



Conversation starter and basic information guide.

## **Partnering with NRCS and SWCDs to offer Continuous Living Cover-related training to staff.**

Last updated April, 2022

This document provides contacts and basic information that can be used to pursue opportunities to develop Continuous Living Cover (CLC)-related training for state agency staff across the Upper Midwest. This document was created by Green Lands Blue Waters with the larger goal of equipping Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff to deliver CLC-related farmer support.

GLBW created this resource following previous engagement with partners to explore how CLC is incorporated into training for technical assistance providers (TAs), and to identify opportunities for expanding CLC topics in training offerings. Background work can be found at <https://greenlandsbluwaters.org/resources/makingclchappen/#technical-assistance-for-clc>

Through our interviews with farmers, TAs and state agency staff, we found a need for more training related to CLC for TA providers. **Increasing training offerings is a major opportunity for expanding NRCS and SWCD staff's ability to deliver farmer support for CLC-related practices.** Specifically, we learned that...

### **CLC related training for TA providers could be improved by:**

- Incorporating “soft skills” training to support relationship-building between TAs and producers including leadership, communication, interviewing, emotional intelligence, patience, and empathy
- Providing opportunities for farmers to teach and provide support to one another in CLC practice adoption
- Showing farmers the data, especially from their own fields
- Emphasizing the economic benefit, while recognizing the risks
- Expanding technical knowledge of a diverse array of soil health practices including proper equipment, planting conditions, details on termination of cover crops, etc.
- Highlighting and promoting CLC success stories
- Hosting more trainings and field days highlighting CLC
- Supporting demonstration projects

- Developing fact sheets and case studies to assist NRCS and SWCD staff in providing information to producers
- Rethinking training as a partnership where trainers and farmers learn from each other collaboratively
- Providing peer-to-peer support for TA providers
- Integrating training on CLC into certifications that already require annual training
- Offering incentives and/or compensation for participation in trainings

There are many opportunities for GLBW and our partners to expand training for TA providers and address a number of the recommendations above. For this report, we surveyed public and non-profit entities that offer training for TAs to understand how the training programs are organized, what current training/professional development needs and interests are, and how we can best intersect to deliver training content around CLC. In general all the individuals we spoke with are interested in strategic partnerships as a way to expand available training on CLC topics. The sections below outline potential national and regional (IL, IA, MN, WI, MO) training partners, and provide details for connecting with the program organizers to schedule trainings. Additionally, a few key priorities surfaced:

## Key priorities for improving CLC-related training opportunities for regional TA providers.

- The [Conservation Webinar Portal](#) is the platform for the majority of NRCS training. Partners could work together to add CLC content ([more details](#)).
- The [Conservation Professional Training Program](#) has opportunities for partnership ([more details](#)).
- [Wisconsin Land and Water](#) offers many trainings and is interested in partnerships ([more details](#)).
- In Minnesota, [BWSR Tech Talks](#) are bi-weekly online sessions on a number of conservation topics and present a nice opportunity for offering a brief, low-input training.
- In Minnesota, BWSR has launched a new [Technical Training Series](#) that groups existing training into categories by topic. This could be a good opportunity to re-package existing training topics in the context of CLC, or create a “CLC 101” series.
- All conservation professionals are required to obtain continuing education units (CEUs), and this is an avenue for building on knowledge/skills they learned in their introductory training. There are many ways that GLBW and partners could explore offering CLC-related content that meets CEU requirements. For example, the [Conservation Webinar Portal](#) provides the ability to offer CEUs.



## Specific CLC topics of interest for training

In order to assess the interest level in various CLC topics among the organizations providing training, we asked our survey respondents to review a list of 16 topics and indicate those of most interest to their organizations. The 8 topics bolded below were the most commonly selected, and this list could be useful in aligning training content with the highest demand topics.

- **Agroforestry**
- Perennial biomass
- Perennial grains
- **Perennial forage and grazing**
- **Cover crops**
- **Winter annuals and rotations**
- Emerging winter annual oilseeds (incl. camelina, pennycress)
- **Farmer adoption and behavior change**
- Market opportunities for CLC crops and cropping systems
- **Impacts of CLC on farm economics/profit**
- **Soil, water and climate benefits of CLC crops and cropping systems**
- Community benefits of CLC
- Impacts of CLC on municipal water infrastructure
- Accessing resources through cross-agency and cross-sector support for CLC
- Building trusting relationships with farmers and farm communities
- **On-farm training and farmer mentorships**

Though these topics are all encompassed under the term “Continuous Living Cover”, we recognize that not everyone utilizes this language and framework when thinking about conservation practices. For example, the NRCS resource, “[Unlock the Secrets in the Soil](#)”, includes language about keeping the soil covered, and keeping plants growing year round to protect soil health, but they do not refer to CLC. **We can leverage this alignment and elevate the concept of CLC to improve training on these practices, and expand understanding of CLC systems. GLBW and partners should consider developing a “CLC 101” training module that could be offered via many of the platforms and organizations outlined in this report.**

GLBW is working with partners to explore which of these opportunities to pursue. If you're interested in working with us to offer CLC-related training contact Aaron Reser [areser@umn.edu](mailto:areser@umn.edu)

We also encourage partners to use this guide to pursue opportunities independently, with the shared goal of improving the ability of technical assistance providers to deliver CLC-related farmer support. If you would like additional information about any of the contacts or programs below, please feel free to reach out to us.



In addition to reaching state agency staff with increased CLC-related training so they're better able to provide support to farmers, GLBW is also engaged in strategic discussions regarding the prioritization of, and funding for CLC at State and National levels. For example, advocating for introducing CLC in core competency training modules required for all new staff, and working with state technical committee partners to advocate for additional CLC practices to be added to soil health initiatives and funding pool.

## Contact Information and Details for Training Providers

*All contacts have been added with permission.*

### National Training Providers

NRCS uses the **Conservation Webinar Portal** to provide content including:

Live Webinars: <https://conservationwebinars.net/upcoming-webinars-1>

On Demand Webinars: <https://conservationwebinars.net/previous-webinars>

How to add a webinar: Conservation Webinars Portal at

<https://conservationwebinars.net>

**Technical Service Provider Network**, <https://www.technicalserviceprovidernetwork.org>

#### **Conservation Professional Training Program (CPTP)**

[Conservation Professional Training Program](#), UW Extension,

Contact: **Kevin Erb**, Program Director

[kevin.erb@wisc.edu](mailto:kevin.erb@wisc.edu), 920-391-4652

The Conservation Professional Training Program is a program of UW–Madison Division of Extension providing conservation training courses to help conservation professionals deliver smarter solutions to farmers and rural landowners.

Training event calendar here: <https://conservationprotraining.org/events/>

Online trainings here: <https://conservationprotraining.org/upcoming-trainings/>

#### **Notes:**

Whether internal or through partnerships, CPTP already has training in a number of CLC-related topics (Agroforestry, Perennial Forage and Grazing, Cover Crops, Farmer Adoption/Behavior Change, Risk Management, Impacts of CLC on Farm Process/Economics, Impacts of CLC on Municipal Water Infrastructure).

CPTP is interested in partnerships to expand training on CLC. Proposed trainings are forwarded to SITCOM, the [State Interagency Committee \(SITCOM\)](#). Along with WI Land+Water and partners, they develop an annual SITCOM training work plan along with the Area Training Committees (AITCOMs) who develop annual training catalogs.



# State Specific Training Providers

## Illinois

Training provided through **NRCS**

Contact:

**George Henshaw**, NRCS State Resource Conservationist  
217-353-6640, [george.henshaw@usda.gov](mailto:george.henshaw@usda.gov)

### **Notes:**

Soil Health and Sustainability is one Core Course all NRCS-certified planners must take. This is a 2.5-3 day course offered through the NRCS AgLearn platform.

Illinois is divided into 4 regions/areas with specific Area Staff. Areas/regions provide training as needed for their staff based on individual needs, and training may be scheduled weekly, monthly, etc.

Any proposed training should be discussed at the state level with the contact mentioned above. Illinois staff request that training organized and conducted for NRCS and partner employees be organized and developed in consultation with NRCS, with potential use of NRCS staff and partners to provide the training. NRCS does currently work with partners to deliver training and wants to continue building partner relationships.

The **Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts** hosts an annual conference. 2022 Conference dates are July 17-19 but the website is not updated yet:  
<http://www.aiswcd.org/annual-meeting/>

Contact:

**Grant Hammer**  
217.494.4240, [grant.hammer@aiswcd.org](mailto:grant.hammer@aiswcd.org)

## Iowa

Training provided through **NRCS**.

Contact:

**Donald Carrington**  
NRCS TSP Coordinator  
515.323.2615, [donald.carrington@usda.gov](mailto:donald.carrington@usda.gov)

### **Notes:**

We located this contact, but have not spoken directly with them.

Continuing education is provided through Conservation Webinar Portal. Training is delivered by **internal** staff and public sector partners.



## Missouri

*Notes:* We are aware that Missouri has some interesting projects within NRCS, and have contacted them for details. We will update as more information is available.

## Wisconsin

Training provided through **NRCS**, other entities.

Contacts:

**Adam Abel**, NRCS State Grazing Specialist

[adam.abel@usda.gov](mailto:adam.abel@usda.gov), 715-467-1037

**Holly Giombi**, NRCS TSP Coordinator and the Resource Conservationist

[holly.giombi@usda.gov](mailto:holly.giombi@usda.gov)

### *Notes:*

Training schedule for 2022 is still being finalized.

In addition to annual training, other training offered as needed, and may move to a quarterly schedule. Also offer on-demand training through **Ag Learn**.

Need 30 days to 6 months to get a training scheduled, especially during the growing season.

In discussion about a CEU training schedule but does not exist at this time.

### **Other Entities Providing Training in WI:**

Wisconsin doesn't have Soil & Water Conservation Districts like other states do, but the **Wisconsin Land and Water** organization is a great training resource.

Contact:

**Penny Pohle**, Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Training and Membership Services Manager

[Penny@wisconsinlandwater.org](mailto:Penny@wisconsinlandwater.org)

Training schedule published here: <https://wisconsinlandwater.org/events> and on-demand trainings here:

<https://wisconsinlandwater.org/members-hub/on-demand-training>

Annual Conference: <https://wisconsinlandwater.org/conservation/annual-conference>

Wisconsin Land and Water and many other partners comprise **SITCOM (The State Interagency Training Committee)**, a partnership effort with a mission of maintaining and strengthening a statewide team of well-trained conservation professionals in WI.



Bi-weekly State Interagency Committee (SITCOM) Training E-newsletter:  
<https://wisconsinlandwater.org/our-work/conservation-training/sitcom>

**Notes:**

Training offered monthly, or more frequently. Currently all training is online.

Twice annual Conservation Partnership Training. Resources provided here:  
<https://wisconsinlandwater.org/members-hub/county-staff>

No continuing education schedule published yet.

Recently hired a new position, Wisconsin Land and Water Statewide Training Coordinator:

Michael Hook

[michael@wisconsinlandwater.org](mailto:michael@wisconsinlandwater.org)

Need at least one week for webinar hosting (includes registration, setup, promotion). Ideally prefer longer lead time to promote.

**Wisconsin Women in Conservation Educator Network**

Launched in October 2021, the new WiWiC Conservation Educator Network has a goal of connecting and amplifying connection opportunities for conservation educators in the state of WI. Recap of first meeting [here](#).

**Minnesota**

Training provided through **NRCS** USDA Online Training Library and partnership with **BWSR** (Board of Water and Soil Resources).

Contacts:

**Shannon Carpenter**

NRCS State Water Quality Specialist, State Technical Service Provider Coordinator  
651-602-7935, [shannon.carpenter@usda.gov](mailto:shannon.carpenter@usda.gov)

**Jon Sellnow**

BWSR Technical Training and Certification Program Coordinator  
218-340-3521, [jon.sellnow@state.mn.us](mailto:jon.sellnow@state.mn.us)

BWSR operates the Technical Training and Certification (TTCP) program, <http://bwsr.state.mn.us/technical-training-and-certification-program> and publishes a training calendar, <http://bwsr.state.mn.us/training-calendar>

Bi-Weekly Tech Talks, <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/tech-talks> are a potential entry point for partners to provide training on CLC practices.



### **BWSR Updated Training Series**

Last summer TTCP assembled collections of trainings and resources to create a [Training Series](#) for commonly-requested NRCS practice standards. Each Training Series provides a direct link to the most relevant trainings currently available online to help build knowledge, skills, and abilities. These training series are updated twice a year or as needed when new/updated training becomes available. The original 12 training series were recently updated, and new collections for Livestock Pipeline & Watering Facility and Prescribed Grazing are now available. To suggest additional trainings, contact Jon Sellnow.

### **Notes:**

MN is very interested in assistance from partners to expand their training capacity/content.

Training participants have indicated they would prefer to have training in the middle of winter so they are not competing with in-field time commitments.

MN has some priority focus on CLC practices.

MN NRCS just brought on 80 new staff in 2021, and hopes to retain them by building their technical expertise and support network.

**Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts** annual convention [https://www.maswcd.org/Annual\\_Convention/annual\\_convention.htm](https://www.maswcd.org/Annual_Convention/annual_convention.htm) is generally held in December. Call for presenters released in August. Contact: LeAnn Buck, Executive Director, leann.buck@maswcd.org

**Are you aware of contacts or training events/  
opportunities that should be added to this document?  
Let us know! Please contact Aaron Reser at  
[areser@umn.edu](mailto:areser@umn.edu)**

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