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**THE WHY:** The advantages farmers are gaining from regenerative farming practices ~ [page 2](#)

**THREE SISTERS:** Reap the benefits of the Three Sisters planting method when using cover crops ~ [page 2](#)

**COST-SHARE:** Get some money for cover crops and reduced tillage ~ [page 4](#)



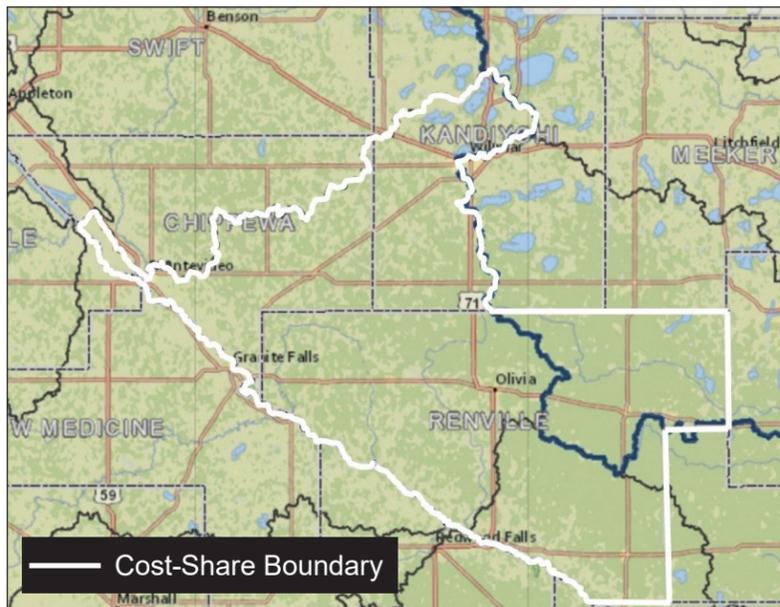
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SUMMER 2022

BY JORDAN AUSTIN, HAWK CREEK WATER QUALITY/OUTREACH TECHNICIAN



## COST-SHARE AVAILABLE

### GET SOME MONEY TO IMPLEMENT COVER CROPS AND REDUCED TILLAGE PRACTICES

The Hawk Creek Watershed Project and Renville County Soil and Water Conservation District are offering cost-share programs for reduced tillage practices and cover crops (planted between April 1 and September 15, 2022). These cost-share programs are available to producers in the Hawk Creek Watershed (covering portions of Chippewa, Kandiyohi, and Renville Counties) and all of Renville County. Contract is for one year with a maximum of three years of cost-share payments.

Reduced Tillage	Cover Crops
Cost-share up to \$20/acre to implement no-till and/or strip till (e.g. labor, equipment use), with maximum payment of \$2,000 per farmer per year	Cost-share up to 75% of costs (e.g. seed, labor, equipment use, seed incorporation), with maximum payment of \$2,000 per farmer per year
All invoices and passed field inspection (after spring cash crop is planted) are required before payment is made	Prior to planting, seed mix must have at least three species pre-approved by Renville SWCD/HCWP. Seed tags, all invoices, and passed field inspection are required before payment is made in 2023
Cost-share application must be signed and approved before planting takes place, ineligible for this cost-share if you receive incentive and/or cost-share payment through any other program (e.g. EQIP, CSP)	

## Soil Health Field Day September 17

BY HEIDI RAUENHORST, HAWK CREEK COORDINATOR

The Renville County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Hawk Creek Watershed Project (HCWP) are hosting a family-friendly soil health field day on September 17 at the farm of Phil and Robin Smith south of Sacred Heart. The field day will demonstrate multiple test plots of cover crop interseedings into corn and soybeans and several variations of cover crop mixes and also show reduced tillage methods. No-till, strip till, and cover crop application equipment will be on display and vendors from local cover crop seed suppliers, consultants, applicators, and equipment suppliers will also be on hand to answer questions and provide information. Several activities are also planned for kids. Phil Smith has been successfully using no-till for over 20 years and cover crops for eight years in his 800-acre corn, soybean, and small grain operation. Phil co-founded 212 Seed & Ag and is also a Pioneer Hi-Bred sales representative. Brian Ryberg, who uses reduced tillage and cover crops on his 5,000-acre sugar beet, corn, and soybean operation near Buffalo Lake, will discuss economics and profitability of implementing soil health practices. The keynote speaker is Gabe Brown, a regenerative farming innovator who uses soil health practices on his 5,000-acre farm and ranch near Bismarck, North Dakota, author of "Dirt to Soil: One Family's Journey into Regenerative Agriculture", partner in Understanding Ag LLC, and educator for the Soil Health Academy. The field day will be an opportunity to learn about regenerative agriculture, to discuss how soil health has been implemented locally, to find out what has been successful, to ask about what caused problems, to learn how those problems were fixed, and to see what benefits farmers are realizing by increasing their soil health. The full agenda will be posted soon at [renvilleswcd.com](http://renvilleswcd.com) and [hawkcreekwatershed.org](http://hawkcreekwatershed.org), as well as the Renville SWCD Facebook and Twitter pages. If you would like to attend the field day, please RSVP by contacting Ethan at the Renville SWCD office at (320) 523-3635 or [ethand@renvilleswcd.org](mailto:ethand@renvilleswcd.org).

# REGENERATIVE FARMING TODAY

## 3 REASONS TO ATTEND THE FIELD DAY SEPT 17



**1. Hear from local farmers using regenerative agriculture**

Ask local farmers why they are making soil health a priority and how they make it successful and profitable

**2. Learn from soil health pioneer Gabe Brown**



Listen to Gabe share how he works with, not against, Mother Nature to make his 5,000-acre operation successful



**3. Get the kids outdoors for a day on the farm**

Bring the kids along for a day full of fun outdoor activities and learning about agriculture

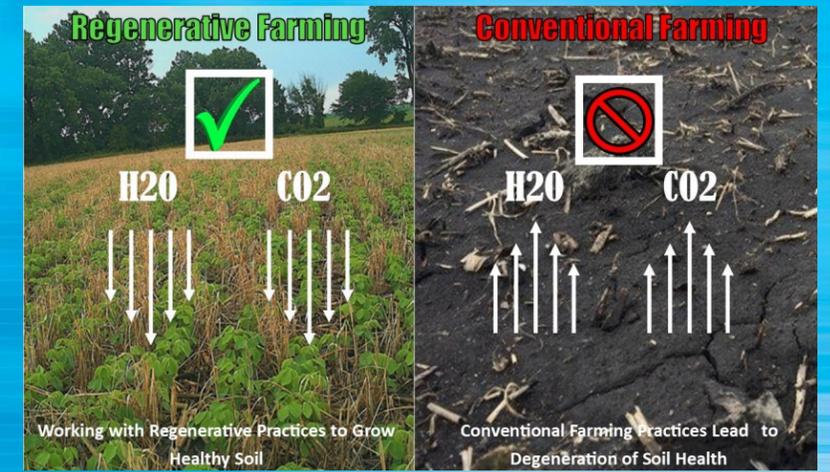
# Regenerative Farming: The Why

BY KYLE RICHTER,  
RENVILLE SWCD  
WATER RESOURCE  
TECHNICIAN

Regenerative farming is increasingly being put under the microscope by the farming community. For generations, conventional farming practices have dominated the way agricultural crops are cultivated and grown. Planting into black fluffy soil was the only way. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to see a planter in a lush green field, green seeding corn or soybeans and having great success financially and in yield. The past few decades have shown the idea of regenerative farming on the rise, but what is it? The gist of it is: farming by working with Mother Nature, not against her. Many people believe farmers need to only use no-till techniques to be considered a regenerative farmer, but that is

not the case. Although that is great and the end goal, regenerative farming needs to show inclusiveness and allow for a broader range of farmers to be allowed into this “club.” This will allow for more widespread adoption and maintain the high productivity of agriculture throughout Renville County and surrounding areas. A small step towards regenerative farming or implementing one regenerative practice will go a long way. The question that needs to be answered though is why should I ditch the tried-and-true method of farming for this new age farming technique? Sustainability is the answer. In 2018, the Renville Soil and Water Conservation District tested native soil that tested at 14.7% soil organic matter; the conventional field in a corn and soybean rotation adjacent had a 3.9% soil organic

matter. Conventional techniques are depleting rich organic matter, naturally found in soil, and making crops more reliant on synthetic chemicals and artificial nutrients to grow. Not only is the crop more reliant on chemicals, more time and energy are expended on applying these products to the crop. Reducing soil disturbance allows a growing root to stay active in the soil throughout the year, which allows soil microbes to remain active longer and restore the organic matter that is used during the growing season. Practicing regenerative techniques helps in more ways than just growing crops. Water quality benefits are seen by increasing water holding capacity of soil, reducing soil erosion, and decreasing water pollutants by the decrease of synthetic inputs.



As William S. Burroughs wisely said, “When you stop growing, you start dying.”

# The Three Sisters Collaboration

BY HOLLY HATLEWICK,  
RENVILLE SWCD  
ADMINISTRATOR

In April 2022, I was privileged to travel to Ecuador with the Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership Program

and observed most small to medium farms applying and thriving with the Three Sisters companion cropping technique. The Three Sisters is a community planting cropping system used by many Native cultures worldwide. This companion cropping system works together to deter weeds and pests, enrich the soil, and support each other. The most common system is corn,

beans, and squash grown together. The corn offers support and a place for the bean to climb, the bean provides the corn nitrogen, and the squash armors the soil from erosion and helps prevent weeds from germinating. Together, the Three Sisters provide both sustainable soil fertility as well as a high yielding production.

If one thinks about soil health practices such as no-till and using cover crops in a cropping system, it's the same concept as The Three Sisters, but on a scale that can be mechanically harvested. The basic soil health principals of armoring the soil, crop diversity, and living roots are being applied. In talking with a farmer in Ecuador, he said he uses The Three Sisters method because that is what his dad did and his grandfather did. He then said he does it to protect his soil and keep his farm healthy for his kids and grandkids. Ecuador receives 30-80 inches of rain annually and armoring the soil is essential to protecting the rolling landscape from soil erosion.

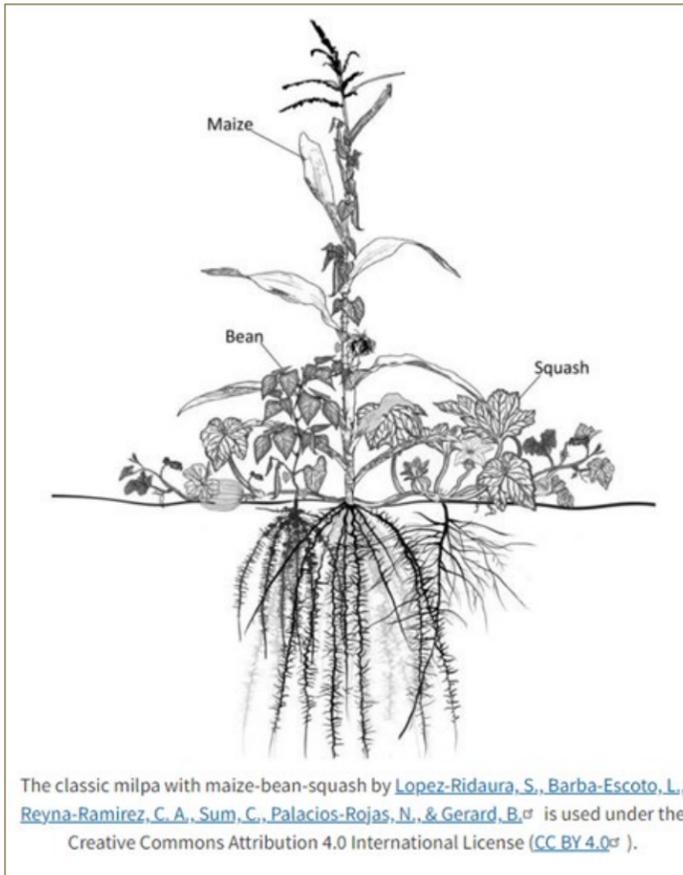


Photo by Holly Hatlewick April 2022

The Three Sisters concept is utilized in this crop field near Mindo, Ecuador where choclo (also referred to as Peruvian or Cuzco corn), pole beans, and butternut squash are growing together to provide sustainable soil fertility as well as a high yielding production.



Photo by Holly Hatlewick April 2022

A crop field near Quito, Ecuador applying the Three Sisters cropping system with corn, green beans, pole beans, and winter squash.

“ Soil health is a global concern and instead of trying our best, we need to do BETTER. ”  
~ FARMER FROM ECUADOR

At its core, it's the same reason many U.S. farmers apply regenerative agricultural practices - not for them, but for the next generation. One Ecuadorian farmer said to me, “Soil health is a global concern and instead of trying our

best, we need to do BETTER.” The sentiment of his words echoes those of Barbara Ward, British economist and writer: “We have forgotten how to be good guests, how to walk lightly on the earth as its other creatures do.”