

# The Germinator

WINTER 2026

VOL. 46 NO. 1

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## 2026

FOOD & FARMING  
CONFERENCE

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The State of the State

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## AI DATA INSIGHTS

That Support Sustainable,  
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## NPSAS MEMBER FEATURE

Joe and Becca Dufner



Photo by Krysti Mikkonen

## Cover Credits

This image was taken by Krysti Mikkonen near Enderlin, ND. If there's a stellar sunset as she's driving, she's known to be sure to either stop and take a picture or hang her head out the passenger window to take a photo. As the sun sets on 2025, let's pray for moisture, good pricing, and healthy blessings for all our farms and ranches in 2026.

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## Mission Statement

Northern Plains Sustainable  
Agriculture Society  
promotes sustainable food  
systems through education,  
advocacy, and research.

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Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society or its Board of Directors.

”  
*Artificial Intelligence isn't a  
substitute for human intelligence:  
it is a tool to amplify human  
creativity and ingenuity*  
“

Quote By Fei-Fei Li

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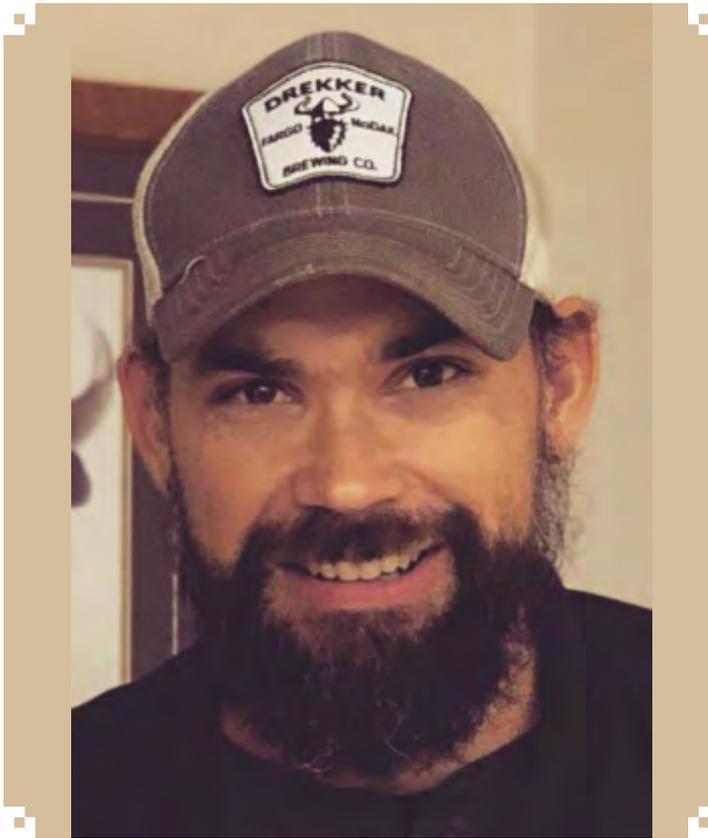
# From the President

As I am finally getting around to writing this, it is one week from the end of the year...2025 went by incredibly fast for me! All the equipment maintenance is done, and everything is put away for the winter. Now it is time to get all the things done around the house and in the office that have been piling up all year long. Throughout the winter, I do a majority of my reading, paperwork, catching up on computer repairs and projects for my clients, some experiments here and there, and planning for the next year; it's taken me a bit longer to get into my winter routine this year, but it's coming along.

Our focus is on AI for this Germinator, which ties well into some of the reading and experimenting I am doing this winter. AI is a very powerful tool that I have started using over the last year or so. I use both Grok (X's AI) and ChatGPT for quite a few things these days and see a lot more uses in the future. I am mainly using AI as a super search engine. I have, in a sense, trained my AI on my style of farming and have a large list of authors and researchers that it references and interprets all my farming-related queries through. I am using it to analyze soil tests and give recommendations, provide market information and marketing advice, read my contracts and offer suggestions, and fix equipment around the farm. I am also using it outside of my farming operation. With that said, I also take everything that comes out of AI with a grain of salt, and if something doesn't quite make sense, I do deeper research and even ask Grok if I am using ChatGPT or vice versa. I have found instances where some things were just made up or wrong, but with the proper prompts, I believe that a lot of the information is dead on and very helpful to me.

That is just the way that I am utilizing AI so far in my operation; I am sure there are many more uses available, as well as many that will be coming down the line. I recently heard of John Kempf's agronomy AI (FieldLark) and look forward to trying that out. There is a great deal of content covering AI at our Winter Conference coming up in January, so I am hoping to learn more there as well.

If you haven't already signed up, don't forget to put it on your calendar. AI and the technology advances that put information at our fingertips are pretty amazing, but they can never replace the human experience of community and getting together with like-minded people to discuss new ideas and learn from the wisdom of others. Speaking of getting together with others, I'll finish this out by wishing everyone a prosperous New Year!



President Martin Goter

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# From the Executive Director

As I think about the small family farm in South Dakota where we raised our four kids, I often reflect on the journey that's been taken to cultivate organic practices that respect the land and promote sustainability. Over the years, the dedication to growing healthy produce while nurturing the soil and ecosystem was clearly visible. Yet, like many other farmers, I realize that our kids and their spouses, the next generation, as they farm those same acres, are on the brink of a technological revolution that could significantly enhance our farming practices with artificial intelligence (AI).

AI offers exciting possibilities for farms like Mikkonen Organic. One major impact it could have is on crop management. Advanced algorithms can analyze vast amounts of data, from soil health to weather conditions. This will allow for more informed decisions about planting and harvesting. For example, AI-powered sensors can provide real-time information about soil moisture levels, helping to optimize irrigation and conserve water, a crucial resource in this semi-arid region.

AI can revolutionize pest and disease management. By using machine learning to identify early signs of crop issues, we can address them proactively, minimizing surprises and further concerns. This means healthier plants and a more sustainable approach to pest control, aligning perfectly with the farm's organic philosophy.

AI can enhance our market reach. With analytics tools, the next generation can better understand consumer trends and preferences, enabling them to tailor their crops production to meet demand effectively. This could lead to improved sales and stronger connections with their community.



Executive Director Krysti Mikkonen

In the coming years, I believe that embracing AI will not only improve the farming efficiency but also allow this new generation to maintain the commitment to organic practices. I am excited that farms like Mikkonen Organic, have the opportunity to learn about AI and other practices at the 2026 conference, and hopeful about leveraging these technologies to build a more sustainable future to help honor the Mikkonen family's and your family's legacy of farming.

“

Artificial intelligence is transforming agriculture through precision farming, automation, and data-driven decision making.”

- USDA

# Global Agri-Tech: The State of the State

There is nothing inevitable about farming. The dynamics to keep a farming operation solvent and productive are in constant change. The American food supply chain is resilient but only if we continue to invest in and support new technology and sustainable farming practices.

With soil degradation continuing to be a problem across all agriculture, new technology that can eliminate soil disruption and possibly increase yields should be our Northstar. Today, we have the opportunity to use robots in the field that analyze crops and weeds and process data using artificial intelligence (AI). This data is then used to stop weeds through laser weeders, photonic light, directed cultivators and more.

Many growers of vegetables, fruits and nuts having been using robotics for several years now in the US and Europe. The main motivation for deploying robotics is that they not only get the job done (removing weeds, harvesting fruit and nuts, etc) they also enable better use of human resources and, as a bonus, many growers are seeing improved yields.

## Autonomous Tech

Autonomous technology has been a popular and somewhat controversial topic for vehicles sharing the highway with conventional cars and trucks... with actual drivers. The headlines have not been flattering for the autonomous car manufacturers. Testing new technology on our highways and interstates has clearly been a leap of faith and technology.

What is happening in farm fields is quite another story. In addition to having the capability of using robotics to control weeds, we can now deploy this technology using autonomous tractor technology. There is nobody in the cab... unless you want to be in the cab. Autonomous farming has moved beyond the experimental stage, it

has been working in fields across the globe for more than two years.

Think of any part of crop production and agronomic practices, autonomous technology can be used successfully and return to the shed on its own. While you were in town picking up supplies, the autonomous tractor just seeded 300 acres.

## Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been the most written and talked about subject in the last five years. Since the launch of ChatGPT and the unprecedented amount of capital being invested in this technology, the world has not been the same. Like any powerful technology, it must be regulated and managed. These new productivity tools can be used for humanity's biggest challenges. Equally powerful if misused, AI can be used for ill intent as well.

Now let's understand what AI really is. AI is a programming language using algorithms to support machine learning. The learning part is what makes AI an important tool in farming. Images that are taken from the field are processed through AI to determine patterns and familiarity with the object (ie, weeds, crops, field maps, etc). The more AI learns about weeds, crops, soil makeup and more, the more it can direct actions for implements, crop disease solutions, weed counting and field mapping.



# Global Agri-Tech: The State of the State...

In addition to “seeing” weeds and crops on or near the ground, there is now a new way to understanding soil health at scale. Satellite AI is now able to determine soil fertility, salinity and carbon metrics. Satellites are seeing and doing more using AI. With

drones and robotic implements, high resolution cameras are cataloging weed location and phenotypes to better apply weed mitigation technology including: see and spray, laser weeders, photonic cultivators and more.

Stay tuned, as new tools for robotic and autonomous farming are expected to enter the market over the next few years. Farming has always evolved and it will continue with efficiency and soil health as the main benefits.





The USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program has been helping farmers, ranchers, gardeners, and students achieve their goals for improved profit, production, national resources and quality of life for 30 years.

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# AI Data Insights That Support Sustainable, Profitable, and Regenerative Agriculture

Walk into a Northern Plains barn today and you might see a soil probe leaning against the wall and a laptop open on the workbench. Artificial intelligence (AI) and data tools are steadily emerging and becoming part of the toolkit for organic and regenerative producers who want to improve soil health, manage risk, and keep the farm profitable for the next generation.

The real promise of AI is not shiny gadgets. It is better decisions.

Organic and regenerative systems depend on complex interactions between rotations, cover crops, livestock, and weather. AI-powered decision-support tools can pull together yield maps, soil tests, satellite imagery, and historical weather to give farmers a clearer picture of what is happening below the surface. Instead of guessing where compaction, low organic matter, or poor infiltration are limiting yield, models can highlight “hot spots” where a different tillage strategy, a multi-species cover crop, or targeted manure application would do the most good.

Economics are never far behind soil health. AI tools can track how those management changes ripple through the farm checkbook over multiple years. For example, a grower exploring a transition to organic small grains can use scenario models to compare different crop sequences, price assumptions, and cost-share programs. The tools do not make the decision, but they expose the trade-offs: short-term yield dips versus long-term soil function, higher labor for weed control versus reduced fertilizer bills and organic premiums.

A recent case study from Wageningen University, “Harvesting Innovation: AI’s impact on barriers of organic arable farming



“An open mind can be a transformative advantage in agriculture” - Angela Jackson

adoption” (2024), shows how this can work in practice. Researchers interviewed conventional and organic farmers about the biggest hurdles to going organic: uncertainty about yields and prices, labor for mechanical weed control, and fear of making the “wrong” long-term decision. They then mapped where AI-based tools could help, such as predicting weed pressure under different rotations, estimating financial outcomes of various transition pathways, or flagging fields where soil conditions are already favorable for organic production. The study concludes that AI is especially powerful in reducing information and risk barriers rather than replacing farmer knowledge.

In regenerative systems, AI can also support “just enough” soil disturbance. Machine-learning models that read imagery and sensor data can estimate residue cover, track tillage intensity over time, and project how different

tillage choices affect soil organic matter, erosion risk, and fuel costs. When that information is linked to real farm budgets, a producer can see, in dollars and cents, the long-term economic value of keeping living roots in the soil and armor on the surface.

There are still challenges: rural high speed Internet connectivity, data privacy, and the need for machine learning on organic and regenerative systems. But farmers in the Northern Plains are well positioned to shape what comes next. By asking hard questions, being open minded, sharing on-farm data carefully, and partnering in research and field trials, organic and regenerative producers can help build AI tools that respect farmer autonomy and strengthen farm economics.

If we do this well, the “future of AI farm tech” will not replace the wisdom of the person walking the fields. It will amplify it.

# Unlock the Future of Farming: Join the Smarter Farming with AI Workshop!

The agricultural landscape is evolving, and staying ahead means embracing innovation. Are you ready to revolutionize your farming practices with the power of Artificial Intelligence? Join us at the Northern Plains Food & Farming Conference for an engaging Preconference Workshop titled Smarter Farming with AI: Planning, Risk & Profit on January 21, 2026, from 1:00 - 4:00 PM CT.



Using mapping data of your soil fertility with a drone you can direct fertilizer right where you want them and not where don't need it

This 3-hour hands-on workshop is designed specifically for organic and transitioning farmers, farm managers, advisors, and value-added operators eager to harness AI's potential for more informed decision-making.

## What to Expect:

The workshop comprises mini-lectures, compelling case studies, collaborative paired work, and an interactive panel discussion that will demystify AI and provide real-world applications. You'll delve into essential topics, including key AI tools like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and Google Gemini, to understand their strengths and capabilities tailored to the farming sector.

Through relatable and credible farm-relevant use cases, partic-

ipants will explore how AI can enhance planning, budgeting, record-keeping, marketing, and compliance efforts. You'll walk away with an AI Decision Support Checklist that outlines essential inputs and verification steps, ensuring you have the tools to practically implement what you've learned.

## Hands-On Experience:

This workshop is more than just theory; it's an opportunity to apply your learning directly to your farm's challenges. Engage in practical exercises to build your customized AI workflows and develop decision briefs that address both short-term and strategic decisions. You'll even have the chance to connect with fellow attendees tailored by farm type, fostering collaborative thinking

and idea-sharing.

## Expert Insights:

Gain invaluable knowledge from our panel of experienced AI users who will share their real-world experiences — what works, what doesn't, and their best practices for effective AI adoption. This open Q&A session is your chance to address specific challenges you face, linking theory with real-life farming scenarios.

## Vision for the Future:

Close out the session with an inspiring keynote by industry expert Randy Stratten, discussing the future of agri-tech and its implications for organic and regenerative systems. Explore topics like decision support automation, data realities, and readiness for emerging agricultural technologies.

## Why Attend?

This workshop promises not just to inform, but to empower you to transform uncertainty into opportunity. Bring your real farm challenges to work through live, and leave equipped with clarity and confidence to make informed decisions that bolster your farm's success.

Don't miss out on this unique chance to enhance your farm's resilience and profitability through AI. Register today for the Smarter Farming with AI workshop and lead the way toward the future of agriculture!



# NORTHERN PLAINS FOOD & FARMING CONFERENCE

January 21-23, 2026 • JOIN US IN Aberdeen, SD

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Time	Description	Room
<b>Wednesday – January 21</b>		
9:00 am – 10:00 am	Registration & Check-in	Main Conference Hall
10:00 am – 10:00 pm	Vendor Set-up	Exhibit Hall
10:00 am – 4:00 pm	Dakota Organic Academy Road Show (OARS) – Free to transitioning organic farmers	Dakota Room TBD
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm	<b>KEYNOTE: Dr. Angela K. Jackson – Smarter Farming with AI: Planning, Risk &amp; Profit</b>	Theatre
4:30 pm	Farm Breeder Network	
5:30 pm	OARS Community Information Night with Vendors	Dakota Room A/B
<b>Thursday – January 22</b>		
8:00 am – 9:15 am	Breakfast – Exhibits Open	Convention Hall
9:30 am	Welcome Message by Martin Goter, NPSAS Board President	Convention Hall
9:35 am – 10:30 am	<b>KEYNOTE: Daniel Salatin</b>	Convention Hall
10:45 am – 11:35 am	<b>Workshop/Breakouts*</b>	
	Crops: Biology that Benefits Crop Production – Larry Sax	Dakota A/B
	Livestock: Pastured Poultry – Daniel Salatin	Dakota D
	Homesteading/Health: Save Your Farm – Tiffany Hoeft	Dakota E
	Business: Risk Management for Organic Operations – Megan Vaith	Theatre
	Kids Ag Workshop – Master Gardeners of Brown County	Indoor Courtyard
11:45 am-1:00 pm	Exhibits Open	Exhibit Hall
12:00 pm – 1:30 pm	Lunch	Convention Hall
12:45 pm – 1:15 pm	Annual Meeting	Convention Hall
1:30 pm – 2:30 pm	<b>KEYNOTE: Taylor Henry – Standing on the Shoulders of Soil Giants</b>	Convention Hall
2:35 pm – 3:30 pm	<b>General Session: Ag Marketing – Making Your Farm Work</b>	Convention Hall
3:30 pm – 4:00 pm	Exhibits Open	Exhibit Hall



# NORTHERN PLAINS FOOD & FARMING CONFERENCE

January 21-23, 2026 • JOIN US IN Aberdeen, SD

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Time	Description	Room
4:00 pm – 4:50 pm	<b>Workshop/Breakouts*</b>	
	Crops: Using Data to Make Farm Decisions – Blake Burggraff	Dakota A/B
	Livestock: Grass-Fed Beef & Diverse Grazing – Scott Kronberg	Dakota D
	Homesteading/Health: Rabbits – The Forgotten Protein – Daniel Salatin	Dakota E
	Business: Holistic Management – Matt Stone	Theatre
	Kids Ag Workshop – Master Gardeners of Brown County	Indoor Courtyard
5:00 pm	Taste of Ag – Happy Hour Social & Cash Bar	
6:00 pm	Dinner & Auction	Convention Hall
<b>Friday – January 23</b>		
7:00 am	Breakfast – Exhibitors Open & Networking	Exhibit Hall
7:30 am	Informal Discussion on the Future of NPSAS	Convention Hall
8:30 am – 9:30 am	<b>Workshop/Breakouts*</b>	
	Crops: Managing Pesticide Drift: Preventative, Detection and Response by Dr. Angela K. Jackson	Dakota A/B
	Livestock: Comparing compost tea and compost extract by Mike Seifert a SARE Farmers Forum	Dakota D
	Homesteading/Health: The next generation of your farm/ranch – who will it be? by Carmen Fernholz & Charlie Johnson	Dakota E
	Business: Understanding the Efficacy, Economics and ROI of Robotics and Autonomous Technology by Randy Stratton	Theatre
	Kids Ag Workshop – By Master Gardeners of Brown County	Indoor Courtyard
9:30 am – 10:30 am	General Session: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly – Farmer Panel	Convention Hall
10:40 am – 11:30 am	Round Table Hot Topics – Moderator Led Discussions	Convention Hall
11:30 am – 1:00 pm	Lunch & Exhibitors Open	Convention Hall
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	<b>KEYNOTE: Angela Jackson</b>	Convention Hall

\* Please check For Final Schedule here or in your conference book for any changes upon Conference Check-in.

# We'd love to see you there!



Go to [NPSAS.org](http://NPSAS.org) or scan the code above & REGISTER TODAY



Northern Plains Sustainable  
**FOOD & FARMING**  
CONFERENCE  
January 21-23, 2026 - Aberdeen, SD

Pre-conference January 21 - Full Conf. Jan. 22 -23, 2026

## Keynote Speakers

**Taylor Henry**  
Farmer, CEO of Acres  
U.S.A & Podcast Host

**Dr. Angela Jackson**  
Organic Farmer,  
Educator & Advocate

**Daniel Salatin**  
Farmer, Teacher, &  
Author



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Student Registration	_____	X \$90 = _____
Taste of Ag Only (Food, Auction, Music)	_____	X \$45 = _____
NPSAS Membership (Individual)	_____	X \$50 = _____
NPSAS Membership (Household)	_____	X \$75 = _____
NPSAS Membership (Corporation/Lg Farm)	_____	X \$300 = _____
Thurs. Only (w/ Member \$140 Non-Mem \$200)	_____	X \$ _____ = _____
Friday Only (Member \$80 Non-Mem \$115)	_____	X \$ _____ = _____
Kids Registration Ages 6-15 \$50/each	_____	X \$50 = _____
Vendor Only Ticket (Includes lunch: Jan. 22 or 23)	_____	X \$50 = _____
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\_\_\_\_\_ **Other**

### Wednesday Pre-conference How many will be attending

**Organic Academy Road Show**  
 **Smarter Farming with AI: Planning, Risk & Profit:**

### Do you have an Item for the fun & entertaining NPSAS auction Friday?

**Yes**     **No**

### List Additional Registrants Needing Name Tags

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Conference Speakers - Biography

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### Tayler Henry

Taylor Henry is a farmer, entrepreneur, and realtor, and the owner of Acres U.S.A.® and Henry Pastures. He carries forward a regenerative farming legacy, managing over 250 acres across multiple farms in the Driftless Region. A former police officer turned entrepreneur, Taylor integrates cattle and hogs into his holistic farming system and helps others acquire land for regenerative use. Passionate about supporting the next generation of farmers, Taylor shares pathways for young people to enter regenerative agriculture, from innovative land access models to financing strategies and mentorship opportunities. Through Acres U.S.A., he continues to inspire and educate farmers nationwide.



### Dr. Angela Jackson

Angela has been active in South Dakota organic food and feed production for many years as an inspector/auditor, educator, and a producer. She is currently working with SDSPA OCIA TOPP and the OTI Regenerative Agriculture Pathway Program. Since 2006, she has been the owner/operator of Prairiesun Organics, a family farm located in Clay County, South Dakota. PrairieSun Organics is certified to the USDA NOP and Regenerative Organic Certified® program. Along with her husband, she raises row crops, vegetables, laying hens for eggs, broiler chickens for meat, and processes their chickens on site.

Angela has a doctoral degree from the University of South Dakota. She taught previously as adjunct faculty in ag business and animal nutrition at a community college in Iowa for nearly a decade. She is actively involved with the Regenerative Organic Alliance, Independent Organic Inspectors Association, South Dakota Specialty Producers Association, and Organic Farmers Association. She is passionate about seeing organic production grow in South Dakota.

# Conference Speakers - Biography...

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## Daniel Salatin

Daniel is multi-generational farmer. He's grown up in the farming landscape in Swoope, VA. Farming right out of the gate has giving him a lifetime of experience, mastery and confidence that comes from a life's work and passion. Today he leads an ever-growing team at Polyface Farm. Daniel finds the most joy in his family, teaching, team building, healing soil, farm design, a growing relationship with Jesus, working with livestock and hunting.

Managing the day-to-day flow of the farm, he works with cattle, hogs, meat birds, layers, turkeys, rabbits, sheep, and forestry, but most importantly- People. This keeps him learning something every day in a high energy, outdoor workplace. With over 30 years on hands-on experience in the land healing, healthy food growing world, Daniel is practical in his approach and teaching.

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# Kids Workshops at the Conference

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One of the unique elements of the NPSAS conference is that we encourage people to bring their kids. In many cases, farms and ranches are a family businesses. We welcome young kids and work to include them by hosting

workshops for them at the same time as the adults. This allows parents to pay attention and get more from the presentations, while the kids can learn something too. Our evening auction and entertainment is fun for kids as

well. We often have items kids will enjoy in the auction, not to mention the great pool area at the host facility, the Best Western in Aberdeen, SD. Bring your kids and enjoy!



# CONFERENCE SPONSORS 2026



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THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS FOR SUPPORTING THE FOOD AND FARMING CONFERENCE IN 2026!

## Show Stopper Sponsorship



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## Other Exhibitors

- Agricultural Exchange Inc.
- Market Link
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## DAKOTA ORGANIC ACADEMY ROAD SHOW

### January 21 Pre-conference 2026 Northern Plains Sustainable Food & Farming Conference

Don't miss your opportunity to explore certified organic production systems for livestock, grains, oilseeds, and pulses and ways to use AI for your organic journey success.

This workshop is **FREE** and geared for any farmers and ranchers who want to learn about transitioning to organic production.

**Join us to learn about transitioning to organic**

**For Questions**

**Contact Krysti Mikkonen at [director@npsas.org](mailto:director@npsas.org).**

United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
National Organic Program  
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



# Share and Sell your Products



## Do you have any of the following:

- Locally grown/produced finished edible products
- A desire to share your products with others
- An opportunity to tell your ag story to fellow producers
- Have goods you'd like to sell

If you said yes to one or more of the above, we invite you to share your Bites, Sips, & Tastes of local & sustainably grown & produced deliciousness!

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**Join NPSAS or renew your membership today!**

**G**rowing nutrient dense food, using environmentally sound farming methods that support the long-term sustainability of human communities, soil, and water resources has been the focus of NPSAS for 40+ years. When we started, there were few others interested in our ideas, and markets for our products were hard to find. All that has changed. Your new membership or membership renewal will help us continue to build our community of support as we work to meet the increasing demand for knowledge and tools to build a more sustainable way of life.



Not sure of your membership status? Email [info@NPSAS.org](mailto:info@NPSAS.org) with questions



Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Please make checks payable to **NPSAS**, or donate with a credit card:  
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Return this section to: NPSAS • PO Box 444 • Frederick, SD 57441

**Renew or join NPSAS**

<input type="checkbox"/> Student \$40	<input type="checkbox"/> Family \$75	
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Optional: Please accept my generous gift of:

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**TOTAL** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Thanks for your continued support of NPSAS!*

***The NPSAS Board & Staff are committed to honoring and building on what the founders created and previous boards and staff nurtured. We will serve the mission of the organization to the highest standard to ensure NPSAS is here to serve for generations to come.***



**Scan to start your NPSAS Membership Today!**



# Sheep Wool Finds New Value as Fertilizer And Soil Amendment

For many sheep producers, wool has become a low-value byproduct. Shearing is necessary for animal health, yet market prices for raw wool often fail to cover even the cost of shearing. Recent research, however, is helping reframe wool as a useful agricultural input and a potential value-added product rather than a disposal challenge.

Several studies from the United States and Europe show that sheep wool can be used effectively as both a soil amendment and a fertilizer. These findings are creating new opportunities for farmers to market wool locally while providing crop producers and gardeners with a natural alternative to conventional products.

Research published in the journal *Plants* examined the use of wool as a soil mulch in vegetable production. Wool mulch was shown to reduce soil moisture loss, moderate soil temperature, and support beneficial soil biological activity. In soils with moderate water-holding capacity, crops grown with wool mulch produced higher yields compared to bare soil. These benefits are attributed to wool's ability to absorb and slowly release moisture while protecting the soil surface from evaporation.

Another study conducted in Vermont evaluated pelleted sheep wool as a fertilizer in organic vegetable systems. Wool pellets are made from compressed raw wool and provide a slow-release source of nitrogen as they break down in the soil. When applied at nitrogen rates similar to standard organic fertilizers, wool pellets produced comparable yields in spinach and tomatoes. This suggests wool pellets can function as a viable nutrient source while also adding organic matter to the



soil.

For end users, wool pellets offer several advantages. Nutrients are released gradually, reducing the risk of leaching and nutrient loss. Wool also improves soil structure by increasing water holding capacity and aeration over time. Because wool pellets are derived from a natural animal fiber, they align well with organic and environmentally focused production systems.

Beyond crop production, a University of Vermont feasibility study explored additional markets for coarse wool that is not suitable for textiles. The report identified strong potential for wool-based garden products, including mulch and soil amendments, as well as insulation and landscaping materials. One key finding was that many buyers value wool for its environmental benefits, moisture regulation, and biodegradability rather than low cost alone.

For sheep producers, these emerging uses represent a chance to retain more value on the farm. Marketing wool for pellets, mulch, or other agricultural uses may not replace traditional wool markets, but it can help diversify income streams and reduce waste. Local processing and partnerships with pellet manufacturers or gardeners may be especially promising.

As interest grows in sustainable agriculture and circular farm systems, wool is gaining recognition as a resource rather than a liability. Continued research and market development will be critical, but current evidence suggests sheep wool has a meaningful role to play in soil health, crop production, and farm profitability.

**Ryan Lermon is an Extension Educator, Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Minnesota Extension.** Originally published in the *Owatonna People's Press* on January 3, 2026

LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT PRESENTS

# Farm Transition Planning Course



Are you a farm family or landowner thinking about the future or next steps for your farm?

Are you interested in planning for the next generation of farmers on your land?

Are you ready to begin the planning process but don't know where to start?

**Register by January 9, 2026**  
**Classes Held Online**  
**Tuesdays — January 27 to March 10**

LSP's **Farm Transition Planning Course** provides attendees with the real-life resources they need to make thoughtful decisions about how their land passes on to the next generation. Course topics include financial planning, legal and long-term care considerations, working with next generation farmers, and peer-to-peer networking opportunities. The course fee is \$250 for families (up to 4 participants). Find out more by scanning the QR code at right.

Learn more and register at [bit.ly/farmtransitions2026](https://bit.ly/farmtransitions2026)  
For questions, contact LSP's Karen Stettler at [stettler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:stettler@landstewardshipproject.org) or 507-458-0349.



# Prime Rib



## Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Place prime rib in the oven for one hour in the morning.
2. After one hour, turn off the oven, but do not remove the prime rib and do not open the oven. Keep the prime rib in the oven, closed all day.
3. Before serving, turn oven to 350°F and cook for 25 minutes for medium rare.
4. Remove and serve.

# German Pancakes

Prep: 5 min Bake: 25 min Total: 30 min

## Ingredients

- 6 large eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- Dash of salt
- 5 Tbsp butter

## Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
2. Place butter in an ungreased 9×13 metal baking dish and melt in oven.
3. Blend eggs, milk, flour, salt, and vanilla until smooth.
4. Pour batter over melted butter.
5. Bake 22–27 minutes until puffed and golden brown.
6. Serve immediately with powdered sugar and syrup.



**A well-written recipe feeds the body before the meal begins.**

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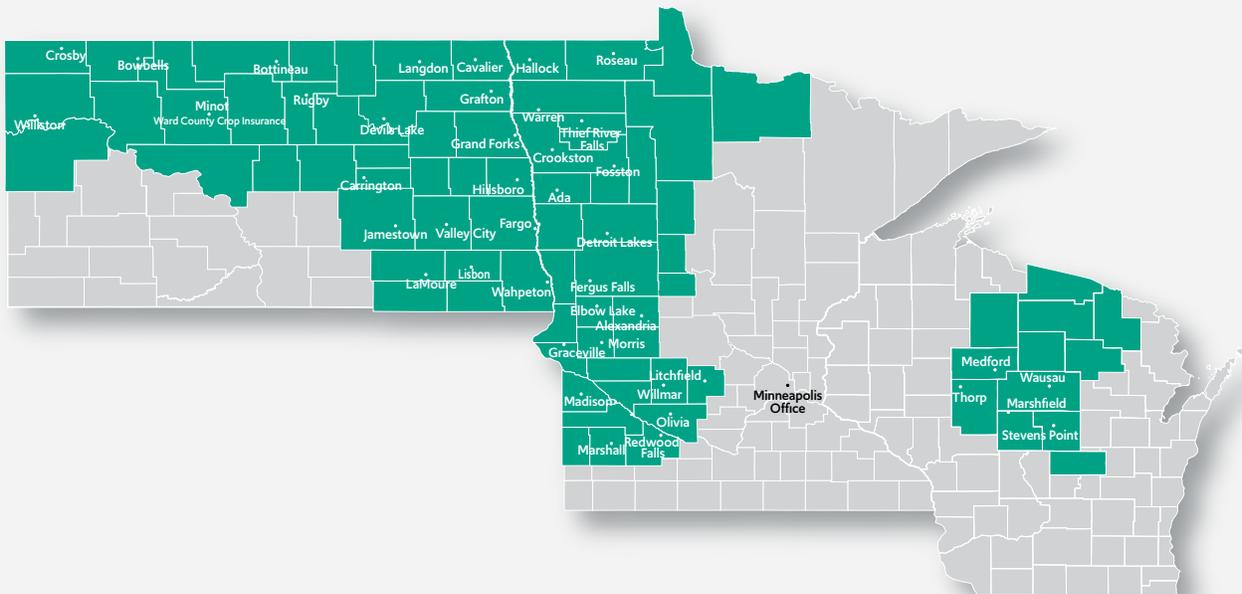
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# NPSAS Member Feature - Joe and Becca Dufner

Thank you for taking time to share information about your operation. If you don't want to answer them all, that's ok.

## Can you tell us about your farm?

Our farm is a third generation family operation in Buxton, North Dakota focused on growing certified organic dry edible beans, small grains, and potatoes.

## Can you tell us a little about your family?

Joe and I have 5 adult children and 5 dogs. Farming is truly a family effort for us. We work side-by-side in the operation, and our kids have grown up around the farm, learning responsibility, work ethic, and pride in agriculture.

We believe farming isn't just what we do-it's how we raise our family and pass values down to the next generation.

## What year were you first certified organic?

Joe's dad, Don, began farming organically long before it was officially called "organic," and we've carried those principles forward and been certified organic ever since.

## What is the best advice you've gotten that helped your operation?

"Focus on what you can control". Markets change, weather changes, life can give you challenges. Put your head down and your wings back, stay forced on the long game.



Joe & Becca Dufner Family

## Do you have anything new you're working on or a goal for the operation next 5 years?

Build long-term stability for future generations.

## Do you have any great advice for new and transitioning farmers?

Be patient, learn from others, and stay committed to the process.

## Do you have a change you have made in your operation that made a big difference for you?

Focusing on soil health and building strong relationships.

## Who is your mentor, and why?

Our mentor is Jesus Christ, whose guidance is the foundation of our family, farm, and fields. Joe's parents have been strong mentors in his life, teaching the value of hard work, integrity, and stewardship of the land. Becca's dad,, Dan, has always been a mentor too, encouraging them to find the positive in every day,

good or hard and move forward with gratitude and perseverance.

## Why are you part of NPSAS, and how does it help your operation?

NPSAS provides education, advocacy, and a strong community and networking with others.

## What is the most impactful success or lesson learned in your operation?

The most impactful lesson has been patience.

Organic farming rewards consistency over time, not shortcuts. Staying committed, even in tough years!

## What's the best thing(s) you've done that made your operation better?

Take good notes of things that don't always work out, and make future changes.

USDA Organic Program

# Transition to Organic Mentor Program

Join the Mentorship Mission Today

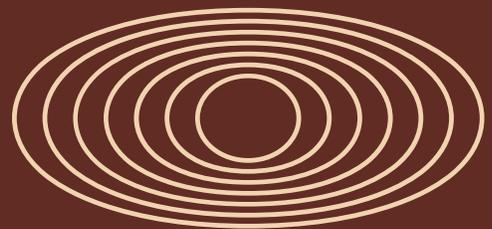
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- Experience with the challenges and benefits of organic production and certification
- An interest in sharing knowledge and giving back to the organic community

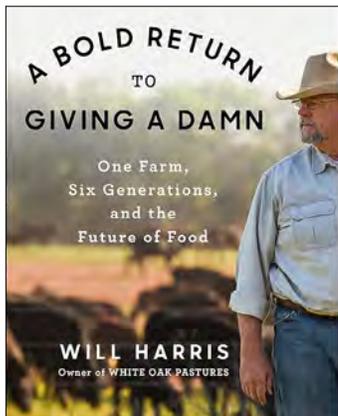
Transitioning producers will receive free mentorship from an experienced organic producer.

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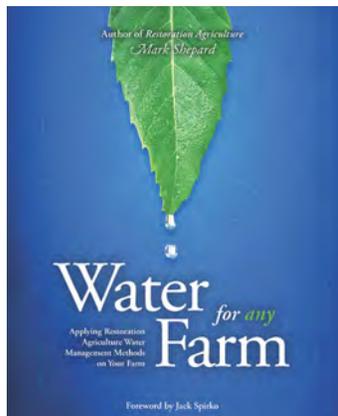
Learn More At: [www.organictransition.org](http://www.organictransition.org)

# Good Reads for Better Farming



**A Bold Return to Giving a Damn: One Farm, Six Generations, and the Future of Food by Will Harris**

In an insightful exploration of sustainable farming through the lens of a family's legacy, "A Bold Return to Giving a Damn: One Farm, Six Generations, and the Future of Food" is a must read for every family farm. Through personal anecdotes and reflections on the challenges of modern agriculture, the author effectively emphasizes the importance of environmental stewardship and ethical practices. This compelling read not only honors tradition but also inspires readers to engage in conscientious food choices for a better future.



**Water for Any Farm: Applying Restoration Agriculture Water Management Methods on Your Farm**

This transformative guide, "Water for Any Farm: Applying Restoration Agriculture Water Management Methods on Your Farm," empowers farmers to optimize water usage sustainably. The book introduces innovative practices that restore ecosystems while enhancing crop productivity. With practical insights and real-world examples, it makes a compelling case for the integration of restoration agriculture into everyday farming. This essential read invites farmers to revolutionize their approach to water management for a thriving future.

Good farming feeds the land.  
**Good reading feeds the mind.**

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