



Traditionally, the value of a farm has largely been determined by its production of food, fuel and fiber. Yet, a well-managed farm produces so much more than just a crop.

As we face down modern challenges like climate change and impaired waterways, we're learning through science the true value of our farmlands. The scope and scale of our environmental challenges uniquely position the ag industry to play a role in addressing water and climate issues through improved soil health management and economic levers like the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium.

What is the ESMC?

The goal of the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC) is to create ecosystem service markets that incentivize producers to improve soil health, benefiting both the farmer and society. What sets this program apart is its focus not just on carbon but also water quality, habitat preservation and biodiversity protection.

Who is eligible to enroll?

Farmers willing to implement practices like cover crops, perennial crops and reduced tillage are eligible and encouraged to enroll in the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium. The ESMC is voluntary and rewards producers for improvements to soil health through revenues from credit sales.

What are the terms of the agreement?

Enrolled producers take initial soil samples at the beginning of their contract period. The ecosystem service value is determined in part by improvements to soil health from this baseline.

How long does it take to start getting paid through ESMC?

As an outcome-based marketplace, farmers are paid annually based on measured soil health improvements. These measurements are based off of annual modeling with a follow-up soil test conducted every five years.





Getting Started

For our agricultural sector to be healthy and sustain into the future we need healthy soils. Employing soil health practices can be one of the best avenues for producers to increase long-term yields, minimize inputs and now—participate in emerging markets.

The great thing about implementing conservation agriculture practices is that producers can bite off as much or as little as they want to. There is a wide range of in-field and edge-of-field practices available, all of which can help improve resilience, profitability and environmental outcomes (and thus, credits) on your farm.

Cost share programs are available through:

- Stearns County SWCD | acresforwater.com
- Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture | mda.state.mn.us
- Natural Resource Conservation Service | nrcs.usda.gov

By leveraging the existing resources available for conservation practices, producers can more readily participate in these markets. Cost-share programs, like those available through NRCS, reduce the financial risk associated with bringing on these new practices.

A Win for Farms = A Win for All

Reducing the environmental impact of agriculture is possible, without blowing up your bottom line. Through programs like ESMC, a farmer can make money by improving the environment. It's high time to retire the idea that conservation and agriculture are inherently at odds. People are a part of nature's systems, and our long-term health and quality of life are dependent on the quality and health of our farms and grazing lands.

At the farm level, these practices will boost productivity and profitability. At a societal level, the benefits of healthier soils include improved water quality, filtration and storage, as well as carbon sequestration.

Producers, agribusinesses and conservation practitioners are all essential to driving practices that restore soil health. Programs and initiatives like the ESMC enable us to comprehensively tackle our greatest social and environmental challenges without leaving anyone behind. Getting started is arguably the hardest part. But the good news is that you have allies to support you every step of the way. Contact Leif Fixen to get started today.

ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES

Water Quality

Declining soil health and increasing severe weather events present a double whammy for farmers and Minnesota's water quality. Prioritizing soil health in farm management decisions helps mitigate risks to water quality by reducing runoff and erosion, retaining nutrients and holding more water on the landscape while increasing the resiliency of farm operations.

Water Quantity

Many of our water quality issues are the direct result of water quantity issues. Contrary to common thought, conventional tillage actually reduces soil's ability to receive and hold water over time. Healthy soil acts much like a sponge, with its ability to absorb and hold much of its volume in water.

Carbon Storage

Carbon is the foundation of soil fertility. Improved soil health is great not just for long-term yields, but also for climate change mitigation. As organic matter builds up in the soil, so too does carbon dioxide.

Practices that build the health of our soils provide one of our most promising defenses against climate change and degrading water quality.



For more information, contact:

Leif Fixen

Agriculture Strategy Manager
The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota,
North Dakota and South Dakota
nature.org/mnagriculture

leif.fixen@tnc.org
(605) 691-3072

