



Welcome

Welcome to the latest issue of our Diverse Corn Belt newsletter. After a year of vision-setting, organizing, building our teams, and working with farmers and other stakeholders to develop the questions we seek to answer, we are excited to enter the data-gathering stage of the project.

In this newsletter, you will read about the survey that is currently in thousands of mailboxes across Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. You will meet members of our In-Field Research team, who are hitting the road in the next few weeks to prepare research sites on farms across the I States. And you will get a peek at some of the other approaches our team of more than 30 investigators are using to gather insight into what it will take to create a more diverse Corn Belt, and why it's important.

I hope you will join us in our effort to create opportunities through diversity—opportunities for economic success, environmental benefits, climate resilience, and new agriculture-based industries.

Understanding diversification requires diverse perspectives, including yours, your neighbors', and the people with whom you do business. Sharing your time and knowledge today will help us create opportunities—through a more diverse, resilient, prosperous Corn Belt—for the years to come.

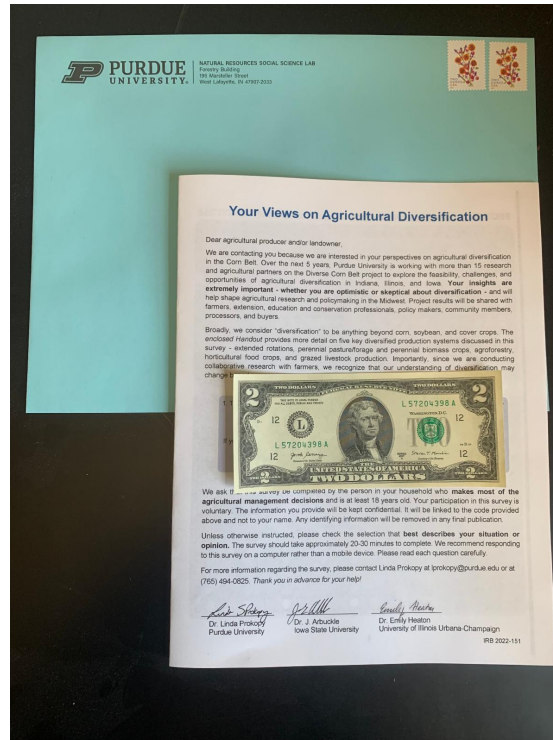
Linda S. Prokopy, Ph.D.
Purdue University
Diverse Corn Belt Project Director



Please Fill Out Our Survey!

Have you spotted a Diverse Corn Belt (DCB) survey in your mailbox? We're surveying farmers across Indiana, Illinois and Iowa, and we want to hear your perspective!

If you receive our survey, please take a few minutes to fill it out. Your answers will help us better understand the opportunities and obstacles that influence diversification in the Corn Belt. We are also using information from the surveys to shape our research for the duration of our five-year project.



A few minutes of your time will be extremely helpful to us as we explore opportunities for enhanced resilience for farmers large and small, conventional or organic, or anywhere in between. (Plus...there's a \$2 bill in there to thank you for your time. Those are pretty cool.)

Have you been invited to join a focus group?

This month, DCB team members are conducting focus groups, which will be vital sources of data and direction. If you're invited to participate, please say "yes" and share your insights!

RAD Teams Come Together

The first Reimagining Agricultural Diversity—RAD—Teams are convening in June in Indiana, Illinois and Iowa to dig deep into the opportunities and challenges around diversifying Corn Belt agriculture.

RAD Teams are like long-standing focus groups, and will meet twice a year in the coming several years to help the DCB team set the course for research, help us define key aspects of diversity, and create a vision for the future. RAD Team members will also provide their reactions to the data we are gathering from field research, surveys and focus groups, computer models, and more.

To provide the breadth of perspectives we need, RAD Teams will include a wide range of Corn Belt stakeholders, including farmers, crop consultants, ag retailers, commodity buyers, food processors, policy makers, non-farm neighbors, and more.

If you are invited to join a RAD Team, please say "yes"!

DCB On the Road

Members of the Diverse Corn Belt In-field Research Team are hitting the road this month to meet with farmers who will be hosting as many as 40 research sites on farms across Indiana, Illinois and Iowa. On both corn/soybean and diversified farms, researchers will gather data on water quality, pest and predator levels, soil quality, nutrient and carbon cycling, crop growth, and other variables to build insight into the agronomic and environmental impacts of more diverse crop rotations.

In addition to providing a deep well of data, the DCB In-field research will provide outstanding opportunities for students to build their research skills and engage in cross-training. Education is a key goal of the Diverse Corn Belt program in several forms. Ultimately, we aim to educate farmers and other stakeholders on the possibilities created by diversification, as well as the steps needed to make a more Diverse Corn Belt economically and environmentally sustainable. Members of our Education team are developing academic curricula to turn our findings into lessons for high school and college students. And the project itself is an outstanding training ground for tomorrow's scientists, economists, educators, communicators, and more.

Are you interested in hosting a research project on your farm?

Meet the Team

This issue, we'll introduce a few members of our DCB In-Field Team. These researchers bring diverse perspectives and areas of expertise together to build a holistic view of the effects that crop diversification could have on productivity, as well as economic and environmental sustainability, at the farm level.



Shalamar Armstrong, Ph.D.
Department of Agronomy
Purdue University

Dr. Armstrong is an Environmental Soil Scientist and Associate professor in the Department of Agronomy at Purdue University. His research program investigates the agronomic, environmental, and economic impacts of current and emerging regenerative agricultural practices that reduce nutrient and soil loss and promote carbon farming



Emily Heaton
Department of Crop Sciences
University of Illinois

Dr. Emily Heaton joined the Crop Sciences department at the University of Illinois as Professor of Regenerative Agriculture in 2021 after twelve years at Iowa State University, where she remains an Affiliate Professor in the Department of Agronomy. Her research investigates the growth and productivity of perennial C4 grasses so we can manage them for multiple ecosystem services, especially



Ian Kaplan, Ph.D.
Department of Entomology
Purdue University

Dr. Ian Kaplan is a professor in the Department of Entomology at Purdue University. His lab conducts research on the ecology and management of insects in agricultural landscapes, focusing on pests and beneficial species involved in provisioning ecosystem services (for instance, biocontrol and pollination). For the DCB project, he is investigating how variation

in the Upper Mississippi River Basin. Dr. Armstrong's research is executed on multiple scales ranging from the soil microbiome to the evaluation of conservation practices on field and watershed scales. Annually, his applied research program advances the knowledge of the agricultural and farming community on cropping systems management that facilitates nutrient loss reduction, nutrient cycling, and competitive crop productivity.

biomass provision. As Feedstock Production Theme Leader for the Center of Advanced Bioenergy and Bioproducts Innovation (CABBI), she advances CABBI's generation of fundamental plant science for production of high-yielding, resilient grass crops that produce oils in their stems. As director of the Illinois Regenerative Agriculture Initiative, she connects researchers and stakeholders to advance knowledge and practices that return value to people and the land. Her family owns and operates Caveny Farm near Monticello, Illinois, where they graze cattle, sheep, and heritage poultry for local sale; the farm serves as inspiration and proving ground for their ideas and collaborations.

in cropping system diversity affects the composition and function of insect communities on farms.



Andrew Margenot, Ph.D.
Department of Crop Sciences
University of Illinois

Dr. Andrew Margenot is a soil scientist at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. As a co-PI on #DCB, he works on biogeochemical indicators of agroecosystem function across a range of diversified management practices, with particular emphasis on organic matter cycling.



Yichao Rui, Ph.D.
Department of Agronomy
Purdue University

Dr. Yichao Rui is an Assistant Professor in Agroecology at Purdue University. He utilizes an integrated systems approach to study the nexus of soil, crops, water, microbiomes, and their inter-relationships that underpin agroecosystem performance and services to identify opportunities and actionable steps for ecological and meaningful transformation of cropping systems in the Midwest and around the world. Yichao holds Ph.D. degrees in Microbial Ecology and Soil Science from Chinese



Keith Schilling, Ph.D.
Director, Iowa Geological
Survey
University of Iowa

Dr. Keith Schilling is the State Geologist of Iowa and Director of the Iowa Geological Survey at the University of Iowa. Schilling is also a research engineer at IIHR-Hydroscience and Engineering at the University of Iowa and an adjunct assistant professor at the University of Iowa Department of Earth and Environmental Science and at Iowa State University Department of Natural Resources Ecology and Management. He received an MS degree in Water Resources

Academy of Sciences and Griffith University (Australia). Before joining Purdue, he worked at the University of Western Australia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Rodale Institute on a wide range of projects investigating the impacts of climate change and land use on agroecosystem resilience and its environmental and social outcomes.

from Iowa State University and a Ph.D. degree in Geology from the University of Iowa. His research has focused on a variety of water-related issues in Iowa, including groundwater flow and quality, surface and groundwater interaction, nonpoint source pollution, and watershed and floodplain processes.

Stay Connected!

If you received this newsletter from a friend or colleague, please [sign up for our subscription list](#). We'll keep you up to date on the Diverse Corn Belt project and tell you what we're finding. If you're a subscriber already, please feel free to forward this newsletter to someone you think might enjoy learning about our project.

DCB is all about diverse perspectives and connecting with people throughout the Midwest to help create opportunities for farmers and rural communities, so feel free to share this far and wide.

Got an idea? Want to share your insight or host an in-field research project? Contact project manager [Emily Usher](#) or [click here](#) to join our contact list.



Get In
Touch



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