



Saginaw Bay Soil Health Hero Awards

2023 Selection Committee



1. Dylan Arnette

MAEAP Verifier – Michigan Dept. of Agriculture & Rural Development

Dylan Arnett is a MAEAP Verifier. He currently verifies the following counties: Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Gratiot, Huron, Isabella, Lake, Mecosta, Midland, Montcalm, Osceola, Saginaw, Sanilac, St. Clair, and Tuscola. Dylan attended Michigan State University and received a Bachelor of Science in Crop and Soil Science with a minor in Technology Systems (GIS) and Environmental Studies. He grew up in Gratiot County, where he still helps operate his family’s large cash crop farm with his father, and manages a 4,500-head hog operation.



2. Julie Doll

Chief Executive Officer– Michigan Agriculture Advancement

Julie started as CEO at Michigan Agricultural Advancement (MiAA) in 2021. Previously she worked at Michigan State University’s Kellogg Biological Station as Associate Director for Stakeholder Engagement for the Kellogg Biological Station Long-Term Agroecosystem Research Program. As a PhD student and Postdoc at the University of Wisconsin-Madison she investigated agronomic, ecological, and social aspects to using native prairie grasses in grazed pastures. While a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay from 2000–2002, Julie fell in love with working with famers, grasslands, and meeting the needs of people

through improved agricultural production and care for the environment.



3. Monica Jean

Field Crops Educator – MSU Extension

Monica serves central lower Michigan with an emphasis on the Saginaw Bay watershed region. Her position covers a large variety of crop production including corn, soybean, edible dry beans, potato and integrated crop and livestock systems. Monica is involved in cover crop, soil health, nutrient management and cropping system research projects. She enjoys conducting practical, on-farm research and working with farmers to improve the weather resilience of their farms. Monica is the Michigan chair for the Midwest Cover Crop Council and the North Central Climate Collaborative.



4. Kristen Poley

Michigan Research Manager – Michigan Corn Growers Association

Kristin Poley joined the Corn Marketing Program of Michigan (CMPM) in 2019 as research manager, where she is responsible for managing CMPM's grant research portfolio. She is also the coordinator for the Great Lakes Crop Summit and is involved in climate and sustainability initiatives. Kristin grew up in Sturgis, Michigan. She attended Michigan State University and graduated with a B.S in fisheries and wildlife biology and an M.S. in entomology. From there Kristin joined the applied nematology staff at MSU where she studied nematode management and soil health. She is also a certified crop advisor.

Kristin now resides in St. Johns, Michigan with her husband, Nathan, on a few acres raising chickens, geese, and ducks.



5. Steve Schaub

MAEAP Technician, Tuscola County Conservation District
President-elect, MI Chapter of Soil & Water Conservation Society

Steve Schaub works for the Tuscola Soil Conservation District as a MAEAP Technician in Michigan's Thumb region. In this role, Steve works directly with farmers on nutrient management, pest management, farm emergency planning, and protecting groundwater and surface water from environmental risks. Steve is President-elect of the Michigan Chapter of the Soil & Water Conservation Society. He also serves on the State Council of the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts representing Region Nine. He is a director

for Lapeer Conservation District and resides in North Branch where he raises beef cattle and forage crops.



6. Steve Tait

Owner/Operator – Tait Farms

Steve Tait is a former Soil Health Hero Award Winner (2017 Impact Award). He is a row crop farmer from Huron County specializing in soil health farming systems. He farms ~1,000 acres near Caseville with a primarily corn-soybeans-wheat rotation, with the occasional sugar beet or dry bean crop as well. His conservation practices include continuous no-till, multi-species cover crops and nutrient management. Since adopting soil health practices ten years ago, Steve has increased his soil organic matter by a full percentage point, and has been able to reduce his fertilizer inputs. Steve is a user of, and field rep for

AgSpectrum. He rents some of fields and owns the rest—all of which are within six miles of the farm headquarters. Landlords that rent to Steve do so because they know he takes care of the land, treating it as if it were his own. Tait Farms is a multi-generational farm. In addition to he and his wife Cynthia, the Tait's also employ two other workers and have two children that help out on the farm. In 2019, Steve and another farmer launched the Thumb-Area Farmer-led Watershed Group. This group has grown to nearly 40 members and continues to meet up to three times a year to discuss soil health issues with local farmers.



6. Ben Thelen

District Conservationist (Genesee County) – USDA-NRCS

Ben Thelen has worked for the Natural Resources Conservation Service for 19 years. He is currently the District Conservationist for the Flint Field Office. He previously worked in the Saginaw, Kimball, Caro and Ithaca Field Offices. He attended Michigan State University and has a degree in Environmental Soil Science.



7. Tess Van Gorder

Conservation and Regulatory Relations Specialist – Michigan Farm Bureau

Tess Van Gorder is the Associate Policy and Regulatory Specialist in the Agricultural Ecology Department in the Public Policy & Commodity Division at Michigan Farm Bureau. She works on environmental issues, which includes everything from recycling to anaerobic digesters. Prior to joining Farm Bureau, Tess worked as an Energy Procurement Analyst for Engie Insight. Tess received a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan in Public Policy, with a specialization in Environmental Policy and a minor in Environmental Geology and Spanish.



8. Lisa Woodke

Director of Sustainability – Star of The West Milling Company

Lisa joined Star of the West in 2019 as sustainability director. Lisa is a graduate of Michigan State University College of Agriculture. During her two-plus years with the company she has led several projects, including the installation of solar panels at the company's Richville, MI, location; the addition of a pollinator strip at the company's Emmett, MI, location; the launch of Airly carbon crackers and the Frankenmuth goat riverbank project. She also has received her Sustainability Specialty designation after receiving her Certified Crop Adviser certificate for the state of Michigan. In addition to volunteering for many groups and organizations, Lisa also currently sits on her local school board.