

Genesee River Demonstration Farms Network



A Year in Review

In 2018, American Farmland Trust and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service launched the Genesee River Demonstration Farms Network. The project showcases the impacts of practical and innovative conservation practices on farm viability, water quality, and other natural resources.

Goals of the Genesee River Demonstration Farms Network

- Demonstrate conservation systems that support farm viability, build soil health, and benefit the environment
- Quantify economic and environmental impacts of soil health management systems
- Share technology, information, and lessons learned with farmers, agribusiness, conservation agencies, landowners, and the public
- Create on-farm research opportunities to evaluate and demonstrate conservation practices
- Facilitate farmer-to-farmer discussions and learning opportunities

Farms at a Glance

Gary Swede Farm LLC



Genesee County, NY

FARM SIZE: 4,500 acres total.
1,500 dairy rotation used for economic case study

CROPS: Corn silage, grain corn, sweet corn, wheat, alfalfa, and vegetables. In partnership with 2,000-cow dairy

SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES:
No-till, strip-till, cover crops, nutrient management

COVER CROPS: Oats, radishes, wheat

Har-Go Farms



Genesee County, NY

FARM SIZE: 650-acre organic dairy farm

CROPS: Corn silage, grain corn, soybeans, alfalfa

SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES:
Cover crops, nutrient management, and no-till when reseeded pasture

COVER CROPS: Triticale and red cover



Year One Partnership Highlights

During its first year, the Genesee River Demonstration Farms Network has accomplished several notable outcomes that provide a foundation for more ongoing success.

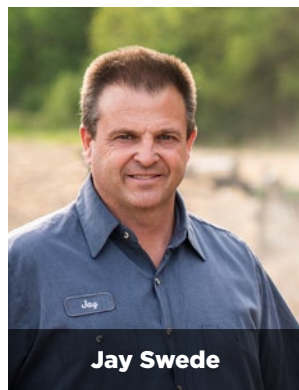
TWO DEMONSTRATION FARMS LAUNCHED

The network established collaborative agreements with two farms—Gary Swede Farm LLC and Har-Go Farms—who are implementing successful Soil Health Management Systems. Both farms have been issued initial payment for assisting with collection of field and cost data, participating in tours and events, providing site access and maintenance, and other activities. The early commitment of these two farms helped American Farmland Trust leverage USDA NRCS support to secure additional funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the New York Farm Viability Institute to grow the network in 2020.

NEW CASE STUDY HIGHLIGHTS ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES

With soil health management, farmers can increase crop resiliency to environmental stress, decrease input costs, and improve their profits, all while conserving resources for the public at large, on their farms, in their watersheds, and beyond. Soil health management systems are good for farmers and for the public.

American Farmland Trust, in partnership with USDA NRCS, recently released eight farmer profile case studies, including one featuring



Jay Swede

Genesee River Demonstration Farms Network participant Jay Swede, that quantified the many economic, water quality, and climate benefits associated with on-farm soil health practices. The Swede farm profile highlighted

practices such as strip-till, cover crops, and nutrient management that ultimately demonstrated how Jay and his family saw a \$55 per-acre increase in net income per year due to soil health management, equating to \$82,257 over the 1,500-acre dairy rotation, a 343% return on his investment. It also estimated that Jay has reduced nitrogen,



\$55

per-acre increase
in net income



343%

return on
investment



REDUCED

nitrogen, phosphorous,
and sediment losses





Experts speak at an outreach event, including a local crop advisor, Jay Swede (farmer), Donn Branton (farmer), Jodi Putnam (CCE), and John Macauley (farmer).

phosphorus and sediment losses by 40, 92, and 96% respectively, while reducing total greenhouse gas emissions by 560%. The case studies were promoted through press outreach and have also been made available on USDA NRCS's [Soil Health website](#) and AFT's [Farmland Information Center](#).

OUTREACH EVENTS EDUCATE FARMERS, SERVICE PROVIDERS

Through the network, American Farmland Trust conducted 10 local and regional outreach events, directly reaching 365 farmers, agricultural service providers, policy makers, and researchers. Farmer Jay Swede spoke at one regional and two local events about his soil health journey and economic benefits, reaching 235 farmers combined. Blake Glover, State Conservationist for USDA NRCS in New York, attended one of the network events in August and stated, "The Genesee River Demonstration Farm Network supports the effective use of conservation systems that reduce nonpoint source pollution in a critical watershed of Lake Ontario. The opportunities for producers and landowners to share outcomes and experiences of new technologies will multiply sustainable benefits throughout the region."

In addition, farmers can visit the [Genesee River Demonstration Farms Network webpage](#) to find upcoming field days and events hosted by demonstration farms in the network, farm case studies and resources, and more.

PROJECT OUTREACH



10

local and regional
outreach events
reaching



365

farmers,
agricultural service
providers, policy makers,
and researchers



FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

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SOIL HEALTH ANALYSIS SHOWS PROMISING RESULTS

The network evaluated the soil health status of the demonstration farms using the [Cornell Comprehensive Assessment of Soil Health](#) or “CASH.” A ‘focus field’ with a history of soil health management was compared to an adjacent forested area with similar soils. The results from the CASH reports show another way that their soil health practices are paying off: soil health indicators such as available water capacity, compaction, organic matter, and respiration from the focus fields were comparable to those of the forest, demonstrating how soil health management in their fields are regenerating and maintaining ecosystem services like those under natural conditions.

Looking Ahead

Through continued partnership with USDA NRCS, American Farmland Trust will deepen its relationship with the two participating farms—Gary Swede Farm LLC and Har-Go Farms. The latter will be featured in an upcoming soil health economic case study, and staff are already engaging these farmers on planned practices for the upcoming season, including field trials to examine the economic and ecosystem benefits of multi-species cover crop mixes. AFT will also work with farmers and other partners in the watershed to hold additional outreach events for farmers and service providers. Altogether, efforts will remain focused on spurring farmers to adopt and expand conservation practices that can improve water quality, soil health, and farm viability.

