

Spring Gatherings at Fields of Sinsinawa

This spring has been a season of coming together.

Across several very different—but deeply connected—events, Fields of Sinsinawa welcomed people onto the land to share stories, food, and time. What emerged in both spaces was something simple and powerful: community taking shape.

Women of the Land: Rooted in Story

On April 10-11, about 25 women gathered for *Women of the Land: Rooted in Story*, an immersive retreat centered on storytelling,

land, faith, and community. Co-hosted with Sinsinawa Mound Center, the retreat offered space to slow down and be present with each other and with the landscape.

Over the course of the retreat, participants shared in meditation, outdoor exploration, storytelling, a fire pit, and community singing. There was a quiet unfolding to the experience—strangers arriving with curiosity, and leaving with a sense of connection.

What stood out most was the openness people brought with

them: a willingness to listen, to reflect, and to share pieces of their own story. By the end, the group had formed an emerging community rooted in both place and relationship.

We're grateful for the energy and intention each participant brought, and we're looking forward to continuing this work. Additional Women of the Land gatherings are planned for July, October, and January, with more details to come as plans take shape.

Continued...



During the retreat, the Women of the Land attendees loaded up on a Fields of Sinsinawa people mover for a tour of the landscape.

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Grounded Gatherings

In a different but equally meaningful way, our first Grounded Gatherings event opened the door to connection right here in our neighborhood.

More than 50 people joined us at the Grounds Shed for a free pancake and sausage breakfast, stopping in for coffee, a bite to eat, and conversation. Some were new faces, others familiar, but the spirit was the same: people taking time to connect.

Throughout the morning, conversations unfolded easily. A few groups even headed out on informal tours of the land, catching a glimpse of how the landscape as it began to come alive this spring.

This gathering was a first step in what we hope will be an ongoing rhythm of simple, welcoming moments where people can show up as they are and get to know one another.

We'll be hosting Grounded Gatherings again on May 20 and June 24 (both Wednesdays), from 6–10 am at the Grounds Shed (2551 County Rd. Z, Hazel Green, WI). Additional dates are likely to follow, and all are welcome!

A Living Classroom

Alongside these gatherings, we spent time digging into the practical side of land stewardship, exploring how soil health connects directly to farm resilience and profitability.

In March, we hosted Soil, Carbon, and Farm Profitability, featuring guest speaker Bodie Kitchel. Bodie shared insights on WEOC and the role carbon plays in helping farmers reduce inputs while strengthening their systems. His talk

Continued...



From morning hikes to singing 'round the firepit to a pancake breakfast, Fields of Sinsinawa has facilitated connections to the land and each other throughout the winter and spring.

Spring Gatherings, cont.

sparked thoughtful questions and lively discussion, setting the tone for a full morning of learning. The program continued with an exploration of the often-overlooked costs of soil erosion, followed by a quiz and Jeopardy-style game focused on cover crops, and a deeper dive into planting with purpose. The mix of technical insight and hands-on engagement made for an energizing learning experience.

We also had the opportunity to host the second Roots to Results soil health training, organized by the Dubuque County Watersheds.

Guest educators Barry Fisher, Hillary Olson, and Alisha Sedlmayer, along with our own Rick Bieber, shared deep, practical knowledge grounded in years of experience. A tour of the fields brought those ideas to life, offering a clear look at how different crops and management practices shape the soil over time.

Beyond these formal programs, the land also served as a gathering place for meaningful discovery and engagement. We welcomed

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On March 9, Bodie Kitchel (speaker, above, right) presented in the classroom at UW-Platteville's Ag Tech Center, discussing the connection between soil carbon, microbial life, living roots, water infiltration, and farming practices. For Roots to Results on March 24, retired NRCS soil scientist Barry Fisher (right, wearing cap), demonstrated a simple in-field test to evaluate soil aggregation.



Spring Gatherings, cont.

several groups for meetings and tours, including a visit from the Midwest staff of American Farmland Trust. Their time on the land offered space for reflection, learning, and connection, and included a memorable stop at nearby Berning Acres, complete with cud-chewing cows, chipper chickens, and gleeful goats. We also spent time touring the land with groups of Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters and Associates, deepening relationships that are foundational to this place.

And in a sure sign of the season, the bees are back! With help from the local Menominee

Achievers 4-H club, we prepared trees, garden beds, and bee boxes in anticipation of new hives. Sinsinawa Associate Mary Goonan guided the effort and returned a couple of weeks later with a “nuc” of bees, with another hive arriving soon. Their presence is a small but powerful reminder that as the soil comes to life, so too does everything it supports.

Looking Ahead

While all of these events looked different on the surface, they shared a common thread: creating space for connection.

Whether through learning, doing, exploring, storytelling circles, or shared meals, these gatherings are part of a larger intention—to build relationships rooted in land, community, and care. We’re grateful to everyone who joined us this spring and helped bring that vision to life.

Turn to page 6 to see how you can join us as we continue the journey in the months ahead.



Photo by Peiro Taico of American Farmland Trust

Several groups spent time with Fields of Sinsinawa this spring, including a group of Sinsinawa Dominicans (top) who managed to stay warm despite cold, blustery conditions; the American Farmland Trust midwest staff (above, right and left), who held a training session at the Mound and also visited nearby Berning Acres; and the Menominee Achievers 4-H club (right), who helped prepare the landscape for new bee hives.



Board Opening at Fields of Sinsinawa

Fields of Sinsinawa currently has an open seat on its Board of Directors. As the organization continues to grow and evolve, we are seeking an individual who is excited to contribute time, energy, and thoughtful leadership to help guide this work forward.

This opening follows the recent departure of Steve Kossel, who stepped down from the board after a period of dedicated service. Steve served as Treasurer and played an important role in keeping board meetings focused, productive, and moving forward with clarity and purpose. His steady presence and attention to detail helped strengthen the organization during a time of meaningful growth.

After recently moving to a new property, Steve made the decision to step back due to the limited capacity he now has for the level of engagement this role requires. We are grateful for his contributions and the care he brought to the work. We extend our sincere thanks to Steve and our very best wishes to him and his wife, Tammie, as they settle into this next chapter. If you or someone you know may be interested in learning more about board service with Fields of Sinsinawa, we welcome you to reach out to Tony Peirick at peirick0583@gmail.com or 920-390-0583.



Plow & Pen

Writings and reflections on soil care, land stewardship, and farming



The following was written by Jerry Volenec, owner of Hardscrabble Farms in Montfort, WI, and husband of Board Member Jen Volenec. Jerry says his daughter Elizabeth was working on a class project and asked him to explain why he farms the way he does. This is what he told her.

Caring for God's Creation

It's hard to distill down why I do what I do into a couple sentences...

Moreover, why I'm changing "how" I do what I do. It is my church.

There is really no separation between God, the farm and family for me.

It's all mashed together like a trifle.

Lots of different good things all in the same bowl, kinda separated, but still all together.

It isn't a job.

It is family.

I'm doing things different because the way I was doing it was killing my soul.

This caring for the land... God's creation is a wonderful thing that only a few are blessed to experience.

I, we, have this blessing.

It's hard.

But, God only blesses what you can handle. I've been given the blessing of caring for a portion of God's creation. I'm working to fulfill this charter to the best of my ability.

New Uploads on Our YouTube Channel

Fields of Sinsinawa is on YouTube, and we've recently added a number of new videos. You can now watch footage from this spring's seeding of soybeans into a wheat/soybean relay system—an up-close look at how these practices come to life in the field.

We've also begun sharing presentations from the 2025 Soul of the Soil Conference, making it easy to revisit favorite sessions or catch the ones you missed.

You can explore the latest videos and subscribe to the channel here: <https://www.youtube.com/@FieldsofSinsinawa/videos>

Last fall, we seeded wheat, leaving room to add a second crop to be seeded this spring. The wheat came up great, and on April 23, we seeded soybeans in the gaps. We'll highlight this system in a field day in June!



Upcoming Events

Grounded Gatherings

When: Multiple dates!

- May 20, 6-10 am
- June 24, 6-10 am
- Additional dates to come

Where: Sinsinawa Mound farm buildings, 2551 County Rd. Z, Hazel Green, WI 53811

We're launching something new at Fields of Sinsinawa: Grounded Gatherings. These informal mornings with FREE PANCAKE BREAKFAST are a chance to slow down, share a cup of coffee, and connect. No agenda, no program, just an open invitation to farmers, neighbors, and anyone curious about the work happening here.

At their core, these gatherings are about relationships. Because while we often focus on practices and outcomes, the most meaningful work starts with people knowing each other, building trust, and finding a place at the table.

Fields of Sinsinawa is still new, and we know there are many neighbors we haven't yet had the chance to meet, or to truly get to know. Grounded Gatherings are a simple way to begin changing that.

Stop by for a few minutes or stay awhile. Bring a neighbor or come on your own. Coffee will be on, breakfast will be ready, and the door will be open.



Summer Field Days and Events

June 5, 5-6:30 pm: Relay Cropping Field Day

Where: Sinsinawa Mound farm buildings, 2551 County Rd. Z, Hazel Green, WI 53811

Take a closer look at our wheat/soybean relay system in action. This field day will cover row spacing, timing, seeding rates, and equipment, along with how fall cover crops fit into the system. Burgers to follow event!

June 10, 1-3 pm: Dairy Grazing Field Day

Where: 5405 N. Mill Creek Rd., Scales Mound, IL 61075

Join the Illinois Grazing Lands Coalition for this deep dive into rotational dairy grazing. An organic dairy since 2005, the Koester farm will host the event.

July 10-11 or 17-18 (TBD): Women of the Land— The Living Roots of Soil and Body

Where: Sinsinawa Mound Conference Center, 515 County Rd. Z, Sinsinawa, WI 53824

Our second session of our Women of the Land Retreat, will explore the soil and how it impacts our bodies, her-stories, and daily lives.

July 13, 5-6:30 pm: Stock Cropper Field Day

Where: Sinsinawa Mound farm buildings, 2551 County Rd. Z, Hazel Green, WI 53811

The Cluster Cluck 5000 is back in action. Join us to see updates to our mobile livestock barn designed for easier use, hear what we learned in 2025, and meet the 2026 animals.

July 31, 11:30 am-4 pm: Soil Health Field Day

Where: 7979 East Cahill Rd., Stockton, IL 61085

Hosted by the Jo Daviess County Farm Bureau, this gathering at Greg Thoren's farm will be a great opportunity to see how he's combining no-till, cover crops, and grazing to advance his conservation goals.

August 5, 1-3 pm: Sheep Grazing Field Day

Where: 5998 S. Irwin Rd., Hanover, IL 61041

See sheep equipped with collars for fenceless grazing, and learn how Nathan' Koester is applying the five soil care principles to cycle nutrients, reduce erosion and weed pressure, and improve water infiltration.

All dates and times are tentative. Please visit FieldsofSinsinawa.org for the latest updates.

Save the
Date! August
25-26, 2026!

S O F THE I L

3RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Sinsinawa Mound, WI



Join **Fields of Sinsinawa** for two days of learning about soil functionality, where the science of regenerative agriculture meets a deeper sense of connection to people, purpose, and place. Through diverse voices—from farmers and researchers to storytellers and practitioners—you'll explore how living soil systems support resilient farms, thriving communities, and a more meaningful way of stewarding the earth.

Accommodations: A block of rooms has been reserved at Stoney Creek Inn in Galena, IL. Doubles and Kings are \$60/night; larger rooms are \$109-\$149/night. To access the special rates, go to stoneycreekhoteles.com/hotel/galena/ and plug in SMC in the promo bar or call the front desk at 815-777-2223 and let them know you are attending a conference at Sinsinawa Mound Center. Rooms will be released to the general public on July 24. After that date, the special rates will still be available, but rooms may book up fast.

Rooted in Soil. Growing Together.



Planting with a Purpose

Beneath every field, there's a conversation happening that we can't see.

When a seed is placed in the soil, it takes on moisture, and the biological community within the seed, also known as the spermosphere, blossoms. Then, a steady stream of sugars, amino acids, and other carbon-hydrates (aka carbohydrates) are released to the soil organisms, creating what is known as the rhizosphere, where microbes, bacteria, and fungi create a community.

The species-specific exudates released from different plants create a plant-soil feedback system that can satisfy the biological void in the soils that would otherwise be filled by weeds. Sometimes this happens with individual plantings; more often it happens with the synergy of multiple seeds sprouting at the same time. This can help explain why weeds show up some years but not others, or why a crop might thrive or fail.

This season, we're setting out to explore those dynamics more closely. We've established research plots where individual

cover crop species will be planted side by side with a diverse mix. By holding management constant and varying only the plant community, we can begin to see how different species, or combinations of species, shape weed pressure over time.

To better understand what we're working with, we'll also be conducting a weed seed inventory to get a baseline of what weeds are present and what could emerge under the right conditions. From there, we'll take it a step further by germinating those seeds in a greenhouse, without the influence of cover crops. This will allow us to compare what emerges in a controlled setting versus what shows up in the field, where living plants are actively shaping the soil environment.

Together, these approaches will help us ask a more complete question: how much of weed pressure is driven by the seedbank itself and how much is influenced by the conditions created by the plants we choose to grow?

Follow along this season to see what we turn up.

Donate Today!

The Fields of Sinsinawa Fund Development team has been working steadily to grow the support needed to advance our mission: inspiring the informed adoption of holistic soil care practices. That mission comes to life through:

- **Field days and hands-on events**, where we explore practical soil care principle: maintaining living roots, diversifying crop rotations, reducing disturbance, protecting the soil surface, and integrating livestock to build organic matter and microbial life.
- **On-farm research and demonstration**, turning working fields into living classrooms where farmers can see firsthand how regenerative practices influence soil structure, water retention, and long-term fertility.
- **Monthly Community Breakfasts**, free and open to all, offering a welcoming space to share a meal, build relationships, and strengthen connections between people and the land.
- **The future Soil Life Center**, a dedicated hub for learning and gathering, with interactive exhibits

that tell the story of soil as the foundation of life, food, and community.

As this work grows, so does the need for support. Alongside outreach to individual donors, our team continues to pursue grant opportunities to expand both new and ongoing projects.

We invite you to be part of this effort. Your gift helps build an integrated hub where farmers, researchers, and community members can learn together—and where the benefits of healthy soil ripple outward to plants, water, people, and rural communities.

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation today at FieldsofSinsinawa.org or send a check to:

**Fields of Sinsinawa
PO Box 4
Sinsinawa, WI 53824**

Donations from Donor
Advised Funds are also welcomed!

