

THE DIVERSE **CORN BELT**

Growing a Resilient Future

Film Synopsis

For generations, the American Corn Belt has become increasingly defined by two crops: corn and soybeans. While this system has fueled remarkable productivity, it has also left many farmers vulnerable to volatile markets, degraded soils, disappearing rural businesses, and shrinking communities.

The Diverse Corn Belt follows three farmers who are charting a different path. In Iowa, Wendy Johnson transforms a conventional family farm into a thriving mosaic of livestock, trees, and direct-to-consumer food production. Nearby, Landon and Anne Plagge invest everything they own in a farmer-owned oat mill designed to create new markets for diversified crops. In Illinois, Will Glazik combines organic grain farming with a family distillery, demonstrating how value-added agriculture can strengthen both farms and local economies.

Interwoven with insights from researchers and agricultural experts, their stories reveal that diversifying agriculture isn't simply about growing different crops—it's about rebuilding resilient landscapes, revitalizing rural communities, and creating a more sustainable future for the Midwest.

As economic, environmental, and social pressures reshape America's Corn Belt, three innovative farmers demonstrate how diversified agriculture can restore healthier soil, stronger local economies, and renewed hope for the next generation.



Logline Option 1

Three Midwestern corn and soybean farmers bet their livelihoods on a more diverse vision of agriculture—and prove that the future of America's Corn Belt depends on rebuilding not just farms, but rural communities.

Logline Option 2

As economic, environmental, and social pressures reshape America's Corn Belt, three innovative farmers demonstrate how diversified agriculture can restore healthier soil, stronger local economies, and renewed hope for the next generation.

About the Film

Runtime: 45 Minutes

Release year: 2026

Directors: Anders Gurda & Wil Crombie

Producers: Freestone Media & Man Alone Media

Funding acknowledgment

This research is part of “#DiverseCornBelt (#DCB): Enhancing rural resilience through landscape diversity in the Midwest,” and is supported by Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grant no. 2021-68012-35896 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Project website: www.diversecornbelt.org.

Downloadable Assets

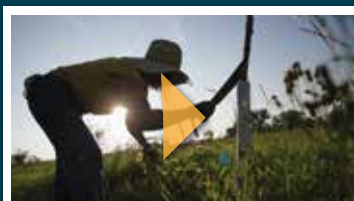
Posters

Film Logo & Font

Stills

Thumbnails

Discussion Suggestions



Download The Trailer



Featured Participants

Three innovative farmers demonstrate how diversified agriculture can restore healthier soil, stronger local economies, and renewed hope for the next generation.



Landon Plagge

Landon and Anne Plagge grow a rotation of corn, soybeans, and food-grade oats on 4,000 acres. For over a decade they have utilized no-till practices while growing a diverse crop rotation, and a mix of cover crops – focused on economically and environmentally sustainable agriculture across the supply chain.



Wendy Johnson

Wendy Johnson and her husband Johnny run Jóia Food Farm, a diverse perennial based livestock and organic grain farm located near Charles City in Northeast Iowa. Wendy and her father co-manage Center View Farms which grows corn, soy, oats, rye and hay. They are currently working to integrate livestock into their row crop operation.



Will Glazik

Will Glazik is a fifth-generation organic farmer and co-owner of Silver Tree Beer & Spirits in Paxton, Illinois, where he and his siblings make sustainable, grain-to-bottle whiskey and vodka using crops grown on their family farm. They also grow food-grade corn which makes its way into tortilla and baking markets.



Meet the Directors



Anders Gurda

is a filmmaker and storyteller with deep roots in agriculture. Through Freestone Media, he creates authentic films that connect people to the land, the farmers who steward it, and the stories that inspire stronger communities and lasting change.



Wil Crombie

is a Minnesota-based farmer, filmmaker, digital marketer and entrepreneur whose work bridges regenerative agriculture and digital storytelling. Wil's work on his family farm, Organic Compound, informs his creative projects, and his films at Man Alone Media shape how he farms—a symbiotic relationship that drives his storytelling.



Press Contact

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Documentary Participants:

Farmers

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Director - Anders Gurda: Anders@freestone.media

Writer/Editor - Matt Wechsler: Matt@hourglassfilms.com





The Diverse Corn Belt - A Documentary:

The Diverse Corn Belt documentary follows the journeys of three innovative farmers toward a more diverse and sustainable Corn Belt. The film captures the opportunities and struggles they experience while building on the typical corn-soybean crop rotation that dominates the Midwestern landscape. It also illustrates the convergence of the local environment, weather, infrastructure, and policy on farmers' decision-making process, making the reality of diversifying much more complicated than the theory.

The farmers, economists, and scientists in the film explain how diversification enhances resilience on the farm and vibrance in rural communities. They also detail how producing a wider range of crops and livestock helps farmers spread risk, adapt to a changing climate, rejuvenate communities, and connect to consumers.

Over the past five years, researchers in the multi-state Diverse Corn Belt Project have been exploring the effects of diversification, the opportunities it provides, and the challenges faced by farmers, food processors, policy makers, and others to broaden the vision of tomorrow's Corn Belt farms. This documentary puts faces—and hearts—to the concept of diversification and looks at the human and business elements that drive the process on the ground.

Choosing to add more diversity to Corn Belt farm rotations—whether by adding cereal grains, forage, or vegetables to the cropping lineup or bringing trees or grazed livestock back to the landscape—can take farmers down a winding road. The Diverse Corn Belt helps viewers understand the biological, economic, logistical, and social hurdles farmers face as they diversify. It explains how the corn-soybean rotation has been strongly reinforced by America's farm policy, economic incentives, infrastructure, and culture. Most importantly, the film shines a light on the hope behind highly individual decisions to diversify family farms while showcasing the creativity and determination of the farmers who are changing Midwestern farms one field at a time.



Mission:

The Diverse Corn Belt Project (DCB) is a five-year, multidisciplinary research project exploring opportunities and barriers to adding more crops and grazed livestock to existing rotations in the Corn Belt and investigating the real-world impacts of diversified farming systems.

On farms, across the landscape, and in the marketplace, we are seeking concrete options for diversification and understanding the agronomic, economic, social, infrastructure, and policy changes that could make these options viable. Our hypothesis is that greater diversity in crops, livestock, and people in the Corn Belt farming community will improve risk management options, resilience, and profitability.

Goals:

DCB's goal is to inform the ongoing conversation about diverse agriculture systems across the Midwest, better understand benefits and challenges of those systems, and to expand agricultural opportunities. DCB explores how new crops, livestock, and markets can work alongside existing agricultural systems to expand opportunities for farmers while generating benefits for communities, regional economies, and the environment.

Partner organizations:

Purdue University
Iowa State University
Montana State University
University of Iowa
University of Illinois
University of Vermont
University of Minnesota
University of Kentucky

University of Wisconsin -Madison
University of Wisconsin - Platteville
Practical Farmers of Iowa
The Nature Conservancy
Conservation Technology Information Center
USDA Economic Research Service
USDA Forest Service



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DIVERSE CORN BELT PROJECT presents ANDERS GURDA &
a film by WIL CROMBIE

produced by FREESTONE MEDIA & MAN ALONE MEDIA in association with HOURGLASS FILMS

cinematography by WIL CROMBIE written & edited by MATT WECHSLER animations by BEAKUS
by MATT WECHSLER & ANDERS GURDA DIVERSECORNBELT.ORG/FILM

