

LETTERS OF FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

The following section contains letters that were submitted by stakeholders of soil health work in Nebraska. They are from entities, organizations, companies and individuals who have had a role in the development of this report and have generously given of their time, effort, and input to make this report a reality.

These letters are not a part of the official document as they had not been written when the Healthy Soils Task Force voted to approve this document. The inclusion of these letters into the printed report was discussed at the final Task Force meeting.

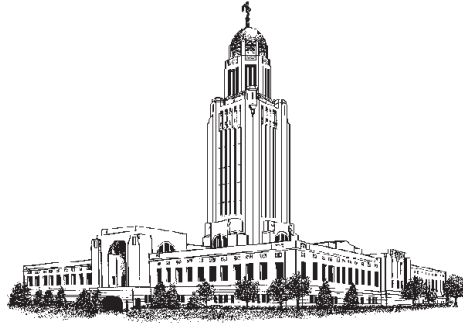
Letters were solicited from all participating stakeholders—even those who were not 100% in support of this Soil Health Initiative—and all letters that were submitted by the deadline given for publishing are contained in the following section.

It is likely that additional feedback and support letters will be submitted after the deadline. Those will be made available upon request by emailing the Healthy Soils Task Force chairman, Keith Berns: keith@greencoverseed.com

Nebraska State Legislature

SENATOR TIM GRAGERT

District 40
State Capitol
PO Box 94604
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4604
(402) 471-2801
tgragert@leg.ne.gov



COMMITTEES

Banking, Commerce and Insurance
Natural Resources
State-Tribal Relations

Governor Pete Ricketts and members of the Agriculture Committee:

In 2019, I introduced and prioritized LB 243, which created the Healthy Soils Task Force. The Healthy Soils Task Force has been meeting for a year and half, working on their mission to develop a comprehensive healthy soils initiative for the State of Nebraska and an action plan to coordinate its efforts. I am writing to express my support for the Healthy Soils Task Force's report titled, "Soil Health for Nebraska Wealth". I applaud all of the members for their hard work and dedication.

The Task Force was comprised of some of the most experienced soil conservationists in Nebraska, bringing their expertise from production agriculture, agribusiness, academia, Natural Resources Districts (NRDs), and environmental organizations. Additionally, there was representation on the Task Force from all corners of the state.

After personally spending 31 years at the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), I know that the degradation of soil health is a complex issue that takes patience, trust, and compromise to address. The Task Force has laid out a plan to address this issue in a holistic and timely manner. Stakeholders from all over the State of Nebraska were met with, one-on-one, to gather their input with the report and the goals outlined. With feedback from over thirty organizations, the Healthy Soils Task Force crafted a final report to address how Nebraska can become the nation's leader in healthy, productive, and sustainable soils.

The Task Force has made recommendations by identifying five goals. The main goal is to establish a clearinghouse, referred to as the "Hub" in the report, to coordinate, communicate, and collaborate with the various conservation organizations in Nebraska, most notably, the NRDs, NRCS, and UNL. Although Nebraska offers many noteworthy programs for conservation practices, the main concern that rose to the top is the lack of synergy between entities. The Hub will be the catalyst for that synergy. The Hub will be a nongovernmental, one-stop shop for information on conservation practices. Furthermore, it will be a vehicle for grants and funds from private companies and large food producers. The Healthy Soils Task Force does not request any funds from the State of Nebraska nor does it seek the power to mandate; rather, it confidently puts forth the Task Force's goals and recommendations as the best path forward to restore the health of our soils in Nebraska.

I humbly ask for your support in the recognition of this initiative and action plan. With the guidance of the Healthy Soils Task Force, Nebraska is poised to be the leader in healthy soils in the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy J. Gragert".

Tim Gragert
District 40

Nebraska State Legislature

SENATOR JULIE SLAMA

District 1
State Capitol
PO Box 94604
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4604
(402) 471-2733
jslama@leg.ne.gov



COMMITTEES

Chairperson - Enrollment and Review
Agriculture
Business and Labor
Judiciary
Midwestern Higher Education Commission

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter to thank the members of the Healthy Soils Task Force for their work over the past several months. They worked diligently to create a thorough report detailing the issues related to providing farmers and ranchers with the research, education, technical assistance, and demonstration projects they need to promote soil health. They also reported on the options for financial incentives to improve soil health, and the contribution of livestock to soil health, as outlined by Senator Gragert's LB 243.

Promoting healthy soils should be a priority of our state's policymakers, as agriculture and livestock production are Nebraska's major economic drivers. There is a significant opportunity for Nebraska farmers and ranchers to capitalize on the economic and production benefits of improved soil health, while simultaneously improving surface and ground water quality.

I look forward to supporting policies to improve Nebraska's soil health in upcoming legislative sessions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Slama', written in a cursive style.

Julie Slama
State Senator, District 1



Natural Resources Conservation Service
Nebraska State Office
Federal Building, Room 152
100 Centennial Mall North
Lincoln, NE 68508-3866
(402) 437-5300

<http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov>

December 17, 2020

Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force
c/o Keith Berns, Chairman
918 Road X
Bladen, NE 68928

Dear Mr. Berns and committee members,

On behalf of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Nebraska, I want to offer our congratulations to the Task Force on your efforts to compile the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force Report. Many of the soil health implementation activities and initiatives described in the report align well with the mission and priorities of the NRCS, and therefore we are supportive of the strategy.

Nebraska NRCS has been working vigorously to promote soil health concepts to our employees, partners, and producer groups for the past decade. We will continue to lend our support and cooperation to other groups working to promote natural resource conservation and the adoption of soil health management systems to landowners and producer groups.

Over the past year, the NRCS Soil Health Specialist has assisted the Soil Health Task Force with technical discussions of several soil health parameters, including identification of the Benchmarks and Measurements in Goal #5 of the report. Additionally, NRCS provided input on the map resources and data contained in the report. I have noted the benefit of a statewide soil health coordinating body to help guide the outreach efforts of many separate organizations working to carry out soil health promotion and field events.

Efforts to achieve large scale improvements in soil health in Nebraska will require multiple partners bringing resources and technical capacity to the table. As such, Nebraska NRCS is in support of a statewide effort to deliver information and education to producers on the benefits of implementing soil health management systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Craig Derickson".

CRAIG DERICKSON
State Conservationist

Helping People Help the Land
USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



January 4, 2021

Keith Berns, Chair
Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force
918 Road X
Bladen, NE 68928

Subject: Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources Collaborations for Healthy Soils

The faculty and staff of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) are committed to conducting research and delivering educational programming that enhance the stewardship and good management of the bountiful natural resources of Nebraska. Recently we have formed the Water and Integrated Cropping Systems (WICS) team within IANR to further enhance our systems approach to managing our soil and water resources, and to increase internal connections, communications, and collaborations in this important area.

We welcome and are supportive of increased communications and collaborations with our external partners in local, state, and federal agencies that are working to improve and sustain soil health. Our WICS team members working with partners in these agencies will continue to serve Nebraska to ensure our soil and water resources are well managed.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Boehm
NU Vice President and
IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

cc: Ronald E. Yoder



LEWIS & CLARK
NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

Protecting Lives, Protecting Property, Protecting our Future

608 N ROBINSON AVE
PO BOX 518
HARTINGTON NE 68739-0518
PHONE (402) 254-6758
FAX (402) 254-6759

December 28, 2020

Keith Berns
Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force
Chair 918 Road X
Bladen, NE 68928

RE: Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force Report

Dear Keith,

The Lewis and Clark Natural Resources District (LCNRD) has closely followed the process of the Healthy Soils Task Force and development of the Nebraska Healthy Soils Initiative since testifying in support of LB243 at the Agriculture Committee hearing in January 2019. LCNRD supports the Healthy Soils Task Force, the completed Report and, most importantly, development of the comprehensive action plan to carry out the Initiative.

LCNRD sees statewide benefit in building awareness, determining collaborative possibilities and determining viable action steps relating to soil health in Nebraska. LCNRD has two conservation areas with direct focus on soil health as a means to positively impact ground and surface water quality and offers conservation cost-share programs that relate to soil health. Land treatment practices, and cover crop programs are widely used by producers to directly benefit soil health in the district. We work effectively with NRCS county offices in preparing and administering these programs, which is a testament to the benefits of working together.

On behalf of LCNRD, I would like to thank the Healthy Soils Task Force for all their work in preparing and submitting the Healthy Soils Task Force report. The report and initiative will further Nebraska's role as a leader in agriculture and conservation.

Sincerely,

Annette Sudbeck
General Manager

cc: Jeff Steffen, LCNRD Board Chair



LOWER PLATTE SOUTH
natural resources district

3125 Portia Street | P.O. Box 83581 • Lincoln, Nebraska 68501-3581
P: 402.476.2729 • F: 402.476.6454 | www.lpsnrd.org

December 21, 2020

Keith Berns
Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force Chair
918 Road X
Bladen, NE 68928

RE: Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force Report

Dear Keith:

On behalf of the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (LPSNRD), I would like to thank the Healthy Soils Task Force for all their work in preparing and submitting the Report. Since LB243 was proposed and approved, LPSNRD has been following the process of the Task Force to develop a Nebraska Healthy Soils Initiative and a comprehensive action plan to carry out the Initiative. LPSNRD testified in support of LB243 at the Agriculture Committee hearing in January 2019 and we support the Healthy Soils Task Force and the completed Report.

Furthermore, LPSNRD supports building awareness, determining collaborative possibilities and determining viable action steps relating to soil health in Nebraska. LPSNRD offers many conservation cost-share programs that relate to soil health. Our land treatment practices and cover crop programs are widely used by producers in our District and directly benefit soil health. We work closely and successfully with our NRCS county offices in preparing and administering these programs, which is a testament to the benefits of working together.

Again, thank you and the Task Force for the important work completed thus far, which could certainly place Nebraska agriculture in the forefront of soil health activity moving forward.

Sincerely,

Larry Ruth
Lower Platte South NRD Board Chair

Cc: Paul Zillig, LPSNRD General Manager



nemaha

NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

62161 Hwy 136 • Tecumseh, Nebraska 68450
Telephone: (402) 335-3325 • Fax: (402) 335-3265
email: [nnrd@nemahandrd.org](mailto:nnrdsnemahandrd.org)

December 23, 2020

Keith Berns
Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force
918 Road X
Bladen, Nebraska 68928

Dear Mr. Berns,

On behalf of the Nemaha Natural Resources District, I would like to thank the Healthy Soils Task Force for their time and dedication in preparing the Healthy Soils Task Force Report. Thru the process it was obvious that the members of the task force were very passionate about developing a report that provided a comprehensive and realistic plan to promote the awareness and improvement of soil health in Nebraska.

Our NRD s located in far southeast Nebraska and our crop production is largely dryland. Soil health is important to all Nebraska; however, dryland agriculture benefits greatly from improved soils and the increased water infiltration capacity. Our hope is that this report will result in more awareness in the benefits of soil health that help provide tools we can use to help local producers implement best management practices that will directly benefit our soils. We feel that producers in our area are some of the most conservation minded in Nebraska and will be willing to work with the NRD to take the next step forward protecting and improving our soil resources.

Again, we appreciate the important work that the task force has done and are exited to see the results of your effort in the upcoming years.

Sincerely,



Robert F. Hilske, General Manager

PAPIO-MISSOURI RIVER
NATURAL
RESOURCES
DISTRICT



8901 S. 154TH ST.
OMAHA, NE 68138-3621
(402) 444-6222
FAX (402) 895-6543
www.papionrd.org

December 22, 2020

Keith Berns
NE Healthy Soils Task Force

Dear Mr. Berns:

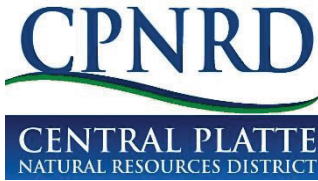
The purpose of this correspondence is to express the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District's support for the formation of the Nebraska Soil Hub to coordinate present and future efforts to improve soil health in Nebraska.

The NRD has a long-standing commitment to conserving and protecting the natural resources within the geographical boundaries of the District. The formation of the Nebraska Soil Hub will enhance the NRD's commitment to this effort, the health of the soils in the District.

The P-MRNRD strongly supports the NE Healthy Soils Task Force and their effort to create the Nebraska Soil Hub to bring all soil health stake holders together into a formal partnership, utilizing a common blueprint to address the Initiative's soil health goals and timelines.

Highest Personal Regards,

John Winkler
General Manager



215 Kaufman Ave Grand Island NE 68803
T: (308) 385-6282 F: (308) 385-6285
www.cpnrd.org

12/21/2020

Keith Berns
Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force – Chair

Dear Keith,

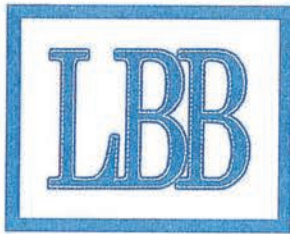
This letter is provided to show support from the Central Platte Natural Resources District for the voluntary implementation of the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force proposal. The voluntary implementation of a statewide healthy soils initiative will begin the process of establishing a statewide soil hub and form a Nebraska producer learning community that will be an integral part of a successful long term soil health program in the state.

This program will bring together the many entities and projects that are being implemented and make them available to the entire state while leveraging funds to grow the program and lessen the risk for producers wanting to implement soil health practices in their operations.

Sincerely,

Lyndon Vogt

Lyndon Vogt
General Manger
Central Platte Natural Resources District



Lower Big Blue
Natural Resources District

Established in 1972 for the Development and Conservation of Soil and Water Resources

December 28, 2020

Keith Berns
Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force
918 Road X
Bladen NE 68928

The Lower Big Blue Natural Resources District would like to thank the Healthy Soils Task Force for the work they put into the Healthy Soils Report. Soil Health has been an important topic in our area of Nebraska and this effort highlights its growing importance and acceptance by producers. It provides a great framework to further promote these activities across our State.

The report clearly defines the needed steps to accomplish the important goals to make Nebraska the leader in soils health. This vital resource needs to be protected and enhanced for the benefit of our citizens.

I am sure your report will be well received by the Governor and the Legislatures Agricultural Committee.

Let me know if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Clabaugh', written over a light blue horizontal line.

David S. Clabaugh, Manager
Lower Big Blue NRD

December 28, 2020

Keith Berns, Chair
Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force
Created by Nebraska Legislative Bill 243,

Dear Task Force Members:

As the UNL Extension Engineer working with no-till educational programs and conducting applied research on no-till practices, I recognize the value of a healthy soil when it comes to having a productive and resilient soil system. Unfortunately, too many producers are destroying soil structure and burying crop residues with tillage, resulting in erosion, runoff, and declines in soil health. Nebraska's progress in implementing continuous no-till systems, helping producers conserve soil and water while improving profitability and reducing risks to the environment, has been fairly regional depending on needs and locally available information. The goals set forth by the Task Force will help producers realize the value having a healthy soil and help spread the adoption of practices to improve soil health state-wide.

I have been with the University of Nebraska since 1978, working with various soil, water, and energy conservation programs and, more recently, cover crops and soil health. Most of my emphasis has been on no-till equipment and system management, stressing the systems approach and the long-term benefits of continuous no-till and improving soil health. I have had the opportunity to conduct applied research, both on University farms and on those of cooperating producers, to learn more about soil health practices and strengthen my educational programs with valuable hands-on experiences. As such, I would be glad to assist the proposed Learning Communities by sharing some of the knowledge and experiences that I have accumulated over the years of helping the early adopters. Producers learn a lot from fellow producers in their own area and the proposed Soil Health Hub and Learning Communities will greatly facilitate this learning. Likewise, I can help demonstrate the long-term soil health improvements from the use of continuous no-till cropping systems by using the University of Nebraska's Rogers Memorial Farm.

I thank the Healthy Soils Task Force for their work and strongly support the implementation of the recommendations in their report. By doing so, Nebraskans will be able improve profitability, build soil health, and reduce risks to the environment. Healthy soils will be more resilient and help make Nebraska wealthy.

Sincerely,



Paul J. Jasa
Extension Engineer

December 23, 2020

Dear Keith,

I am pleased to offer this letter of support to you in regards to the final Healthy Soils Task Force Report. For the last three years, I have been the primary instructor of two crop management courses within the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. During this time I have taught over four hundred undergraduates who are soon to be, or have already become, the agricultural workforce of our state, country and world. I speak for their enthusiasm and interest in improving soil health and supporting natural resources stewardship. I can attest firsthand to their eagerness to gain from the classroom an understanding of the crop production approaches that support these critical goals for the future of our state.

As I read the report, I see the fundamental groundwork that will help my teaching better support students who are eager not only for classroom learning, but more importantly, for seeing in action how we maintain soil resources and profitable farms. I see the report as foundational to supporting my teaching and in developing the next generation of human capital and creativity. The ideas proposed in the report – namely the formation of a state soil hub and producer learning communities – will offer countless out of classroom learning opportunities for my students. The report includes ambitious ideas that I am not aware of ongoing at such a scale in any other state. Therefore we have an opportunity to lead the country in demonstrating collaboration that truly achieves resource stewardship as well as prosperity for both our rural and urban communities.

I truly appreciate the work of the Task Force in outlining such an ambitious and important plan.

Best Regards,



Andrea Basche, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor in Cropping Systems
Department of Agronomy and Horticulture
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

30 December 2020

Keith Berns, Chair
Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force
C/O GreenCover Seed
Bladen, Nebraska

Dear Mr. Berns,

I am writing to express my support for the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force Report. The report provides a strong case for increasing adoption of soil health practices in Nebraska. The report also provides a strategic framework for adoption of soil conservation practices through education, research, and financial investments.

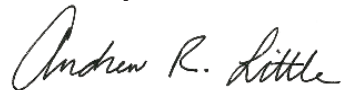
As a University faculty member, my extension and research efforts focus on developing innovative solutions to the growing wildlife conservation and management needs in multi-functional landscapes where there are competing interests for agricultural production, wildlife conservation, and ecosystem services. One approach that my lab focuses on is precision conservation, which aims to create 'win-win' solutions for agricultural producers by maximizing whole-field profitability while reducing the impacts on the environment (e.g., reduced soil erosion, water runoff, etc.). The Healthy Soils Task Force Report aligns well with this precision conservation initiative by providing a strategic framework to adoption of soil conservation practices in Nebraska with the goal of creating resilient agricultural systems for future generations.

The elements outlined in the report are important to developing an effective healthy soils conservation strategy across Nebraska, including three key areas:

- **Establish the Nebraska State Soil Hub with Regional Proving Grounds.** This *Hub* will address a critical need by providing a centralized location to improve communications and coordination with partner agencies and landowners. This *Hub* will also help landowners share information amongst each other and work together to improve soil conservation in Nebraska.
- **Develop Producer Learning Communities (PLCs) focused on precision agriculture, economics and natural resource conservation led by interested and qualified parties such as UNL, NRCS, NRDs, and others.** PLCs will help strengthen current efforts to improve adoption of alternative agricultural practices to maximize whole field profitability and natural resource conservation in Nebraska.
- **Recruit at least \$50 million in new outside funding to help farmers and ranchers make investments.** Funding will be critical to improving adoption of soil conservation practices in Nebraska.

I look forward to working with the Healthy Soils Task Force members, Nebraska agriculture and conservation organizations, and Nebraska landowners to improve education and research efforts on alternative agricultural practices aimed at maximizing whole field profitability and natural resource conservation.

Sincerely,



Andrew Little, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Landscape and Habitat Management
School of Natural Resources
(402) 219-1913
alittle6@unl.edu

December 28, 2020

Keith Berns
Chair of NE Healthy Soils Task Force

Dear Keith,

This is a letter of support for the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force's Action Plan and the five goals you have developed. As an Extension Educator located in Nemaha County, I have been working in the area of Soil Health for the past 10 years primarily in southeast Nebraska. I have also been involved in Soil Health Programming through Extension statewide and as the state coordinator of the SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) Program in Nebraska.

I believe your first goal of establishing a Nebraska Soil Hub with regional proving grounds is an excellent strategy for the development of healthy soils in Nebraska. There are several excellent soil health projects that are currently being conducted cooperatively between the University of Nebraska, NRCS, different NRDs and farmers. Having worked with several of these projects with Nebraska Extension, coordination is sometimes lacking and resources of these different stakeholders would be better utilized if this goal is accomplished. The regional proving ground is key to moving soil health management systems forward through research and demonstration sites across the state. The regional proving grounds (RPG) will be able to build on the infrastructure that is already in place across the state under the direction of the statewide soil hub. These regional proving grounds are extremely important for developing the best soil management systems for the different climates and agriculture production systems across Nebraska. This concept to "prove" and analyze the agronomic, economic, and environmental viability of soil health practices regional is vital to the success of this action plan.

The second goal of forming a Nebraska Producer Learning Community (PLC) is a very important component of the action plan. Producer lead groups in several states have formed organizations to address soil health and your plan to use the neighboring states of South Dakota and Colorado as models makes good sense. The plan to have the PLC work with the Nebraska Soil Hub and RPG is important to increase the adoption of soil health management practices. Having a small membership fee of \$50 shows a commitment to the organization and will provide some funding for programs. Opening up membership in the PLC to landowners, agriculture support workers, agribusinesses, and consumers is also important. Similar to other farm organizations, producers are key to a successful program. Nebraska Extension currently works hand in hand with different farm organizations, commodity boards, NRCS, NRDs and the farmers in the on-farm research network. The PLC would be a key group for us to work together on soil health programs and projects.

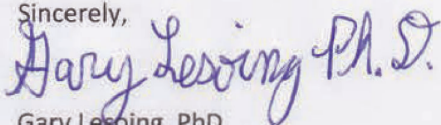
The third goal to develop the next generation of soil health practitioners is extremely important. Nebraska Extension through 4-H Programs, FFA and partnerships with other organizations knows the importance of education and training. Your plan to first expose all young people to the benefits of soil health to prepare the next generation of consumers to be soil health savvy is key. I see Nebraska Extension Educators working with PLC to provide education and training to youth and young adults about soil health. Through the partnerships with PLC, NRCS and other organizations, we will facilitate the development of the next generation of farmers, ranchers, technicians, conservationists, educators, entrepreneurs, agronomists, agribusiness workers, and leaders to ensure a productive and sustainable future for Nebraska. Your detailed plans to accomplish this goal are achievable with cooperation and collaboration of the previously mentioned organizations.

The fourth goal to recruit \$50,000,000 in Additional Soil Health Funding and incentives over the next ten years is an aggressive goal, but the potential is there. I agree with your logic that soil health management practices need to be incentivized to increase adoption by farmers. I believe as the benefits of soil health practices, such as cover crops are realized, both environmentally and economically; funds will become more available through government programs, grants from governmental agencies and grants from private organizations and corporations like you describe in your action plan. A major source of funding to farmers can definitely come from corporations that are incentivizing farmers to sequester carbon through soil health practices to reduce their carbon footprint. The potential for this program are unlimited.

The fifth goal of establishing Nebraska Soil Health Measurements and Benchmarks needs to be completed. This is crucial in determining the progress producers are making through the soil health management practices they are following. Your plans for accomplishing this goal are doable as well and very important if the Nebraska Healthy Soils Action Plan is to be completed. I know Nebraska Extension Educators can be a valuable partner in soil health evaluation in the RPGs across Nebraska.

As an Extension Educator currently working in the area of soil health, I am very excited on the potential to work with the Nebraska Soil Health Task Force to improve soil health and make Nebraska a more sustainable agriculture system.

Sincerely,



Gary Lesoing, PhD
Extension Educator
Nebraska Extension

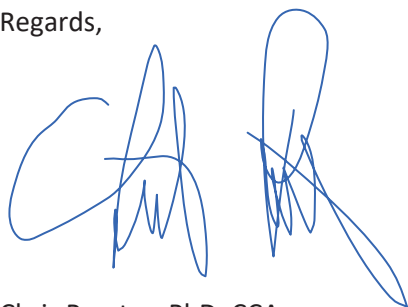
December 29, 2020

Letter of Support for the Nebraska Health Soils Initiative

To the Nebraska Health Soils Taskforce,

Having read the Taskforce Report and taken opportunity to participate in the UNL Agronomy and Horticulture listening sessions I would like to voice my support of the five goals outlined in the report. The need to value soil health for the state of Nebraska is clear. As an extension professional with Nebraska Extension, I consider it a privilege to have worked and interacted with many of the innovative and forward-thinking farmers in our state. These hard-working men and women view themselves as stewards of the land and I have learned much from them. Many of my own goals in research and extension have focused on developing and communicating ideas that will help farmers steward their land well both now and for future generations. One of the important issues addressed by the Taskforce is the farmer-led and farmer-focused approach proposed in the initiative recognizing the important role farmers play in building soil health. Furthermore, the State Soil Health Hub and Regional Proving grounds represents an innovative approach to extension and research with great potential to help improve understanding and adoption soil health concepts. Another critical need the Soil Wealth initiative addresses is the need for greater sharing and collaboration across the various soil health stakeholders in Nebraska. With the increased attention on soil health, having consistent metrics for evaluating soil health is absolutely critical if we are to improve our understanding and ability to communicate these concepts. I also appreciate the ambitious goal of recruiting \$50,000,000 in funds for soil health in Nebraska and I look forward to collaborating with these efforts. While I look forward to continuing work with farmers in our state helping them produce the resources our world needs in an economically and environmentally sustainable way, I believe this can be more effectively accomplished within the framework outlined in the report. These goals address critical issues for our state, are both achievable and ambitious and I look forward to opportunities to work with the Soil Wealth initiative.

Regards,



Chris Proctor, PhD, CCA
Weed Management Extension Educator
University of Nebraska – Lincoln
174 Keim Hall
Lincoln, NE 68583
(402)472-5411
cproctor@unl.edu

December 26, 2020

To Whom it May Concern:

This letter is in support of the Soil Health for Nebraska Wealth initiative. My perspective is from the lens of working as a Nebraska Extension Educator for nearly 17 years in the areas of crops and water.

In their report, the Healthy Soils Task Force outlined five goals for consideration, and I support each of them. Many entities within Nebraska work in the soil health arena. While there has been increased effort to partner in recent years, coming together to create a Soil Health Hub would heighten awareness, increase collaboration, and reduce duplication of efforts amongst government and private entities. For example, in 2020, a partnership was formed locally with The Nature Conservancy, Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District, Nebraska Extension (and Nebraska On-Farm Research Network), Natural Resources Conservation Service, Kellogg's, and 11 farmers to interseed cover crops into four-leaf stage corn for improved soil health. The partnership has benefited all of us in ways that could not have been achieved by any individual party. This is just one example of what could be achieved exponentially with the creation of a Soil Health Hub. It also shows the potential of entities coming together to recruit the \$50 million outlined in the fourth goal. These entities can also play a role in developing the next generation of soil health practitioners as outlined in the third goal.

Working closely with farmers and livestock producers, the ones thinking outside of the box and on the cutting edge are often trying things without feeling the freedom to talk with neighbors working in more traditional ways. Connecting like-minded farmers around topics for 'support systems' is something I've often done in my Extension career. Many individuals and some groups exist but aren't connected. Listening to farmers share ideas and their desire to share with other like-minded farmers resulted in the recent formation of a small, local soil health group. Farmers having the opportunity to share, try things, fail, and learn with others shortens the learning curve and propels agriculture forward. Thus, the importance of a state-wide Nebraska producer learning community as outlined in the second goal.

Perhaps the greatest challenge regarding soil health is understanding what it is, how to measure it, and how to put economics to it. Consistency and consensus do not currently exist and (I feel) are necessary amongst entities regarding what should be measured, what tests should be used, and what the results/analysis mean. I appreciate the recommendation of creating a committee from various entities to define these. A large barrier to soil health practice implementation is understanding economics of practices that take years to measure and place a financial value upon. Having a clear, consistent way to associate economics to practices and measurements for communication with landlords, tenants, and bankers is critical to future soil health practice adoption as outlined in the fifth goal.

This letter of support outlined a few of the reasons I support all five goals proposed by the Healthy Soils Task Force. Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this letter.

Sincerely,

Jenny Rees

Jenny Rees, Nebraska Extension Educator, York and Seward Counties
jrees2@unl.edu, (402) 362-5508, 2345 Nebraska Ave., York, NE 68467



December 30, 2020

Keith Burns
Chair, Nebraska Healthy Soil Task Force

Dear Keith,

I am pleased to write this letter in support of the final report prepared by Healthy Soils Task Force (HSTF). I am writing in a capacity of Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist in Soil Science and Agronomy at the Dept. of Agronomy and Horticulture in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

First and foremost, HSTF deserves congratulations for such a comprehensive document on Soil Health with a well-thought plan of actions for Soil Health for Nebraska Wealth Initiative. This is a very timely and potential document that many of us will take advantage of in guiding our soil health efforts in the state individually or collectively.

Soil as a finite yet a most important resource has finally gained a long overdue attention. Some may say Nebraska is behind other states on initiatives around soil health. But the topic is so consequential and perennial that today is also the best time to set out on this journey of soil stewardship. The HSTF tirelessly conducted surveys among producers, documented challenges and opportunities around this issue and formulated 5-prong action plans. I can speak for researchers that HSTF's suggestion to identify metrics and benchmarks of soil health management is spot on. Nebraska can take a national lead on benchmarking soil health management and many other as suggested in the report. As an extension specialist, I admire the smart idea of the Hub, Proving Grounds, Professional Learning Communities, and the development of Practitioners that will help achieve desired soil health goal in the state and are needed particularly in western NE and beyond to explore and build capacity. In addition to stewardship and capacity building, this initiative can potentially open us to a new economic growth.

I am impressed with the HSTF reaching out to all possible stakeholders and institutions in preparing this report staying true to their 3Cs (communication, coordination, and collaboration) approach. Such extensive communication and collaboration among all the state agencies and stakeholders are what it would take to move this Soil Health for Nebraska Wealth Initiative forward. I commend HSTF for putting this important foundation to all the good initiatives around soil health that are soon to sprout in the state.

Yours sincerely,


Bijesh Maharjan

Assistant Professor | Extension Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Panhandle Research, Extension and Education Center
1-308 632 1372 | bmaharjan@unl.edu



December 27, 2020

Keith Berns
918 Road X
Bladen, NE 68928

Keith,

On behalf of the Nebraska Wheat Board (NWB), we are writing to express our support for the Healthy Soils Task Force - Soil Health Initiative Report. The task force has taken the first step in creating meaningful change in soil health.

Crop production has become much more intense and producers planting decisions change based on a number of factors. Improving our ability to manage and produce profitably will help prevent catastrophic losses, allow more effective management options, protect natural resources and help to stabilize crop and livestock production across the state. Managing nutrient inputs, crop quality, farm profitability and soil health are paramount, as we expect world populations to grow exponentially by 2050 and the burden of feeding the world falls upon Nebraska agricultural producers.

The Nebraska Soil Health Initiative links farmers, agronomists and ag professionals to conduct practical research and answer questions, develop a learning community, and recruit investment into soil health. Producers will benefit with this type of hands on research and allow them to make more informed management decisions. The cooperation between farmers, public researchers and private industry agronomists, demonstrates a commitment to the entire agriculture community. The willingness to share findings speaks volumes of the importance of the project for the benefit of all producers.

Projects like this will allow for great food stability and food security for a countless number of people worldwide, while providing practical research to farmers that produce our food. The Nebraska Wheat Board supports the continuation of research, investment, and out-reach of healthy soils.

Respectfully,

Royce Schaneman, Executive Director
Nebraska Wheat Board



December 27, 2020

To Whom it May Concern,

The Nature Conservancy is excited to see the development and delivery of the report: *Soil Health for Nebraska Wealth*. The report is well documented and has been informed by experts across the food and agriculture spectrum. We have been grateful for the opportunity to provide ideas and input as this report was developed.

The report documents the significant economic and environmental benefits that can flow from widespread adoption of soil health management practices across the State of Nebraska. In 2016, The Nature Conservancy issued a report¹ finding, on average, each one percent of U.S. cropland moving to a soil health management system would improve farmer returns by \$37 million, while increasing the value for society at large by \$226 million. The benefits on farm result from the opportunity to reduce input costs while keeping yields stable or seeing modest increases. The benefits to society arise from lower greenhouse gas emissions, improvements in water management and water quality.

The goals and recommendations provided in the report reinforce the need to provide timely and accessible information to farmers and ranchers across the state. Our positive experience with peer learning networks in other geographies reinforces our belief that investing in this approach will greatly accelerate the adaptive learning process across diverse areas and increase the rate of successful adoption of these practices in Nebraska. New market incentives are starting to take shape as companies and governments look to agriculture as a solution provider on environmental challenges such as climate change or water quality. Positioning Nebraska agriculture as a leader in the testing and development of new market incentives will ensure Nebraska producers are prepared to take advantage of these opportunities as they emerge.

We look forward to staying engaged with this initiative as it continues to take shape and we will look for ways we can contribute our expertise and resources to the benefit of the farmers, ranchers and citizens of Nebraska.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Doane".

Michael Doane
Global Managing Director
Food and Freshwater Systems
The Nature Conservancy

¹ *reThink Soil: A Roadmap to U.S. Soil Health*, The Nature Conservancy, 2016



December 10, 2020

Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force,

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC) Board of Directors wholeheartedly supports the *Soil Health for Nebraska Wealth* report. With 22 million of Nebraska's 45 million farm and ranch acres in rangeland and pastureland, half in the Nebraska Sandhills, the potential impact for improved soil health is significant. This vast land area represents, perhaps, the largest carbon sink in the state and, hence, can play an immeasurable role in carbon sequestration. The properly grazed ruminant has the potential for the greatest enhancement in soil health over time. In addition, getting the grazing ruminant back onto row crop acres remains as an untapped management practice to greatly enhance soil health on Nebraska's row crop acres.


NGLC Executive Board members participated in a stakeholder's session resulting in exchange of knowledge about how effective grazing management can result in improved range conditions and enhanced soil health over time. The NGLC Coordinator served on the HSTF.

The NGLC Board of Directors stands ready to support the HSTF Initiatives as follows:

- 1) Collaborate with UNL, NRCS, NRDs, NDA and other natural resource conservation entities in formation of the State Soil Hub and Regional Proving Grounds
- 2) Contribute to the Producer Learning Community through the NGLC Stewardship Program wherein experienced grazers mentor less experienced grazers
- 3) Help develop the Next Generation of Soil Health Practitioners by including soil health discussion into our Generational Transition sessions
- 4) Participate in helping to develop soil health measurements and benchmarks that are informative for range application

Through Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) funding, NGLC recently wrapped up a three- year land owner demonstration wherein eight private land owners grazed diverse mixtures of cover crops on row crop acres. Changes in soil health were part of the data analyses. The longer term objective is to encourage the conversion of marginally productive row crop acres back to perennial grasslands with grazing cover crops as an intermediate step.

The NGLC Board of Directors applauds the HSTF for their tireless efforts resulting in this report which paves the way for enhanced soil health across Nebraska for future generations.


Ron Bolze, Coordinator, NGLC



Nebraska Farmers Union

Office: 402-476-8815

Fax: 402-476-8815

1305 Plum Street

Lincoln, NE 68502

info@nebraskafarmersunion.org

www.nebraskafarmersunion.org

December 28, 2020

Chairman Keith Berns
Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force
932 Road X
Bladen, NE 68928

Dear Chairman Berns and members of the Task Force,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the final draft of "The Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force Report. Also, thank you for providing Nebraska Farmers Union (NeFU) the opportunity to comment on the draft. Finally, we thank you and everyone involved with the Task Force for their hard work.

While NeFU has reservations about portions of the report, opportunities missed, and the logistics tied to goals, all things considered, we are in general support of the goals of the report. We appreciate the effort that was made to pull together the many diverse factions in agriculture and natural resources to focus on ways Nebraska can accelerate healthy soil building activities.

As we consider future potential carbon sequestration efforts in Nebraska, it is helpful to review the carbon sequestration efforts in the 2006-2010 years. The Chicago Climate Exchange had 3,064,918 acres of Nebraska farm and range land under contract with one of three primary aggregators in the state tied to the Chicago Climate Exchange as of March 1, 2010. At that time, carbon values fell to 15 cents per metric ton as the result of the failure of the U.S. Senate to approve the Cap and Trade program already passed by the House of Representatives. 1,604 Nebraska farmers and ranchers were credited with sequestering 3,937,232 metric tons of carbon, making Nebraska the top carbon sequestering state in the nation. If the Cap and Trade legislation would have passed in the Senate, most carbon experts were forecasting carbon values to increase over a period of several years to \$12 to \$15 per metric ton. National Farmers Union was the largest carbon aggregator in the nation by a good margin.

NeFU was the largest aggregator of carbon in Nebraska measured by acres with 1.2 million acres of land signed up from 2006 to 2009 in anticipation of the Senate approval of Cap and Trade legislation. The Farm Bureau's AgraGate carbon sequestration program had more producers but not as many acres as did the NeFU program. The high water mark for carbon values sold on the Chicago Climate Exchange under contract with Nebraska Farmers Union was \$4.72 per metric ton. NeFU sent out checks amounting to \$484,485.66 for 2006-2007 carbon credits to 221 Ag producers for an average of \$2,192.24 per payment. Carbon sequestration was well received by farmers and ranchers, and just getting a good start when the U.S. Senate failed to pass the Cap and Trade legislation, which did collapse the value of carbon offsets. .

Unfortunately, when the Senate did not pass Cap and Trade legislation and support a version of the market based system being used by Europe and most of the industrialized nations of the world, it tragically failed to develop a coherent alternative climate change policy, forfeiting the U.S.'s leadership role in the world on climate change issues.

If there is to be a viable and stable carbon offset market that rewards farmers and ranchers for sequestering carbon and reaping all the soil building and water holding benefits that come with storing more carbon in our soils, the ag carbon market must be tied to a coherent national climate change strategy with goals to reduce carbon emissions and the amount of carbon dioxide in the air.

It is a fundamental mistake to not understand the linkage between healthy soils, carbon sequestration, and reducing the amount of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere. Corporate America understands that reality, and is looking for ways to partner with Ag, but national Congressional leadership is needed.

Relative to changing the cultural practices of Ag producers in order to create more healthy soils, NeFU has always supported state and federal cost share programs to incent farmers and ranchers to adopt soil and water conservation practices on their land. Experience has taught us that the most effective way to garner the necessary voluntary participation and support of landowners is to educate them on the benefits of practicing good conservation and then incent those practices. The support of landowners is essential to the success of soil building activities. Experience has also shown us that when federal, state, and local policies are aligned, progress happens, especially when educational, private sector, and land grant colleges and NGO organizations work together.

NeFU's support for focusing on healthy soil building practices including compensating farmers and ranchers for adopting agricultural practices that sequester carbon is based on our understanding of the benefits of increasing our soils ability to absorb and store more moisture. As a result of climate change, Nebraska is experiencing changes in weather patterns. Precipitation patterns exhibit more high intensity rainfall events and longer periods between precipitation events. Soils with higher water absorption rates allows more moisture to be absorbed during high volume rainfall events, and provides more moisture for plants to draw from during longer gaps between rainfall events. Farmers and ranchers are always well served when they increase the productive capacity of the soils they depend on.

NeFU supports the establishment of Nebraska State Soil Health Hubs with Regional Proving Grounds, and forming Nebraska Producer Learning Communities, and developing the next generation of soil health practitioners as part of a broad based educational effort needed to lay the groundwork for the adoptions of healthy soil building efforts. Education is at the base of the NeFU Triangle because all useful cooperative efforts begin with education.

We believe there are benefits in aligning the State Soil Hub and Educational and Demonstration regions with NRCS Major Land Resource Areas (MLRAs). We want to do support efforts that increase the adoption of regenerative agricultural practices and the utilization of cover crops.

We support creating a Producer Learning Community. When farmers can learn from the experience of other farmers and ranchers, we know that farmer and rancher acceptance increases.

We find the funding section to be problematic. While we need private sector partners, we know that their financial support will come with company interests that may or may not be consistent with the Task Force goals. We think the structure of future Farm Bills to support soil building is likely to happen.

Production agriculture must be open to new ideas and realities. We need to work together to pursue any and all viable options to increase healthy soils, and regenerative agricultural practices. We thank the Task Force again for their considerable amount of time, effort, and willingness to think outside of the box.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John K. Hansen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John K. Hansen
President, Nebraska Farmers Union

Fighting for Nebraska's family farmers and ranchers since 1913.

December 23, 2020

Keith Berns, Chair
Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force
c/o GreenCover Seed
Bladen, Nebraska



Via email: keith@GreenCoverSeed.com

Dear Keith,

We are writing to express our support for the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force Report.

We appreciate all the work that went into the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force Report. The Report makes a strong case for state policies that promote the widespread adoption of soil health practices in Nebraska. It also provides a strategy for achieving more widespread adoption of those practices and the many public and private benefits that would follow. We agree that the elements outlined in the Report are important pieces of a state soil health strategy, including:

* **Organize Nebraska soil health efforts along regional lines**, using a Soil Health Hub and regional proving grounds to recognize the differences in soils, climate, and agricultural systems across the state and deliver region-specific research and information that will serve Nebraska farmers and ranchers.

* **Support a statewide Nebraska Producer Learning Community** to help farmers test soil health practices and share results and other information, which should be done in coordination with existing organizations already working to support soil health practices.

* **Put in place a state framework to support soil health education for a new generation of producers**, which will also require that the University of Nebraska and other post-secondary institutions overhaul the way they teach agronomy, livestock management, and ag economics to catch up with recent advances in soil health science.

* **Recruit at least \$50 million in new outside funding to help farmers and ranchers make investments** needed to make the transition to farm and ranch systems that will rebuild healthy soils.

* **Establish benchmarks and measurements of success**, which includes identifying appropriate soil health tests for Nebraska farmland; establishing a system to track data on soil health and the adoption of soil health practices; and setting goals for the adoption of farm and ranch systems that rebuild soil health. We would like to see the state establish goals for the adoption of soil health practices by 2030 that include at least 75% no till/25% conservation tillage; cover crops used on 50% of cropland; managed rotational grazing systems on 50% of Nebraska pasture and range; and doubling the use of diverse crop rotations and the implementation of Integrated Pest Management on Nebraska farmland.

We believe the elements outlined in the Task Force Report are important, but believe several additional steps will greatly help Nebraska attain widespread adoption of soil health systems:

* **Dedicated state funding is very important.** Many of the opportunities to acquire outside funding identified in the report require a substantial match from state or local sponsors, and having a dedicated

source of state funding would greatly aid efforts to attract outside funds. That investment is very justified by the many public benefits healthy soils provide for Nebraska including water quality, soil conservation, flood mitigation, carbon storage, and fish and wildlife habitat.

*** Support for soil health planning will be critical.** Farmers and ranchers will need technical assistance to develop and implement soil health plans at the farm and ranch level. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has been developing soil health planning protocols but does not have the capacity to deliver soil health planning and other technical assistance to all 45,000 farms and ranches in Nebraska. Nebraska's Natural Resource Districts (NRDs) are one logical provider of the technical assistance required, but NRD staff will need additional training in soil health principles, practices, and planning, and NRDs will need additional resources to employ soil health planners.

*** Nebraska should work with USDA to identify opportunities to better use the more than \$200 million in USDA conservation dollars coming into the state each year.** Focusing more of those funds on soil health testing, planning, practices and systems could help Nebraska farmers and ranchers reap the economic and resiliency benefits of healthier soils while also delivering the many natural resource benefits for all Nebraskans.

*** Grassland restoration and preservation should be part of Nebraska's soil health strategy.** Considerable grassland remains in the Sandhills and some parts of Nebraska, but in many counties grassland has been largely eliminated. To economically obtain the soil health and economic benefits of integrating livestock back into cropland production, Nebraska needs to promote the restoration and protection of grassland, especially in counties where it has been largely removed from the landscape.

We look forward to working with the Task Force members, the Nebraska Legislature, and Nebraska agriculture, conservation, education, and other organizations towards adoption of these recommendations.

Mike Gaghagen, Nebraska Division
Izaak Walton League of America
mikegaghagen@gmail.com

Duane Hovorka, Agriculture Program Director
Izaak Walton League of America
dhovorka@iwla.org



Central Valley Ag Cooperative letter of support for the Nebraska Healthy Soil Task Force Soil Health for Nebraska Wealth Initiative

Central Valley Ag Cooperative (CVA) wants to express our support for the work done by the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force developing their “Soil Health for Nebraska Wealth” Initiative. CVA works with Nebraska crop and livestock producers across the eastern half of our state. We see the need for a better understanding of soil health and how to improve the health of our soils.

The Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force report completed in the fall of 2020 addresses many issues and concerns common to our members: Consumer interest in sustainable agricultural practices, the growing interest in agriculture’s role in climate change, agriculture’s impact on water quality, and the interest our members have in passing productive and sustainable operations to future generations.

We have recently created a position of Conservation Agronomist at CVA. Our Conservation Agronomist helps our producer members understand opportunities to add beneficial conservation practices, take advantage of cost share programs, understand opportunities for trading carbon credits, and seeks premiums for grains and proteins produced using sustainable practices. All these opportunities take good record keeping and additional planning to reap their benefits. We will assist our producers with these tasks.

We intend to work with the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force and the entities they create such as the Nebraska Producer Learning Community in educating agricultural producers in our trade territory. We will assist in providing speakers, distributing educational resources, and hosting grower and livestock producer meetings.

Tim Mundorf

Nutrient Management Lead

Central Valley Ag Cooperative

Timothy.mundorf@cvacoop.com



December 21st, 2020

Via First Class Mail and Electronic Mail

Mr. Keith Berns
Green Cover Seed
918 Road X
Bladen, NE 68928

Re: Nebraska Soil Health Task Force

Dear Chair Berns:

Thank you for your leadership of the Nebraska Soil Health Task Force. Cargill appreciates the effort that every member of the Task Force contributed to the final report which is now on its way to Governor Rickett's and the legislature for consideration. We applaud the broad make-up of the Task Force which consisted of agricultural producers, educators, industry, policy makers, and environmental groups.

As you know, Cargill provides food, agriculture, financial and industrial products to the world. With deep roots in Nebraska, we operate 15 facilities and employ over 3,800 people. The health of Nebraska's environment is imperative, and Cargill is working to improve soil health in Nebraska by working hand-in-hand with farmers, ranchers, and innovators through implementation of on-the-ground projects, some of which are referenced in the report. Specifically:

- Cargill's "BeefUp Sustainability" is an initiative committed to achieving a 30% greenhouse gas (GHG) intensity reduction across its North American beef supply chain by 2030. The 30% reduction builds on the industry's existing GHG efficiency efforts and will equate to removing 2 million cars from U.S. highways for a year. In order to reach the goal, Cargill will work across the beef supply chain to accelerate adoption of practices known to improve sustainability outcomes, like soil health and carbon storage.
- In August 2020, Cargill, The Nature Conservancy, Target and McDonald's launched a new five-year project aimed at working with Nebraska farmers to advance proven soil health practices to help mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and help farmers adapt to climate change. Overall, this effort has the potential to sequester 150,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide over the course of the project – equivalent to removing over 32,000 cars from the road in one year.
- In addition, Cargill previously teamed up with Nestlé Purina and The Nature Conservancy to implement innovative irrigation technology in the beef feed supply chain in Nebraska, which could save up to 2.4 billion gallons of irrigation water over the life of the project.

Again, Cargill wishes to thank the entire Task Force for their work toward assembling the final report. We share your objectives of promoting soil health practices, forging partnerships and coordination between farmers, industry, and government, and focus on setting and achieving measurable soil health outcomes. Cargill looks forward to being a partner in helping make Nebraska a leader of soil health awareness and adoption.

Sincerely,

Ryan Sirolli
Sustainability Director
Cargill, Incorporated
952-984-7626
Ryan_Sirolli@cargill.com



Ag - Testing Consulting

12-30-2020

To: Keith Berns

Chairperson, Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force

From: Raymond Ward, Agri-Business member of Task Force

RE: Support of the Task Force Report

I realize the importance of Nebraska's great Natural Resource – SOIL on a daily basis. Plant life as well all life is dependent on our soil resource. This says we have to educate the population on the importance of soil in our daily lives. Erosion of soil by water and wind has reduced the potential productivity of a large percentage of our soils. This report is a road map of how to reduce soil degradation and to improve the health and productivity of our soil natural resource. A very strong side-benefit of healthy soil is improved water quality and quantity.

Our farm in Saline County has benefited from healthy soil practices. Soil erosion and water loss is much less while crop productivity has increased. In our business, farmers contact me daily asking how to improve their soils. Education, by demonstration, as outlined in the Report is the answer producers need to improve the soil and water natural resources.

I support the Task Force Report to help improve our soil resource for the betterment of Nebraska farmers and all Nebraskans.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raymond C. Ward". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Raymond C. Ward
Chair, PhD, CPSS, CCA

Bus: 308-234-2418
Fax: 308-234-1940

web site
www.wardlab.com

4007 Cherry Ave., P.O. Box 788
Kearney, Nebraska 68848-0788

Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force
December 23, 2020

NHSTF Members,

I am a 25-year member of the American Society of Agronomy and the Certified Crop Advisor Program, I have logged over 500 credit hours of continued education, as well as over 30 years of working consulting with farmers and ranchers in their respective cropping and grazing systems.

After being invited to sit in on a Zoom conference call and reading the report and talking with some key members. I would like to endorse and support this effort and see it continue. I complement the task force members on the work they accomplished of laying out the needs and goals, as well as laying out the next step for the future of agriculture and potential enhancement of our precious soils.

In agriculture there are many sources of education from universities, government organizations and private industry. I see the future in a different light than one that is heavily influenced by either commodity organizations, government programs, and or federal crop insurance. The Farmer and Rancher of Nebraska and the surrounding region has an opportunity to learn, find economic opportunity and become an excited practitioner of soil health through the action plan. However currently I feel is held back from one of the core soil health principles, due to the lack of cropping choices and one of the 5 soil health principle is a diverse crop rotation and diverse species. The task for has laid out a plan for the most often the most underutilized part of the core soil principles in diverse crop rotations, which can include grazing.

My support also is area of the task for on increasing emphasis on the measurables. We often hear about the benefits of the tangibles in soil health but there are several ways of helping producers and the ag industry gain excitement as we look at the list below. These will be developed through the recommendations committee and the design of the key regions of the state referred to as the Hub.

Let me put emphasis on some of what I would hope to see developed in the Hub system.

1. Water Holding capacity is one of the most exciting things to me as I see not only benefits in infiltration but WHC increasing with good management practices. This has great economic implications to the state. My example is a producer who has soil considered by soil type to hold in the surface foot 2.5 inches of soil water. However, when measuring after 20 plus years of not till and over 10 years of cover cropping that his soil could hold 4.2 inches of soil water. More needs to be learned about how much the total soil profile can hold.
2. Carbon, I am wondering if we would be underselling the value of the carbon cycling without better measurements of total plant, root, and soil contributions from crops, covers and livestock. If this is not a net gain to the soil, we would not have the ability to increase SOM. Thus, removal from the atmosphere. Whenever I see news or comments on climate change or carbon, I think that only the emissions (carbon footprint) are discussed and rarely the sequestration side (carbon sink) unless it is from a tree in the rain forest and USA agriculture (thus NE ag) is greatly overlooked in the calculations.
3. Nutrient cycling and nutrients stored in the biomass and the soil It is easy to measure the biomass of crop residue and cover crop biomass and add that nutrient measured into fertility programs. And learn more about how much nitrate and phosphate we are retaining in the field.

Sincerely,

Rich Russell CCA

Holdrege, NE 308-991-6442

December 23, 2020

Keith,

I am writing this letter of support for the Healthy Soils Task Force Soil Health Initiative. As a No-till Specialist working for USDA-NRCS, I have worked personally in the field with many members of the Task Force promoting soil health and water and soil conservation for sixteen years.

I will submit that the goals set forth by the highly qualified members of the Task Force are realistic and achievable and will integrate well with existing groups that we will look to align with in the future.

The establishment of a State Soil Hub that aligns Educational and Demonstration regions with NRCS Major Land Resource Areas (MLRAs) will allow for information sharing that will be invaluable in the development of economic databases that will increase awareness and encourage adoption of regenerative ag and cover crops across all of the variable soil types and various agronomic systems in our state.

The concept of creating a Producer Learning Community is an excellent approach. Having coordinated a No-till Incentive Program for the Lower Elkhorn NRD for some twenty years, I believe that the process of bringing farmers together to share ideas, approaches and successes is a sound path toward success.

Education is the foundation of change, and the Healthy Soils Task Force Soil Health Initiative approach is a good base to begin with in our journey to address climate change and regenerate our soil resources.

Thank you,

Dan Gillespie

NRCS No-till Specialist

December 23, 2020

TO: Members of the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force

FROM: Nebraska Elder Climate Legacy Initiative

RE: **The Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force Report: Findings, Recommendations, and Action Plan**

As members of the **Nebraska Elder Climate Legacy (ECL) Initiative**, we enthusiastically support the work of the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force which has culminated in this final report to Governor Ricketts and the Agriculture Committee of the Nebraska Legislature.

We see the effort as being a very comprehensive process of assessing Nebraska's abundant and diverse soil resources. The process was also transparent, involving all stakeholders. And it comes at a critical point in the evolution of agricultural management practices needed to adjust to the multiple challenges facing agriculture and society today. But rather than just another report to gather dust on administrative bookshelves, the Task Force members have developed a sound set of recommendations and a bold, but certainly doable, action plan. In short, the Task Force efforts over these many months serve as a solid foundation for Nebraskans and their elected officials to move forward in establishing the state as a national leader in building soil health for the future. And doing so through voluntary programs and additional support offered our agricultural producers—the true stewards of the land!

Early on in its inception, founding members of ECL realized that Nebraska has a particularly unique and profound role to play in humanity's dual challenges of long-term food security and climate adaptation/mitigation; a role coming through our productive agricultural sector and the land and water resources from which it thrives. Consequently, ECL was instrumental in the passage of LB243.

Over the past 12 to 18 months, much has transpired at the national level which amplifies soil health and this work of the Healthy Soils Task Force. Within the private sector, businesses are increasingly seeing the value of *eco-services* that agricultural producers can provide—including carbon sequestration in the nation's working agricultural lands. In turn, markets are developing for carbon credits, whereby producers are financially reimbursed for their stewardship practices. In Congress, Nebraska's own congressional delegation have signed on in support of the *Green Climate Solutions Act*, a plan to help farmers and ranchers access carbon credit markets. As NE Senator Deb Fischer noted, "--reducing barriers (to these markets) will enable more ag producers to be part of the climate solution and it will help them expand on existing practices (of good stewardship)."

Looking ahead, we regard the implementation of the recommendations of this report as being a most critical policy action step. It is policy that can offer better risk management and expanded economic opportunities for our agricultural producers; while at the same time yielding greater environmental sustainability and more equitable societal sharing of those responsibilities and benefits. It's just good *Down-to-Earth* policy!

Bruce Johnson, on behalf of the **Nebraska Elder Climate Legacy Initiative**