



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2023 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2023-251

Proposal Title: Training the Trainers: Expanding Regenerative Agriculture Mentor Networks

Project Manager Information

Name: Dave Zentner

Organization: Izaak Walton League of America - Minnesota Division

Office Telephone: () -

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: We will expand regenerative agriculture education capacity by recruiting and training farmer and agricultural landlord mentors passionate about conservation using a series of strategically designed workshops and conferences.

Funds Requested: \$383,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2026

LCCMR Funding Category: Methods to Protect, Restore, and Enhance Land, Water, and Habitat (F)

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Statewide

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Narrative

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Regenerative agriculture offers protections for impaired agricultural watersheds and landscapes. Reducing the amount of disturbed soil through no-tillage or reduced tillage can completely halt erosion, cutting sedimentation and nutrient transport that pollutes rivers and lakes. Cover crops and residue, take up excess nitrogen, provide nesting habitat for birds and reduce erosion and runoff. Overall, these practices improve soil health, storing carbon and preventing nutrients from entering surface and subsurface water. Moreover, they provide drought and flood resilience by storing water and promoting infiltration.

Unfortunately, there are many agronomic and social barriers to adoption and regenerative practices are not yet widespread in Minnesota. For example, no-till adoption requires more intensive management, and cover crops require careful termination to avoid interfering with row crop production and sacrificing crop insurance coverage. Many farmers feel pressure from neighbors to maintain “clean” fields that have been thoroughly tilled, have no residue, and have no cover crops or weeds. Ongoing education is required to overcome advanced agronomic challenges, and the development of networks of like-minded farmers is necessary to provide social support for adopting what are still seen as controversial practices within most farming communities.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

We will host events educating farmers and agricultural landowners and recruiting them to our mentor network, then give them opportunities to mentor others, magnifying our impacts. Our partner, Minnesota Soil Health Coalition (MSHC), has an existing network that has helped over 300 farmers convert 60,000 acres of land to regenerative agriculture, and by growing this network together, we will be capable of helping even more farmers and landlords adopt these conservation-focused practices. Mentors provide troubleshooting to farmers overcoming agronomic obstacles, assist with equipment modification, help develop individualized conservation plans, and serve as a source of social support. Moreover, peer-to-peer learning is a known pedagogical strategy that improves retention, understanding, and buy-in among both teachers and learners. To address economic obstacles, our Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) partners will be on board to provide cost sharing opportunities. Put together, we will help farmers overcome the agronomic, social, and economic obstacles to adoption. Training farmer and landlord mentors will create an invaluable resource for the agricultural community in Minnesota, shift cultural norms in favor of regenerative agriculture, and, at this scale, will make Minnesota a regional leader in environmentally-responsible agriculture.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state’s natural resources?

At least 40 new farmer mentors will be recruited, doubling the network of mentors and the capacity to support farmers in environmental stewardship through regenerative agriculture.

Mentors will be trained on advanced soil health practices and mentoring

The first non-operating landowner mentorship network in the country will be created, providing opportunities for landowners to realize their conservation vision.

New mentors will be connected with educational events and mentees

Doubling the mentor network will double our capacity, allowing us to convert over 20,000 acres per year to regenerative agriculture ongoing.

Minnesota will become a regional leader in regenerative agriculture adoption.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Expand farmer mentor network by hosting high-impact events designed to attract farmers knowledgeable in regenerative agriculture from across Minnesota.

Activity Budget: \$129,000

Activity Description:

Working closely with Minnesota Soil Health Coalition (MSHC), a regional leader in farmer mentor networking, will host advanced-level educational events designed to recruit experienced farmers to our network. These events will feature keynote speakers nationally renowned for their experience with regenerative agricultural practices and give experienced farmers a chance to learn from some of the most sustainably-minded farmers in the country without flying to a national conference. In order to attend these events for free, farmers will need to pledge to serve as a mentor for at least four hours per year for three years. We will host one event per year in environmentally strategic regions which have a critical mass of sustainably-minded farmers and capacity to host such high-impact events. Existing mentors will be invited to speak at the conferences and to be available to discuss the mentorship program with prospective mentors. We have learned that social bonding is crucial to creating lasting, landscape-level change, so these events will not only create an opportunity for like-minded farmers to come together, but will also build networks of mentors who can support both each other and new farmers in overcoming the economic, agronomic, and social challenges to adopting regenerative practices.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Host first event SE MN in Mississippi River Basin	March 31, 2024
Host second event Minnesota River Valley	March 31, 2025
Host third event northern MN in Mississippi River Basin	March 31, 2026

Activity 2: Recruit agricultural landlords to our mentor network through a series of non-farming landlord conferences.

Activity Budget: \$138,000

Activity Description:

Around half of row crop farmers in Minnesota work on rented land, and landlord negotiations are often cited as a major obstacle to adopting regenerative agriculture for tenant farmers. Both tenant farmers and landlords often need support to achieve their conservation vision within mutually agreeable lease terms. The Upper Mississippi River Initiative (UMRI) has considerable experience hosting landlord conferences. Leveraging MSHC capacity and networks, we have funding to host 5 landlord conferences throughout the Minnesota River Valley over the next two years and will host 9 additional conferences. These conferences will educate landlords and recruit them to our mentor network in order to magnify the effects of our educational activities. The primary content of this education will be designing mutually agreeable lease terms more favorable for the adoption of regenerative agriculture. Tenant farmer mentors will be present to discuss what has worked for them, what challenges they have faced, and what is reasonable to expect from a farmer tenant. In activity 3, landlords recruited as mentors will be compensated for time they spend reaching out to other interested landlords to walk them through the benefits of regenerative agriculture and the steps to promote its use on their land.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Host three landlord conferences	June 30, 2024
Host three landlord conferences	June 30, 2025
Host three landlord conferences	June 30, 2026

Activity 3: Provide mentorship opportunities to farmers and non-operating landowners.

Activity Budget: \$116,000

Activity Description:

We will connect new farmer and landlord mentors to events hosted by our partners, MSHC and various SWCDs. MSHC hosts over 40 events per year, so each mentor will have an opportunity to speak at events about their experiences overcoming challenges in regenerative agriculture. We will also connect new farmer and landlord mentors with farmers and landlords less experienced with regenerative agriculture, giving them an opportunity to work one-on-one to make individual operations more environmentally sustainable. This peer-to-peer education has proven very successful- in the last 3 years, MSHC's network of 40 farmers has promoted the conversion of 35,000 acres of land to regenerative practices, reducing river and lake sedimentation, halting erosion, providing nesting habitat for birds, storing carbon in the soil, and reducing nutrient losses to surface and subsurface water.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Provide landowner perspective at ongoing regenerative agriculture events	May 31, 2026
Sponsor farmers to share skills at ongoing soil health and regenerative agriculture events	May 31, 2026
Connect 40 new mentors to mentees	May 31, 2026

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Mark Gutierrez	Minnesota Soil Health Coalition	With decades of experience working with farmers, Mark oversees the farmer-run MSHC. He will coordinate the mentors, oversee the events, and assist with participant recruiting.	No
Cody Fox	Mower SWCD	Cody will provide cost-share assistance to program participants, recruit workshop and conference participants, and assist in the design and implementation of workshops.	No
Duane Hvorka	Izaak Walton League of America National Office	identify resources for landlord workshops, recruit participants through the Izaak Walton League's extensive network	No
Barb Hanson	Upper Mississippi River Initiative	Barb will manage bookkeeping and grant reporting relying on her several years of experience.	Yes
Francine Larson	Serburne SWCD	Provide cost-share assistance, recruit participants, organize events	No

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

UMRI has secured funds from SARE and Fishers to Farmers for conservation in addition to considerable donations from private foundations. The Minnesota Soil Health Coalition has also identified many potential funders and has secured over half a million dollars this year to support regenerative agriculture adoption in partnership with UMRI and SWCDs. After expansion, the MSHC network of mentors will continue to operate, grow and develop. The success of the expansion of a mentor network dedicated to regenerative agriculture will be communicated through our Newsletter (800 subscribers), social media (>2,000 subscribers), and in media outlets across Minnesota.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Dave Zentner

Job Title: Project Director

Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.

Dave Zentner is a regional and national leader on environmental conservation issues with decades of experience in environmental leadership. He has served as National President of the Izaak Walton League of America in addition to several other leadership roles. In his quest to protect Minnesota's environment, Dave has formed collaborations with hunters, farmers, legislators, and the general public. Dave was an active player in building support for the Legacy Fund Amendment, bringing together Minnesota residents from myriad backgrounds. Dave's work on behalf of natural resource conservation has been recognized with an Honorary Dr. of Law from the University of MN, an honorary Dr. of Public Service from Northland College, the Izaak Walton League's 54 Founders Award, and Outdoor Life Magazine's 100th Anniversary Conservationist' of the Year. In addition to his considerable environmental credentials, Dave also has several decades of experience running a business and coaching employees. Dave's leadership experience will ensure that qualified staff are recruited, trained, and maintained, and his record of getting things done will ensure milestones are met in a timely manner. Dave also has several decades of fundraising experience, including putting together grants and raising donations. This experience will help build capacity for the Minnesota Chapter of the Izaak Walton League in the coming years and will provide funds for the continuation of this project past the completion date.

Organization: Izaak Walton League of America - Minnesota Division

Organization Description:

For over a century, the Izaak Walton League of America has been at the forefront of efforts to protect and restore the health of our streams, lakes, and wetlands. Since the first Farm bill in the 1930's, the League has supported federal policy that supports conservation on America's farms and ranches. The League has a strong presence in Minnesota and our staff and volunteers have good relationships with conservation agencies and organizations. This project will be carried out by the Upper Mississippi River Initiative, a project of the Izaak Walton League. We have a long track record of success in undertaking and completing local initiatives like this one. Specifically, we have experience facilitating non-operating landowners of agricultural property conferences, which bring together landowners and farmers to develop mutually beneficial conservation goals that integrate regenerative agricultural practices. We have relationships with numerous conservation organizations across Minnesota, including those dedicated to promoting conservation and regenerative agriculture.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Administrator		coordinate personnel, reporting, liasing			0%	0.51		\$36,000
Program Coordinator		Recruit participants, organize events			0%	1.5		\$99,000
							Sub Total	\$135,000
Contracts and Services								
Minnesota Soil Health Coalition	Sub award	Mentors will provide one-on-one support for farmers and landlords				0.27		\$38,000
Minnesota Soil Health Coalition	Sub award	Mentors will speak at and facilitate workshops				0.09		\$12,000
Minnesota Soil Health Coalition	Sub award	A project coordinator will recruit mentors and organize events				1.5		\$99,000
							Sub Total	\$149,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Postage	Mailers will be sent in advance of each event to recruit participants @ \$0.40/mailer					\$8,000
							Sub Total	\$8,000
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-

Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	12 workshops * 3 travelers * 200 miles * \$0.56 rounded down	Program coordinators and directors need to be present for meetings					\$4,000
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	12 workshops * 3 people * \$233 per diem rounded down	Leaders and project manager need to attend workshops out of town					\$8,000
							Sub Total	\$12,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	12 events, 50 attendees per, 3 handouts per, 2000 mailers prior to event, banners	Recruit attendance to events and disseminate information to audience					\$12,000
							Sub Total	\$12,000
Other Expenses								
		3 High-impact farmer workshops- \$5k national speaker fees * 2 keynotes, \$500 local speakers *2, \$1000 for conference center	Educate and recruit farmer mentors					\$36,000
		Conferences- 9 Landlord conferences- \$1,000 room rental, \$1,500 speakers	Educate and recruit landlord mentors					\$23,000
		Radio ads- \$500 * 12	Recruit participants to events					\$8,000
							Sub Total	\$67,000
							Grand Total	\$383,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
In-Kind	Izaak Walton League of America	Duane Hvorka effort	Secured	\$12,000
			State Sub Total	\$12,000
Non-State				
In-Kind	UMRI volunteer labor	UMRI director labor	Secured	\$24,000
In-Kind	Minnesota Soil Health Coalition	MSHC director labor	Secured	\$24,000
In-Kind	Minnesota Soil Health Coalition	Food for events	Secured	\$12,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$60,000
			Funds Total	\$72,000

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [3eba2b60-c30.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Our extensive network of existing experienced farmers and conservation-minded landowners will become mentors after interacting with our existing mentor network and going through training to become new mentors. These new mentors will speak at workshops and help other farmers and landowners develop or expand conservation plans, and then they will provide ongoing mentorship as those farmers face additional challenges. As new farmers and landowners gain more experience, they will be recruited as ...

Financial Capacity

File: [6111e68f-539.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Letter of Support from President	2cb0e5ed-ee3.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter or Other

Title	File
MSHC Letter of Support	c3fd5cff-529.pdf
Mower SWCD Letter of Support	4ac82182-d1f.pdf
Sherburne SWCD Letter of Support	a086b781-b8d.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

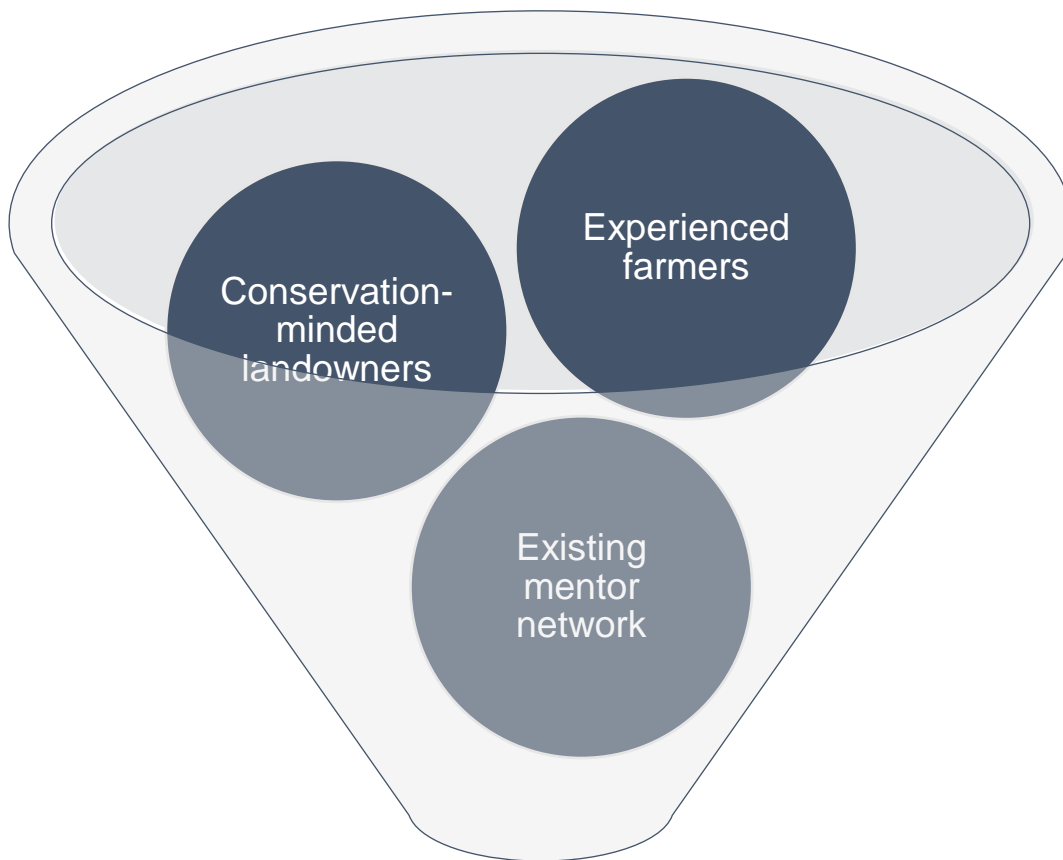
N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No



**Expanded
mentor network**

Increased capacity for regenerative agriculture that promotes soil health, protects water quality, and stores carbon

Individualized mentoring

Introductory workshops

Conservation plans

