

# FARMLAND STEWARDSHIP SOLUTIONS

Newsletter  
MAY 2017



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## CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT JULY 27TH, 2017 SOIL 2017 Cultivating Your Investment: Landowners and Stewardship Olmsted Center at Drake University



Farmland Stewardship Solutions along with the Drake Agricultural Law Center, Iowa Water Center, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and The Nature Conservancy will be sponsoring SOIL 2017: Cultivating Your Investment: Landowners and Stewardship. This event will be held at Drake University's Olmsted Center starting at 8:00 a.m. and will wrap up at 5:00 p.m. The full day event has a targeted focus on non-operating landowners. The goal of SOIL 2017 is for landowners to learn how to better lease their land so that it is environmentally responsible, economically sound and protected for the future. Learn how conservation and sustainable farming practices are compatible with modern farm production and profitable for both the landowner and tenant.

"This is a very unique program and opportunity for landowners from across the Midwest to come together and get engaged in discussions about topics that are relevant to them as care-takers to a million dollar plus investment", says Greg Townsend, Executive Director, Farmland Stewardship Solutions. "Owning farmland in today's environment is complex. It's not that you need to be an expert in all areas, but it is important that one stays current of issues affecting farmland owners. This is an ideal venue to discover a full breath of every aspect of owning, managing, investing and passing on to the next generation healthy sustainable farmland. This gives participants the chance to learn from experts as well as networking with other landowners".

To round out the day long conference there will be both a landowner and farmer panel that will address such topics as how to develop a strong long-lasting partnership, ways of keeping the landowner informed on what's happening on the farm and how to discuss conservation practices and the economic returns impacting both parties. Both panels will take questions from the audience as well.

General registration is \$75.00 per person and \$25.00 for a spouse. Payments can be made online with credit card or you can select Pay by Check. Seating is limited so we suggest getting registered right away for this important and informative conference. If you are an interested exhibitor, contact [info@farmlandstewards.com](mailto:info@farmlandstewards.com) for information and sign-up.

Registration for this conference is available now online at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/soil-2017-cultivating-your-investment-landowners-and-stewardship-tickets-34241883395>.

## AGENDA

### 7:30 - 8:00 - Registration

8:00 - 8:15 - Opening Remarks  
Main Room - (Mark Gannon)

8:15 - 9:00 - Plenary Speaker  
Main Room - (Prof. Neil Hamilton)  
The Role of Landowners in Land Stewardship

9:00 - 9:45 - Plenary Speaker  
Main Room - (Dr. Jerry Hatfield)  
Conservation and Economics Working Together

### 9:45 - 10:00 - Break/Move to Break-Outs

10:00 - 10:30 - Break Outs  
Sustainable and Systematic Leasing Main Room  
The Costs of Soil Mismanagement - Breakout Room  
Your Farm as an Ecosystem - Breakout Room

### 10:35 - 11:05 - Break Outs

Having Open Communications with Your Tenant - Main Room  
The Costs of Soil Mismanagement - Breakout Room  
Your Farm as an Ecosystem - Breakout Room

11:10 - 11:40 - Break Outs  
Land Trusts - Financial and Other Benefits - Main Room  
Soil Health Coming of Age - Breakout Room  
Preserving Your Family's Heritage - Breakout Room

11:45 - 1:00 - Lunch/Plenary  
Main Room - (Dan Frieberg)  
The Power of On-the-Farm Data

1:00 - 1:30 - Break Outs  
Sustainable and Systematic Leasing - Main Room  
The Costs of Soil Mismanagement - Breakout Room  
Your Farm as an Ecosystem - Breakout Room

### 1:35 - 2:05 - Break Outs

Having Open Communications with Your Tenant - Main Room  
Conservation Decisions on Rented Farmland - Breakout Room  
Navigating Land Improvement Programs - Breakout Room

### 2:05 - 2:15 - Break

### 2:15 - 3:15 - Panel Discussion

Main Room - Landowner Panel

### 3:15 - 4:15 - Panel Discussion

Main Room - Producer Panel

### 4:15 - 4:30 - Wrap Up/Final Comments

Main Room - Mark Gannon - Wrap Up

# Speakers



## Dr. Jerry Hatfield

Dr. Jerry Hatfield, laboratory director of the USDA-ARS National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment, will be the guest presenter at SOIL 2017. Dr. Hatfield's presentation will be on Conservation and Economics Working Together. His topic will shed light on how you as a landowner can base your conservation planning around the return on investment that can benefit your farmland and its value.

Hatfield received his Ph.D. from Iowa State University in Agricultural Climatology and Statistics, a master's degree in Agronomy from the University of Kentucky and a bachelor's degree in Agronomy from Kansas State University. He was appointed Laboratory Director of the National Soil Tilth Laboratory in 1989, which was renamed to the National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment in 2009.



## Dan Frieberg

Dan Frieberg is President of Premier Crop Systems, LLC. Premier Crop is a leading precision ag data processing and analysis company located in Des Moines and entering their 19th crop year. Premier Crop data analysis drives better agronomic decisions that lead to higher yields and increased profits for their grower customers across the Midwest.

Dan will be presenting at the SOIL 2017 Conference, "The Power of On-The-Farm Data" for fact-based decision making and farm property improvement. Today's precision ag technologies allows farmers to collect and analyze important production data directly tied to the farm. Landowners should be attuned to this data and understand its value to their property.



## Prof. Neil Hamilton

Prof. Neil Hamilton, Director of the Agricultural Law Center at Drake University, is one of the preeminent experts on sustainable agriculture. Hamilton provides legal advocacy on behalf of small-time farmers. He equates access to local, natural, small-farm crops with democracy in action. He's led Drake's agricultural law center since 1983, and serves as the Dwight D. Opperman chair of law and professor of law. Hamilton has advised U.S. President Barack Obama and worked for U.S. Agriculture Secretary and former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack.

At The SOIL 2017 conference, Prof. Hamilton will address the topic of "The Role of Landowners in Land Stewardship". Landowners must become engaged and advocate land stewardship practices that can add long term value to their farmland.

## Understanding the Current Status of Your Farm

In today's agriculture there are many issues that landowners need to be aware of and knowledgeable on. A lot more goes into being a non-operating landowner than renting out the farm each crop year. To ensure your land is reaching maximum productivity and profitability takes year round effort which requires time and dedication. Certainly, another option is to continue with the status quo and agree to lease terms from year to year, meanwhile not obtaining any in season data to help you make informed decisions. Being a non-operating farmland owner or a fiduciary for a farmland investment is a challenge. The industry and markets are constantly changing and it takes a full time effort in order to stay on top of it.

There is much more that goes into owning farmland than securing the highest rental rate. Locking in to a fair market value rental rate is an important part but only one aspect when it comes to owning farmland and making it as productive and profitable as possible. A three pronged analysis covering the most important aspects of the land is required. In order to truly understand your farm one must take a comprehensive look at these areas. The three areas of focus are financial, agronomic and environmental stewardship. To accomplish this comprehensive analysis the first item needed is historical on farm data, without this it is impossible to truly know the health of your farm. Sure, there are surveys available through different publications but at the end of the day that information is just averages and doesn't reflect your specific farm.



In order to have access to this farm data, owners need to build language into their leases which requires the operator to submit the requested data during the crop year. Operators today are collecting tremendous amounts of data on all of the properties they farm and utilize this information to make informed decisions which helps increase their profits. This should be no different for landowners. The majority of operators understand this and are willing to provide their landlords with the data. Requesting records is only the first step, next is following up with your tenant until you receive the data, the final and most important step is analyzing the information.

Farmland Stewardship Solutions has noticed a gap in the analysis portion of this three step process and has developed a product for non-operating landowners and fiduciaries to help them reach their farmland ownership goals. The analysis looks at present and past financial data, fertilizer information, soil test results, yield maps, crop insurance information, photos, leases and owner's goals to assess the present status of the land. Farmland Stewardship Solutions also has a drone which we are able to utilize for over head pictures and videos of your property that would not be possible from the road. Once the analysis is complete Farmland Stewardship Solutions provides landowners and fiduciaries with a detailed report breaking down your land into the three emphasis areas mentioned above; financial, agronomic and environment stewardship.

Although leases are in place for the 2017 crop year it is never too early to start planning ahead. Being able to understand the health of your farm is truly invaluable. Non-Operating landowners and fiduciaries should be confident their land is in the best position possible by being both maximally productive and utilizing the right stewardship practices in order to leave the land in better a better condition for future generations. Farmland Stewardship Solutions is here to assist landowners and fiduciaries reach their goals and the Farm Land and Lease Assessment is the first step in that process.

## Farmland Stewardship Solutions Involved In Nature Conservancy Project



The Nature Conservancy is a charitable environmental organization, headquartered in Arlington, Virginia. Its mission is to "conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends". The Conservancy's work focuses on Lands, Water, Climate, Oceans, and Cities. As part of their mission, TNC receives grants to study and research a number of topics that can impact landowners and the practices that affect the quality of the land.

Recently, a research project was initiated by TNC looking into how conservation decisions are made on rented land. The research involves interviewing landowners, farmers, consultants and farm managers to get a better understanding how all these entities are connected in the decision process and identify barriers that exist for implementing conservation practices.

Farmland Stewardship Solutions was asked to be one of the participants in the interviewing process. It is believed that companies like FSS which provide services to non-operator landowners can be critical leaders and advisors for getting conservation on rented land. The interview of FSS was conducted by Dr. Pranay Ranjan, a postdoctoral researcher at Purdue University and part of the TNC research team.

Preliminary results of this project will be presented at the SOIL 2017 Conference held on July 27th by Dr. Sheila Walsh Reddy, Behavioral Economist with The Nature Conservancy from Durham, NC.

## **Water Quality Does Matter: A Landowner's Role In Protecting This Resource**

If you haven't read, heard or been part of a debate on the quality of water coming off or through agricultural land, well you've been living under a rock. The Des Moines Waterworks lawsuit against three northern Iowa counties for contributing to high nitrate levels in the Raccoon River was heard beyond Iowa's border. In 2015, Minnesota found that at least half of their lakes and watersheds with heavy farming and urban activity had harmful algae outbreaks caused by phosphorus overload. And high bacteria levels made more than half the streams in those areas unswimmable. Countless other examples have been headline material recently.

These examples only support the fact that a problem exists, it's not going away and agriculture is one of the contributing factors. As stewards of Midwest farmland and the waters flowing from them, landowners have a responsibility to protect our natural resources. The best way of dealing with this responsibility is to develop a good partnership between the landowner and the farmer.

Landowners need to be more actively engaged in collaborating with their farm operator by planning measures that can improve water quality on the property. This is a good starting point. Together they can discuss production and conservation practices such as cover crops, improved waterways, buffer strips, saturated buffers, no-till or strip-till and changes in fertilizer applications. All of these can reduce field run-off, minimize phosphorus and nitrogen loss and have a positive impact on water quality. But, solutions to this problem are not always simple and there's no "one solution fits all" scenario. Each farm property has unique attributes that can contribute to poor water quality and those practices that can help reduce the problem.

On a larger scale, landowners and their farmers can and should get involved in their local watershed and determine if water quality improvement plans are in place. Getting water quality initiatives started at the grass root level is far superior to waiting for government agencies assistance or even mandates. Getting consensus around a large watershed plan can be difficult and conversations at first can be difficult. Yet, if you don't get involved in what activities are happening around your farm regarding water quality you may miss out on opportunities that can benefit you and your property.

At Farmland Stewardship Solutions one of our goals is to provide annual financial and crop management oversight for non-operating landowners and fiduciaries. We focus on the right lease arrangement but also ensure that your farmland meets good stewardship standards. Of course, first understanding what level of water quality coming off your farm is the starting point. In order to do that we are implementing these services for the 2017 growing season:

- FSS tile line monitoring kits used to analyze and benchmark of water quality for selected landowners and then provide feedback to them and their farmer on findings
  - Partnering with the Iowa Soybean Association with selected client farms as part of their water monitoring network in 2017.
  - Provide the landowner with data on both conservation and production practices that result in reduced levels of phosphorus and nitrogen losses that lead to polluted waters
  - Through our partnership with AGREN using their SoilCalculator® software to model soil loss on the property, we can put a strategy in place to implement soil conservation practices that keep the soil on the land, reducing nutrient runoff
  - Make landowner aware of government programs and grants that are applicable to your farm which could provide government funding for such practices as saturated buffers, filter strips, wetlands and other practices attributing to improved water quality on the property
- It is the landowner's responsibility to comply with water quality protection; Farmland Stewardship Solutions can provide assistance to you. We can help direct you to the right resources to help make those management changes and we can provide you with BMP's (Best Management Practices) specific to your farm. Again, let's be part of the solution and NOT the problem.

### **Landowners Who Can Benefit From FSS**

1. Landowners who don't have a lease that responds during the crop year to upward market movement.
2. Landowners who don't have a lease that pays more when the yields or prices are higher than expected.
3. Landowners who don't have accurate information about yields and evidence of the 10 year Federal Crop Insurance yields.
4. Landowners who are uncertain if their rent is at fair market value for their farm.
5. Landowners whose tenant is not taking care of their land and improvements as they wish.
6. Landowners who don't have copies of current soil tests or know they have been done.
7. Landowners who don't have evidence that their land was fertilized to at least crop removal.
8. Landowners who are uncertain whether their land has soil loss within acceptable levels.
9. Landowners who are unclear what forms of fertilizer are applied to their farm.
10. Landowners who are getting manure applied to their farm.
11. Landowners who are in need of assistance in finding a superior tenant.
12. Landowners whose farm needs outside assistance for guidance on conservation improvements.
13. Landowners who value long term permanent storage of all farm records.
14. Landowners who want to insure to their heirs and family that they have done the best they could to take care of the family farm.
15. Landowners who want seasoned experts in their corner to discuss and help them through complicated farm issues.
16. Landowners who want to begin to set up a transition plan for their land.
17. Landowners who want someone else to assist them with the farm details so they have more time to enjoy life.
18. Landowners who want a company set up to help their heirs who may be less informed about farm matters when they are gone.
19. Landowners who are truly proud of their land and want to prove their concern for stewardship.
20. Landowners who want to help a young or beginning farmer.

Modern farming is a technology dependent industry with volatile prices, uncertain weather and mind-numbing regulations. That's why annual financial and crop management oversight is a requirement for non operating landowners and fiduciaries managing farmland properties. Yet, this work — negotiating annual leases rental rates, monitoring the farm's performance and ensuring the farmland meets good stewardship — is stressful, time-consuming and errors can be costly.

Farmland Stewardship Solutions offers a farm leasing platform that addresses non operating landowner and fiduciary needs directly. By offering a range of farm leasing services, designed to provide farmland owners and fiduciaries the expertise and services to manage their property. We work with landowners and fiduciaries to select the right type of lease, clarify stewardship terms, collect and store all farm-related data and produce annual reports.

## **OUR MISSION**

Farmland Stewardship Solutions' mission is to:

- Provide landlords and fiduciaries accurate and timely farmland oversight and performance reports;
- Develop mutually beneficial farmland leases supported by on-farm production data, current economic trends, and stewardship goals;
- Leverage an industry-accepted process for leasing that uses technologies to capture key data, retain trend records and communicate an accurate portrayal of the farm's production and value;
- Recommend strategies to maximize short-term returns for tenant and landlord while protecting or enhancing the farm's value long term

## ***LEARN MORE***

If you are an absentee or non-operating farmland owner; or a fiduciary, you may find Farmland Stewardship Solutions is your answer. Give us a call at: **515-243-9352** and ask for Greg Townsend or Andy Mullan.

