meaningful, on-the-ground change. We worked on the systems that influence farmer decisions, because lasting change depends not only on what happens within a single program, but on how markets, partnerships, and support structures function together over time.

MRCC's strength lies in its members' willingness to work through challenges collaboratively. Corporations and partners shared lessons openly, tested new approaches, and expanded learning across food, feed, and fuel systems.

The result is a collaborative growing more focused, energized, connected, and better positioned to support farmers and the landscapes in the Midwest they steward. The work described in this report reflects that progress and the leadership of members who continue to invest time, trust, and energy in doing this work together.

We are grateful for that commitment and encouraged by what it makes possible.

With appreciation,



Emily O'Halloran
Kellanova
Co-Chair, Midwest Row
Crop Collaborative



Suzy Friedman
World Wildlife Fund
Co-Chair, Midwest Row
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As global supply chains face mounting pressures and regenerative agriculture gains urgency, MRCC strengthened its role as a trusted systems convener, aligning corporate and NGO partners to accelerate regenerative agriculture across the Midwest.

Major milestones included:

- **Welcoming Ingredion** as a new member, adding a key crop processor and ingredient supplier as a bridge between farmers and global food brands.
- **Launching the inaugural Regenerative Agriculture Leadership Cohort** which includes engaged representatives of nine corporations across the food, feed, and fuel sectors.
- **Publishing *From Field to Fuel: Building Sustainable Biofuels Supply Through Procurement*** following a four-part learning series in 2024. Advancing voluntary procurement guidelines for sustainable biofuels emerged as a gap-filling opportunity within the industry.
- **Retaining and engaging MRCC's leading members** through sponsorship, mentorship, and project incubation.
- **Articulating new messages and engagement strategies** to move middle adopter farmers from “curious”, to ready to act, through Reach Farmers Faster.
- **Encouraging financial investments in our Midwest landscape** through participation in the TransCap Initiative's Regenerative Agriculture Orchestrator Design Council.
- **Incubating five projects across food, feed, and fuel supply chains** with MRCC members who are developing the human and strategic infrastructure required to scale regenerative agriculture in ways that are practical and collaborative.



ABOUT THE MIDWEST ROW CROP COLLABORATIVE

The world needs innovative solutions to feed a growing population while reducing our impact on the environment. The Midwest Row Crop Collaborative (MRCC) advances solutions designed to maximize agricultural productivity while improving soil health, water quality and quantity, and rural livelihoods.

MRCC convenes leading corporations and environmental NGOs in pre-competitive, cross-sector collaboration – enabling solutions that no single actor can achieve alone. To pave the way for broader change in the agriculture system, MRCC’s members share pre-competitive lessons from cutting-edge program development with emerging corporate leaders in feed, fuel and food sectors.

MRCC membership is an intentionally small, close-knit community of individuals committed to action and learning.



Mission and Theory of Change

The Midwest Row Crop Collaborative (MRCC) tests and demonstrates solutions that promote the widespread adoption of regenerative, science-based approaches that benefit the environment and shares learnings that support scaled adoption across the supply chain.

MRCC works within the sub-basins flowing into the Mississippi River, where corn, soy, wheat, and rice production significantly influence soil health, water quality, and greenhouse gas emissions.

MRCC's mission is guided by our theory of change and [vision for the Midwest agricultural landscape](#) by 2030.

MIDWEST ROW CROP COLLABORATIVE THEORY OF CHANGE

Mission: Test and demonstrate solutions that promote the widespread adoption of regenerative, science-based approaches which benefit the environment, and share learnings that support scaled adoption across the supply chain.



SYSTEMS CHANGE INITIATIVES

Systems change initiatives are multi-year collaborative efforts that translate the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative's (MRCC) theory of change into action. Members and partners strengthen cross-sector collaboration through shared learning, incubating projects, and advancing policy within the initiatives.

Current initiatives (2025-2027)

- **Leadership development** - Develop regenerative agriculture leaders to expand agriculture system innovations in the Midwest.
- **Biofuels** - Develop demand pathways for regeneratively grown feedstocks and low-carbon biofuels to economically benefit farmers.
- **Crop diversification** - Educate and engage stakeholders on the benefits of producing and sourcing crops beyond corn and soy to diversify crop rotations in the landscape.

Taken together, these efforts reinforce a lesson from 2025: Farmers respond to how the whole system behaves instead of individual programs. When partners are aligned and adequately resourced, regenerative practice-change transitions become clearer and more likely to last.

Regenerative Agriculture Leadership Cohort

Purpose and design

Sustainability and procurement representatives within the food, feed, and fuel supply chains are navigating rising expectations, internal scrutiny, and increasing uncertainty about how to translate high-level regenerative agriculture commitments into on-the-ground impact. The pressure to “get it right” is high, while clear pathways often feel fragmented or unclear.

MRCC designed the Regenerative Agriculture Leadership Cohort in response to this moment, leveraging nearly a decade of insight from its members. MRCC created space for new leaders to step out of isolation, learn from peers facing similar constraints, and build shared confidence navigating complexity together. Nine corporations with supply chain presence in the Midwest were selected from a competitive application process. Their commitment and participation is based on their potential to test and demonstrate regenerative solutions collaboratively.

If regenerative agriculture portfolios, partnerships, and reporting approaches are grounded in lessons from multi-partner project development from the outset—can this reduce burden on farmers and accelerate durable, profitable adoption of regenerative agriculture?

Leadership Cohort programming snapshot

The inaugural cohort includes six workshops, real-world case studies, mentorship, and project incubation over two years. Between sessions, Leadership Cohort participants gather for a no-agenda peer exchange to ask questions, test ideas, and troubleshoot challenges.

Case studies

MRCC's collaborative regenerative agriculture projects serve as practical case studies for Leadership Cohort participants to review, explore, and potentially replicate. These examples are revisited throughout the workshops, allowing participants to deepen their understanding and build relationships with project leaders.

Project development framework

Staff and Leadership Cohort participants are co-developing a framework to support the design and implementation of future sustainable agriculture projects that include three or more agriculture stakeholders representing different parts of the supply chain.

100%

of participants either agreed or strongly agreed the workshop created a safe and productive pre-competitive space for collaboration.

Early Leadership Cohort outcomes

The first workshop held in Minneapolis in October 2025 offered a wide range of experiences:

- Explored the business case for regenerative agriculture from a corporate and farmer lens.
- Toured Legvold Farms in Northfield, Minnesota.
- Learned how peers are navigating similar issues by working through participants real-world challenges.
- Designed sample pre-competitive regenerative pilots and strategies, adapting in response to real-world challenges injected into the scenario.
- Learned from farmers and agriculture experts who shared that a focus on value and economics per acre (such as time savings from no-till), better demonstrate the value of regenerative agriculture over the familiar conventional discussion of bushels per acre.

Leadership Cohort participants found community, common ground, and renewed energy with peers who are committed to transformational change in our food and agriculture systems. Participants committed to these key action steps.

- Engaging internal procurement and sourcing teams.
- Reframing return on investment conversations towards resilience, risk reduction, and reputational strength.
- Collecting improved supply-shed data.
- Initiating pilot project conversations with suppliers and customers.
- Inviting landlords, commercial teams, and agronomists into sustainability work.
- Developing at least three project ideas.

“

“Investing in learning to develop a well-designed business case for regenerative agriculture is a transformative opportunity.”

– Chris Nelson, Post Consumer Brands



Cohort acknowledgements

We're grateful to the following presenters in 2025.

- Greg Bohrer, Walmart
- Jean Brokish, American Farmland Trust
- Caitlin Colegrove, PepsiCo
- Stefani Millie Grant, Unilever
- Margaret Henry, PepsiCo
- Rusty Kluver, Dutch Creek Farms
- Dean Larsen, River Country Co-op
- Mark and Dave Legvold, Legvold Farms
- Emily O'Halloran, Kellanova
- Bradley Prowant, Stoel Rives, LLP
- Steve Rosenzweig, General Mills
- Simone Schenkel, Environmental Defense Fund
- Bailey Tangen, University of Minnesota
- Andrew Utterback, Ingredion
- Mark Wehe, Farm business management professor

We appreciate these key partners for sharing insights on implementing regenerative agriculture programs.

- Practical Farmers of Iowa
- Precision Conservation Management
- Soil and Water Outcomes Fund
- Sustainable Food Lab
- Forever Green Initiative

Our sincere gratitude for the [Regenerative Agriculture Leadership Cohort sponsors](#).

Whole Farm

- Platform for Agriculture + Climate Transformation
- Unilever
- Walton Family Foundation

Cover Cropper

- Forever Green Initiative

No Tiller

- Bloom by Trellis Impact
- PepsiCo
- Stoel Rives, LLC

“

“Collaborating with trusted partners to co-develop a leadership cohort invites knowledge transfer, new perspectives, and project incubation for the benefit of farmers and the environment.”

– Simone Schenkel, EDF



Biofuels

In the Midwest, a significant amount of corn grown is used for producing biofuels. One aspect of the transition to a regenerative agriculture production system is leadership from the biofuels industry, which is why MRCC members have been exploring sustainable biofuels procurement as a market lever for positive environmental and farmer outcomes.

After completing internal learning sessions on biofuels, MRCC prepared a report which includes principles designed to benefit farmers economically while avoiding unintended land-use change impacts. In 2026, MRCC will lead a cross-sector effort to design sustainable voluntary procurement guidelines for biofuels.

To learn more about our report *From Field to Fuel: Building Sustainable Biofuels Supply Through Procurement*, the next steps in our systems change initiative, or to join as a partner on this effort, contact [Jaycie Thomsen](#).



Crop diversification

While biofuels production presents a near-term market coordination opportunity, crop diversification requires long-term systems change across research, supply chain infrastructure, product development, market opportunities, and consumer demand. Diversified rotations that include small grains and continuous living cover crops can enhance soil health, improve nutrient recycling, support biodiversity, and create new revenue streams for farmers. However, scaling these systems requires coordinated investment and innovation across the value chain.

In 2025, MRCC members worked to clarify where corporate demand, scientific innovation, and philanthropic capital must align to enable more diverse crop rotations in the Midwest. Midwest Row Crop Collaborative's NGO members including American Farmland Trust, Environmental Defense Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and World Wildlife Fund, worked alongside partners such as Sustainable Food Lab and the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative to explore:

- Market signals needed from corporate off-takers.
- Infrastructure gaps (processing, aggregation, logistics)
- Research investments required to strengthen crop performance and market readiness.
- Financing mechanisms to de-risk early adoption.

Priority crop discussions in the Upper Mississippi River Basin include oats, winter camelina, and hybrid rye. These crops have demonstrated potential to complement existing corn and soy rotations while supporting emerging food, feed, and fuel markets.

Philanthropic investment remains catalytic in this space, enabling proof points necessary for sustainability and procurement leaders to integrate crop diversification into long-term resilience strategies.

To learn more or join as a partner in this effort, contact [Jaycie Thomsen](#).



SHARED LEARNING AND NETWORK ENGAGEMENT

MRCC deepened shared learning not only across our systems change initiatives (cohort, biofuels, and crop diversification) but also within our broader systems change pathways, especially agriculture network engagement and conservation finance and incentives.

Agriculture Network Engagement: Reaching Farmers Faster

Agricultural change is human change. Behind every agricultural shift or practice change, there lies a producer who is making decisions every day on behalf of the animals and acres they steward. Environmental Initiative, Trust In Food™, and Midwest Row Crop Collaborative (MRCC) are working to accelerate the adoption of regenerative practices by grounding outreach and engagement strategies in producer values, motivations and behaviors. Here's how.

- A data-driven outreach strategy that engaged 55,000 farmers across three states demonstrated that tailored, values-based messaging can increase farmer engagement by up to 5 times over typical benchmarks.
- We've developed a self-guided outreach planning tool at reachfarmersfaster.org. This resource allows users to design producer centered outreach in five easy steps. Worksheets and outcomes from our case study are available for download.
- In-person workshops are also offered to help project implementors design outreach strategies based on real-world or sample scenarios.
- A first-of-its kind national study was conducted in 2025 to measure the cost, time, and effort involved in enrolling producers into conservation programs.

An additional case study based on engaging ranchers in North and South Dakota will be available in 2026 on reachfarmersfaster.org. Our work is focused on connecting program implementors with producers they have not yet met.

To learn more about incorporating this process into program design, developing outreach and engagement materials, and hosting workshops designed to bring project partners together, contact [Deborah Carter McCoy](#).

Agriculture Network Engagement: Field to Market Education & Outreach Committee

Deborah Carter McCoy, Environmental Initiative, and Paula Labine, ADM, were named as co-chairs for the [Field to Market Education & Outreach Committee](#). The committee supports Field to Market's cross-sector dialogue, research and innovation showcase, Fieldprint® Platform promotion, and leadership development and recognition.



Scan the QR code to learn more at reachfarmersfaster.org



Conservation Finance and Incentives: Exploring systemic investment for the Midwest landscape

Environmental Initiative staff participated in the [TransCap Regenerative Agriculture Capital Orchestrator Design Council](#), a nine-month initiative focused on aligning capital to accelerate regenerative agriculture across the Midwest, on behalf of the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative. The Regenerative Agriculture Capital Orchestrator Midwest (RACO) convenes leading philanthropic and investment partners alongside farmer-facing organizations and supply-chain stakeholders.

Environmental Initiative's role is to provide input on the Midwest's market realities and supply chain dynamics to inform emerging capital deployment strategies. During early co-creation sessions, RACO identified significant systemic barriers to capital flow, including:

- Mismatches between investment types and the on-farm transition timeline.
- Short-term expectations for return that conflict with regenerative agriculture's multi-year payoff.
- Limited understanding of regenerative agriculture as an investable asset class.

Through this work, our team is contributing insight to discussions on new financial mechanisms, blended capital, and coordinated funder strategies that could help de-risk adoption, strengthen markets for regenerative products, and unlock larger-scale systems change. As RACO progresses through 2026, Environmental Initiative staff will share insight and collaboration opportunities with MRCC members to support farmers and enable corporate action.

National thought leadership

Staff from Environmental Initiative representing the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative contributed insights and thought leadership at conferences across the country in 2025.

[From Chaos to Collaboration: Aligning Farmer Asks to Scale Regenerative Practices](#)

Trellis Impact 25 - San Jose, CA

Deborah Carter McCoy joined industry leaders from Griffith Foods, Horizon Organic Dairy, and HowGood to chat about how pre-competitive partnerships and supply-shed solutions can supercharge soil health and boost biodiversity while making regenerative practices easier for farmers.

Co-investment opportunities in North American landscapes

World Business Council for Sustainable Development, High Impact Landscapes - Zoom

Jenny Kramm and Jaycie Thomsen highlighted place-based opportunities for global corporations to engage in regenerative agriculture projects in the Midwest.

[Stakeholder Engagement for Freshwater Target Setting in the Mississippi River Basin](#)

Environmental Initiative and World Wildlife Fund - Zoom

Environmental Initiative and WWF co-hosted a pre-competitive discussion focused on the opportunities, challenges, and barriers corporations face when setting actionable, science-based freshwater targets in the Mississippi River Basin. Environmental Initiative conducted research and interviews with corporate sustainability leaders, surfacing common challenges and shared needs.



FROM THE CO-DIRECTORS

This was a year that asked for patience and a willingness to stay in conversation, even when the path forward was not clear. Our members showed up for the work. We are grateful for the trust that continues to make MRCC a place where partners can think, test, and learn. The trust among members is foundational to the collaborative and allows MRCC to confront complex challenges and design durable solutions in service to regenerative agriculture systems change.

One thing became especially clear this year: regenerative agriculture moves forward when responsibility is shared early and intentionally. When partners align before scaling, around expectations, data, and risk, the work becomes more navigable for everyone involved, especially farmers. This insight will continue shaping how MRCC shows up as a convener, partner, and learning community.

In 2026, we will support the design of strategies, partnerships, and projects with greater clarity from the outset. We will continue to create opportunities for cross-sector exchange, support collaboration across food, feed, and fuel systems, and stay grounded in the realities of farm businesses and the landscapes they steward.

We are entering the next chapter of this work with confidence. Not because the challenges are any less complex, but because the community is leaning in.

Thank you for the care, curiosity, and commitment you bring to this collaborative.

With appreciation,



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THANK YOU AND AN INVITATION TO PARTNER

The Midwest Row Crop Collaborative catalyzes investments among diverse public and private partners to accelerate sustainable agricultural innovation. Collaboration remains essential for the kind of innovation that drives transformational change.

Thank you to our partners who helped remove cost, risk, or knowledge barriers to implementing sustainable agricultural practices and supported the development of scalable solutions in 2025.

As we look to 2026, our invitation is clear: Continue leading with us. Bring your questions, your constraints, and your commitment to collaboration. Together, we can turn uncertainty into momentum and design systems that support farmers and hold up over time.

Contact Jenny Kramm

at jkramm@environmental-initiative.org or 612-334-3388 ext. 8112 to learn more about Midwest Row Crop Collaborative membership or sponsorship of the Regenerative Agriculture Leadership Cohort, biofuels, or crop diversification work.

MIDWEST ROW CROP COLLABORATIVE



Steering Committee

- Emily O'Halloran, Co-Chair, Kellanova
- Suzy Friedman, Co-Chair, World Wildlife Fund
- Lily Barrie, Kellanova
- Greg Bohrer, Walmart
- Claire Brierley, Walmart
- Jean Brokish, American Farmland Trust
- Challey Comer, The Nature Conservancy
- Travis Deppe, Gevo
- Simone Schenkel, Environmental Defense Fund
- Andrew Utterback, Ingredion
- Michelle Zackin, Walmart

Environmental Initiative staff

- Jenny Kramm, Partnership Director
- Jaycie Thomsen, Associate Partnership Director
- Jasmine Baxter
- Deborah Carter McCoy
- Britta Dornfeld
- Rachel Geissing
- Mike Harley
- Sacha Seymour-Anderson

