



Increasing Access to Regenerative Agriculture

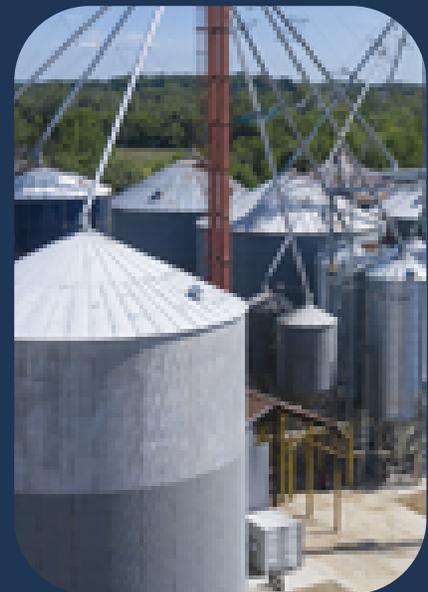
BACKGROUND

Multiple partners spanning industry sectors have undertaken nearly a decade of field work alongside agricultural stakeholders, focused on barriers to the adoption of pro-soil health practices in Michigan. This work started in 2017 with funding from MDARD, and has continued with support of the Erb Family Foundation. It has brought together “nontraditional” partners. Helping farmers and industry continually improve conservation practice adoption – while remaining profitable and successful – is important both for environmental outcomes, and to meet increased market scrutiny into sustainable production practices.

Here are key pillars we have heard throughout this work, and potential areas of focus for Michigan policy leaders. These pillars could provide state policy leaders with options to help expand, advance and improve conservation program delivery.

Pillar 1: Grow infrastructure to support diverse markets and supply chains for Michigan

- **Invest in Value Chain Infrastructure:** Underdeveloped handling, aggregation, processing, and distribution for Michigan-based small grain field crops need investment. Additionally there is a need for small and medium scale meat processors throughout the state.
- **Encourage and Engage Institutional Buyers:** Redouble efforts to link institutional buyers (schools, universities, hospitals) with farm and commodity reps to identify and reduce barriers for local use of Michigan-grown products.
- **Address Rural Infrastructure:** rural infrastructure crisis (roads, rails, internet) disproportionately affects smaller farmers and hampers market access. Most efforts to reinvest in infrastructure have a downstream benefit for diversity of production in Michigan.



Priority 2: Complement current conservation programming with longer-term, targeted and tailored options

- **Build on the successes of existing conservation programs by providing longer-term tools**, supporting soil health transitions over multiple years (5-7+). Longer timelines encourage permanent practice adoption, reflect ecological realities, and allow for troubleshooting complex conservation practices
- **Leverage technology to track and compensate for desired environmental outcomes**, allowing flexibility for site-specific solutions.
- **Continue to enhance understanding of conservation program availability**, supporting efforts like MDARD's Soil Health Task Force and NGO-led efforts to increase producer and retail channel awareness of conservation program opportunities.

Priority 3: support social networks and peer-to-peer learning opportunities

- **Support networking efforts** (facilities, supplies, food, financial support for leaders), leadership and facilitation training, and organization support (communications, outreach, and strategic planning) that equips farm organizations, nonprofit groups and government to convene the industry around new, emerging ideas and practices.
- **Build stronger connections between farmers and new purchases/ end consumers**: These efforts can take many forms. The industry will benefit from greater collaboration and networking among stakeholders across the food system to support resilience

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