



MAGIC OF CONSERVATION

2024 Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Annual Meeting & Summer Training Conference

July 14-16, 2024 | Springfield, IL

At this year's event, we will celebrate the **MAGIC of Conservation** by sharing successes and embrace lessons learned so that we can move toward our shared goals of protecting Illinois' greatest assets—the rich, fertile soils and water resources of the state by making a greater individual commitment to the capacity, innovation, and partnerships needed to regenerate our land, water, and other natural resources.

The agenda will feature the latest ideas, technologies, practices, and foster a dialogue around their adoption. Scientists and practitioners will present their work at the field, farm, and watershed scales across an array of private and public arenas. Applications of social theories and examples of successful outreach and education will enable you to identify ways to scale up the magic of localized successes. As an attendee, you will also hear about policy and economic developments that build a framework to increase conservation adoption and support future generations.

Ample time will be provided outside of the formal program, for you to reconnect with colleagues and engage in discussions!

Sunday, July 14 (starting at 5:00 pm at the Crowne Plaza)

The AISWCD Summer Training and Conference will kick off with a good old fashion shindig often celebrated in rural communities. Your evening will resemble a small-town celebration in which guests can reconnect with friends, enjoy drinks, and boogie on the dance floor with Sista & The Misters while building up an appetite for the delights of the Pork Pop-Up buffet. Perhaps we Conservationists are just a big bunch of dreamers who have created something unique — a gathering that celebrates

Making A Greater Individual Commitment to Conservation!

Our MAGIC welcoming celebration will highlight the Illinois Leopold Conservation Award and its 2024 finalists. The Illinois Leopold Conservation Award is an award program that recognizes private landowners in Illinois for their voluntary conservation efforts. The award is named after Aldo Leopold, a well-known conservationist who wrote about land ethics in his 1949 book, *A Sand County Almanac*. The award recognizes landowners who:

- Demonstrate how to improve land health while still producing food and fiber
- Inspire others with their dedication to environmental improvement
- Manage soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat on their working land

Presenting Partners include Illinois Pork Association, AFT, NREC

Monday, July 15	Time	Location	Speaker
Conference Registration	7:00 am -	Lobby Level	
Breakfast and Morning Vespers Presenting Partners: IL Soybean Assoc. and IL Corn Growers Assoc. Tentative: Tylor Strom (Illinois Agrifood Alliance)	7:00 am - 8:30 am	Plaza E & F	
Partner Exhibition Showcase	8:00 am -	Plaza G & H Foyer	
Opening Ceremony: Magic of Conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of Colors • National Anthem/Pledge • Blessing of Conservation • President Welcome • Conference Chair Welcome • Keynote Address: <i>The Magic of Inspiration</i> • MAGIC of Partnerships: Partner Greetings • Exhibitor Introduction 	8:30 am - 10:00 am	Plaza G & H	Keynote: Mitch Williams
Auxiliary Snack Shop and Coffee/Beverage Center Open		Plaza G & H Foyer	
MAGIC Talks: Climate Conversations Pathways to Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting Climate across Illinois • Extensions new climate initiative: Engaging Communities 	10:00 am – 11:00 am	Plaza G & H	Dr. Trent Ford Duane Friend
Auxiliary Snack Shop and Coffee/Beverage Center Open Presenting Partners: Auxiliary, NREC, IEC, AFT	Open all day	Plaza G & H Foyer	
Breakout Session: Stakeholder MAGIC (Choose 2 of 4 to attend) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmer Leaders for Our Watersheds • “Find” Conservation Funding for Illinois Farmers with ISAP’s Financial Incentives Database (FIND) Tool • What Does Smart SolarSM look like in Illinois? • Community Based Farming and NACD Urban Ag Grant Program 	11:05 am – 11:30 am 11:35 am - noon	Plaza A Plaza B Plaza C Plaza D	Jean Brokish & Dr. Staci McGill Helen VanBeck Alan Bailey & Joel Tatum Beth Mason & District Panel
Award Luncheon: Hosted by Rita Frazer Presenting Partner: IL Dept of Agriculture, IL Farm Bureau, NREC	Noon – 1:30 pm	Plaza E & F	Hosted by Rita Frazer
Breakout Sessions: District MAGIC (Choose 2 of 4 to attend) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MAGIC in Relationships (friendraising and fundraising) • Behind the MAGIC: the power of community organizing • Learn to Communicate the MAGIC of Conservation • MAGIC Formula for Recruiting 	1:35 pm – 2:15 pm 2:20 pm – 3:00 pm	Plaza A Plaza B Plaza C Plaza D	Janet Mathis Liz Rupe/Liz Stelk Michael Whitmer Amie Hasselbring
Auxiliary Snack Shop and Coffee/Beverage Center Open Presenting Partners: Auxiliary, NREC, AFT	Open all day	Plaza G & H Foyer	
MAGIC Talks: New Crops, New Uses, New Markets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kegs4Conservation • Seed to Glass 	3:10 pm - 4:10 pm	Plaza E & F	Charlie Cole Matt Riggs
Cocktail Reception Presenting partner: Illinois Sustainable Ag Partnership	4:10 pm - 5:30 pm	Plaza E & F and Plaza G & H Foyer	
Conservation Farm Family Banquet Presenting Partners: Illinois Beef Association, NREC, NRCS	5:30 pm	Plaza G & H	Hosted by Cindy Young
Auction and Fellowship	Following Banquet	Plaza G & H	Brent Miller (Auctioneer)

Tuesday, July 16	Time	Location
Conference Registration	7:00 am – 10:00 am	Conference Registration Desk Lobby Level
Stewardship Breakfast Presenting Partners: IL Soybean Assoc. and IL Corn Growers Assoc. Speaker: FarmLink	7:00 am - 8:30 am	Plaza E & F
Partner Exhibition Showcase	Opens at 8:00 am	Plaza G & H Foyer
Director Forum/Resolution Committee Meeting	8:30 am - 10:00 am	Plaza G & H
Employee Forum	8:30 am – 10:00 am	Plaza A & B
Illinois NRCS Leadership Meeting	8:30 am – Noon	Plaza C & D
Beverage Center Open Presenting Partner: Troxell and Marathon Pipeline	8:00 am – Noon	Plaza G & H Foyer
76 th Annual Business Meeting	10:00 am - Noon	Plaza G & H
AISWCD Foundation Board Meeting	Immediately following board meeting	Plaza G & H



Conference/Workshop Presenters



Mitch Williams
Magician

For over 25 years, Central Illinois magician, Mitch Williams, has thrilled audiences throughout the US and internationally. With his home base located in the heart of Illinois, he regularly performs throughout Illinois, the Midwest, and beyond for corporate events, fairs and festivals, banquets, exclusive private parties, and much more.



Dr. Trent Ford has been the Illinois State Climatologist since 2019.

Trent is an expert in climate and climate change and its interactions and impacts, especially as they relate to water. Trent leads climate monitoring and data collection and provision for the state of Illinois. He and his team provide information online, through traditional and social media, and by speaking to interested groups across the state.

A native of Roanoke, Illinois, Ford earned a bachelors in geography from Illinois State University before completing his masters and PhD at Texas A&M University.



Dr. Trent Ford
Illinois State Climatologist



Duane Friend

Climate Change Specialist
University of Illinois Extension

Duane Friend is the Illinois Extension Master Naturalist Coordinator and Climate Specialist. Prior to Extension, he was a resource conservationist with a soil and water conservation district, and a county director for the Farm Services Agency. He grew up on a farm in Mason County Illinois. Duane is also an adjunct faculty member for Lincoln Land Community College, teaching an introductory weather course.

Rita has been director of network and audio services for the RFD Radio Network and the Illinois Farm Bureau since January 2015. Prior to her present position Rita served as network anchor/broadcast editor joining the RFD team in December of 2011. As director, she is responsible for the management and administration of the RFD Radio Network. Rita is also a full-time farm broadcaster, joining DeLoss Jahnke in producing and distributing more than a dozen programs each weekday used by more than 80 Illinois radio stations. Prior to moving to the network, Rita was a farm broadcaster at WSMI Radio in Litchfield. She joined the staff there in January of 1990 and served local farmers and the mid-Illinois community for 22 years. During her time as the WSMI Farm Director Rita received several awards for her farm reporting and service to Illinois Agriculture.



Rita Frazer
Director of Radio
RFD Radio Network

Jean Brokish is the Deputy Director for the Midwest Region of American Farmland Trust where she provides leadership and coordination for programs advancing conservation cropping systems. Key initiatives include the Illinois Sustainable Agriculture Partnership, the Illinois Cover Crop Initiative, and farmer-led water quality. Jean grew up on a dairy farm in southwest Wisconsin, has a Bachelor of Science in agronomy from the University of Wisconsin at River Falls and a Master of Science in soil science from Purdue University.



Jean Brokish
Midwest Deputy Director
American Farmland Trust



Dr. Staci McGill
Midwest Program Manager
American Farmland Trust

Dr. Staci McGill is the Midwest Program Manager for American Farmland Trust working on increasing producer-led initiatives for watershed and water quality projects in Illinois. The goal of these initiatives is to improve soil health and water quality through the implementation of conservation practices that also work to combat climate change and meet the goals of Illinois' Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. Prior to joining AFT, Staci completed her master's and PhD at the University of Kentucky in Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering where she worked closely with members of the equine industry to identify and address concerns in livestock facilities. Her passion for implementing research-driven best management practices led her to develop extension programming and materials to provide producers with quality scientific supported information. Staci is an avid sport horse owner and breeder with a small array of other livestock.

Helen VanBeck is a Midwest Program Manager for American Farmland Trust, where she is responsible for managing programs including the Illinois Sustainable Ag Partnership (ISAP) and Saving Tomorrow's Ag Resources (STAR). Helen works closely with partners across Illinois to advance the adoption of conservation practices that are proven to build soil health, improve water quality, and support climate resiliency. Helen earned her Bachelor of Science in environmental policy with an emphasis in sustainable agriculture from the University of California, Davis.



Helen VanBeck
Midwest Program Manager
American Farmland Trust




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Alan Bailey

Midwest Solar Specialist
American Farmland Trust

Alan Bailey joined American Farmland Trust in November of 2023 as the Midwest Solar Specialist. Based in Springfield, Illinois, his primary role is implementing AFT's Smart Solar strategy at the intersection of solar energy production and farmland conservation. He primarily works in Illinois, Indiana and Iowa but also covers Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Alan has worked in multiple facets of agriculture in Central Illinois for over 25 years. Prior to AFT he farmed for himself and others, and managed local sales & operations for a global ag retailer. He also focused on solar sales within the ag sector for a Michigan based solar installer focusing on Illinois. Alan also works for Bayer/Climate as an on-farm senior research assistant, supporting research to strengthen their product modeling and carbon/sustainability sectors. He also serves as chairperson of the Lake Springfield Watershed Resource group, helping the community and stakeholders improve water quality and decrease soil erosion.



Joel Tatum

Senior Solar Specialist
American Farmland Trust

As the Senior Solar Specialist, Joel develops outreach and relationships with farmers related to AFT's Farmers Powering Community program. This program enables landowners to engage in small 15-50-acre solar leases and still farm the land in and around the panels where prime farmland is utilized through a practice called agrivoltaics. Joel grew up in Illinois in Mclean County on a large row crop farm and feedlot. Prior to joining AFT, Joel worked in the solar industry where he designed, sold, and constructed solar projects focused on agriculture and small commercial settings. For 8 years he worked in this sector helping farmers and ranchers navigate best practices when it comes to installing PV and designing small scale dual use projects used for distributed generation. Joel also worked as an extension agent for University of Missouri as a Regional Agriculture Specialist where he implemented programs to help small farmers and ranchers with programs to help grow their operations. Joel has always been a farmer rancher himself and has a small Angus cow calf operation in Missouri.



Michael Whitmer

Director of Marketing Communication
Illinois Soybean Association

Michael Whitmer is the Director of Marketing Communications for ISA. Whitmer is responsible for advancing a marketing function within ISA, leading and managing a core team of communications professionals and driving strategy across the organization. Whitmer comes to ISA with more than two decades of experience in marketing and communication management, delivering multi-million-dollar organic growth and business development. He organized multi-agency teams and cross-functional departments to drive long-range strategic organizational goals. His strategic marketing planning and creative activations have been leveraged by national checkoff organizations, multinational agricultural companies, consumer-facing meat brands, and sustainability-focused start-ups. As Director of Marketing Communications for ISA, Whitmer is primarily focused on building the visibility of the importance of soybeans and soybean farming throughout the state of Illinois.

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Amie Hasselbring

Field Recruiting Strategist
GROWMARK

Amie Hasselbring for GROWMARK as the Field Recruiting Strategist. She partners with 129 companies throughout the GROWMARK System, including FS member cooperatives, throughout North America helping them bring top talent into the FS System through recruiting and retention strategies.

Liz Rupel

Lead Organizer
Illinois Stewardship Alliance



Liz Rupel is the Lead Organizer for the Illinois Stewardship Alliance. Since joining the team in 2018, Liz has put her community organizing skills to work by launching the Alliance's Soil Health Farmer-led Caucus where she engages with members to create change in our local food and farm systems, like declaring the first ever Soil Health Week in Illinois. She graduated from the University of Illinois Springfield with a Bachelors and master's degree in environmental studies with a focus of policy and sustainable development.

Liz Moran Stelk

Executive Director
Illinois Stewardship Alliance



Liz Moran Stelk has served as executive director of The Illinois Stewardship Alliance since 2017. Liz is a veteran organizer bringing experience in sustainable agriculture policy and building powerful organizations to the Alliance. She previously served as a Regional Organizer with the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) in Montana where she worked with farmers and ranchers in seven states on local, state, and federal food and agricultural policy. She formerly organized union homecare and healthcare workers and led fieldwork for a variety of grassroots legislative and electoral campaigns with a focus of policy and sustainable development.

Janet Mathis began her career at the Association of IL Soil & Water Conservation Districts as the organization's Information and Education Coordinator. She continued her career in agriculture at the Illinois Department of Agriculture, where she had significant impact on state and county fairs, Illinois horse racing programs, domestic agricultural marketing and led agricultural trade with Canada while serving as Director of the Toronto, Ontario, office. Mathis' ag roots and education provided the backdrop to influencing bi-partisan, public policy at all levels of Illinois government including as Press Office staff in Governor Jim Edgar's Office. As the hand-picked Executive Director of the Edgar Fellows Program, Mathis helps to carry on Governor Edgar's vision for a state built on civility, collaboration and compassion.

Janet Mathis

Edgar Fellows, Executive Director
The Development Consortium, CEO



Cindy Young

Director, Brownfield Network



Cyndi Young grew up on a multi-generational family farm in Scott County, Illinois. She majored in agricultural education and animal science at Western Illinois University and began her radio career at WJIL in Jacksonville, Illinois. She then worked for Oklahoma Agrinet and WTAX, Springfield, Illinois before joining Brownfield in 1998. She has traveled extensively throughout the United States and to 16 different countries covering agriculture. Her work has earned her dozens of honors from agriculture groups and associations. A member of the National Association of Farm Broadcasting for 37 years, Cyndi was recognized as Farm Broadcaster of the Year for the nation in 1997, received the coveted Oscar in Agriculture in 2009 and was inducted into the National Association of Farm Broadcasting Hall of Fame in 2021. Cyndi and her husband, Jim Puyear, raise Simmental cattle on their farm in mid-Missouri.



Charlie Cole

Conservation Planner
Brewmaster



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Matt Riggs

Farmer & Brewer
Riggs Beer Company

Charlie Cole is a Conservation Planner with the IDOA/NRCS Capacity Building Initiative as well as an international award winning Brewmaster. His wide variety of education in Brewing & Malting Science programs around the country has led to a passion for the creative promotion of small grains focused research and conservation in the Midwest agriculture industry.

Matt Riggs is a 5th generation Champaign County Farmer and brewer. Along with his brother and their wives, he owns and operates Riggs Beer Company. Matt is a graduate of the University of Illinois (Technical Systems Management '06). After 5 years on active duty with the Marines, he shifted into the brewing industry. Matt worked for three different commercial breweries before completing his brewing education at a master level brewing and malting school, Doemens Academy, in Munich. Riggs Beer Company specializes in German and American style beer styles and is a market leader in sustainability as well as the vertical integration of locally grown brewing grains.

Kegs4Conservation

With funding from the National Wildlife Federation, AISWCD seeks to engage new audiences and provide a new approach to field days. Notably, our Kegs4Conservation Field Days will be a grassroots campaign advanced by the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts in partnership with a local SWCD and Land Use Councils designed to raise awareness about conservation practices and elevate conversations awareness among producers and landowners considered to be middle adopters.

Kegs4Conservation seeks to start conversations about conservation practices and soil health in a relaxed and non-threatening way. By having some fun with a topic people would rather avoid, we are able to reach a population who might otherwise ignore traditional conservation messages.

Contact AISWCD to learn more and schedule a Kegs4Conservation event!



It takes Partners to make the



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Thank you for bringing more magic to our united efforts!

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United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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