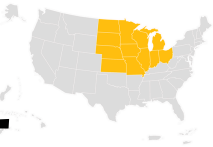


# STEADY STEPS FORWARD

## SARE HELPS NORTH CENTRAL PRODUCERS NAVIGATE INNOVATION AND RISK



Erin (left) and Drew Gaugler (right) navigate the delicate balance of restoring land and raising livestock with guidance from NDSU livestock specialist Karl Hoppe (center).

**FARMING TODAY REQUIRES CONSTANT ADJUSTMENT. WITH RISING COSTS, FLUCTUATING MARKETS, AND CHANGING ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS, PRODUCERS OFTEN STRUGGLE TO FIND A PATH FORWARD.**

When siblings Erin and Drew Gaugler returned to farming on overgrazed, low-fertility land in North Dakota, they received support from SARE to use cover crops and rotational grazing to restore it.

SARE helps farmers like the Gauglers navigate challenges by funding practical, farmer-driven research and education. Through grants, training, and outreach, SARE supports producers in finding a steady path forward. In this report, you can read more about the Gauglers and other producers who have tested new ideas, built resilience, and discovered sustainable solutions that work on their farms.

# STRONGER FOOTING

Since 1988, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program in the North Central region (NCR-SARE) has offered grants and educational opportunities to advance sustainable agriculture across 12 Midwestern states.

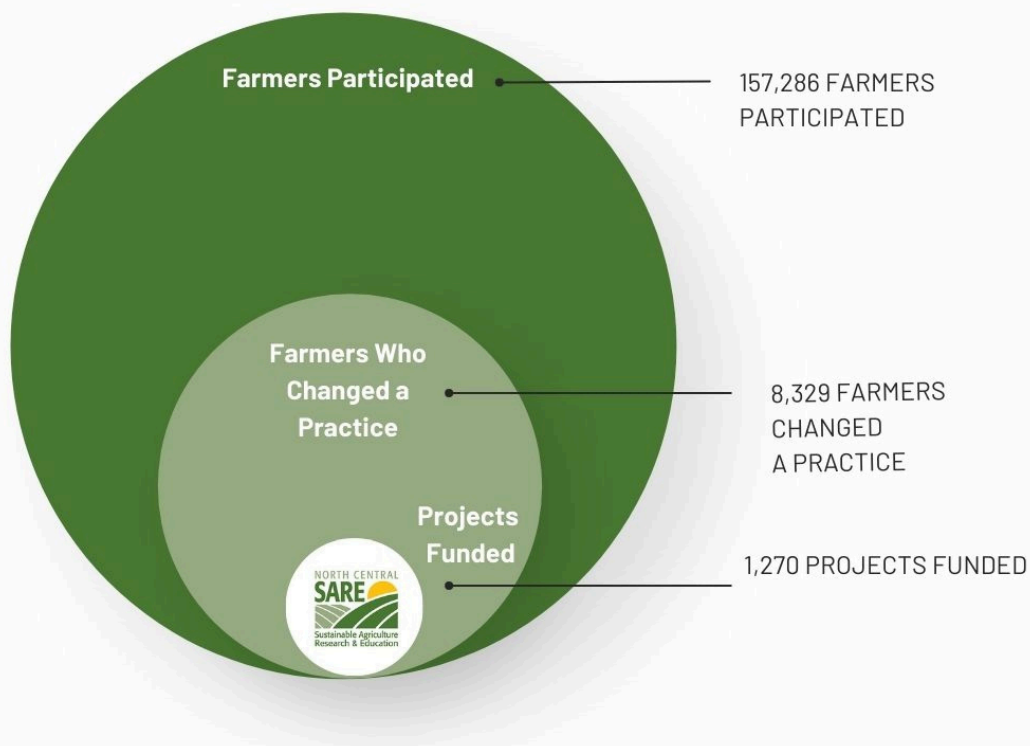
Since 1988, NCR-SARE has awarded over 2,900 grants and educational programs led by or involving farmers and ranchers, all focused on practical, sustainable practices.

## HOW DO THESE NCR-SARE PROJECTS IMPACT PRODUCERS?

**BETWEEN 2014–2024, NCR-SARE FUNDED 1,270 PROJECTS:**

- **8,329 FARMERS REPORTED MEANINGFUL CHANGES, LIKE ADOPTING NEW PRACTICES OR REDUCING INPUTS.**
- **157,286+ PRODUCERS WERE REACHED THROUGH EVENTS SUCH AS FIELD DAYS AND WORKSHOPS.**

NCR-SARE Farmer Impacts 2014–2024



**FOR EACH PROJECT FUNDED, 7 FARMERS MADE MEANINGFUL CHANGES, AND 124 WERE REACHED, BUILDING NEW FARMER-TO-FARMER CONNECTIONS.**



**FARMING ON TIGHT MARGINS IS TOUGH. NCR-SARE SUPPORTS PRACTICAL, INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS THAT HELP FARMERS BALANCE RISK AND IMPROVE PROFITABILITY.**

# **ECONOMIC VIABILITY:**

## **STABILITY THROUGH INNOVATION**



Brian and Keith Berns (Nebraska) combined decades of no-till experience with a background in agriculture and computer science to found Green Cover Seed, now one of the leading cover crop companies in the United States. It all started with a Farmer Rancher grant from NCR-SARE. SARE funding enabled them to scale research into over 80 species and hundreds of seed mix combinations. Their free SmartMix Calculator™, developed with farmer input, allows producers to tailor mixes for nitrogen fixation, water use, and livestock grazing. It gives farmers a practical tool to reduce inputs while improving soil health. It is one of the most widely used cover crop selection tools on the internet.



Robert Braun (Wisconsin) developed and tested a hybrid dual-fuel tractor conversion with SARE support, allowing his machinery to alternate between gasoline and electricity. It lowered his operational costs while keeping reliability intact during busy seasons. He created how-to videos that gives other farmers a template for building their own more economical and efficient machinery options. The tests have shown promising results. For instance, fence trimming costs just \$0.90 per session using grid power, compared to \$9.00 for gasoline, with even greater savings when using solar energy.

**SARE GRANTS OFTEN SERVE AS A SPRINGBOARD FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING. BETWEEN 2014 AND 2024, SARE GRANTEES SECURED 867 SUBSEQUENT GRANTS FROM OTHER PROGRAMS.**



# ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: RESTORING THE GROUND BENEATH



**SARE SUPPORTS THE ADOPTION OF SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES SUCH AS COVER CROPPING, ROTATIONAL GRAZING, AND REDUCED TILLAGE, HELPING FARMERS BUILD A STRONGER FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE.**

Erin and Drew Gaugler (North Dakota) inherited land that had suffered years of poor grazing management. With SARE funding, they trialed bale grazing, placing hay bales in their pastures so livestock distribute nutrients as they feed. It improved soil organic matter and moisture retention in harsh winter conditions. Lacking nearby case studies, they documented their process and results in a “mailbox tour,” a self-guided, farmer-focused learning tool designed to engage skeptical neighbors on their terms. The Gauglers reported sharing project information with 1,500 local farmers and 200 agriculture professionals.

Logan Simon (Nebraska) used SARE support to evaluate the effects of rotational grazing using temporary electric cross fencing. His project showed measurable gains in forage regrowth, livestock health, and soil structure. Simon provided a blueprint for other livestock producers seeking cost-effective, regenerative strategies by sharing his grazing maps and yield comparisons.



**FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCE DRIVES ADOPTION. ACCORDING TO A 2025 SURVEY BY SARE AND THE CONSERVATION TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION CENTER, FARM ADVISORS WHO USE COVER CROPS ARE 5 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO RECOMMEND THEM TO PRODUCERS.**



# QUALITY OF LIFE:

## LIGHTENING THE LOAD



**FARMING CAN BE ISOLATING AND PHYSICALLY DEMANDING. NCR-SARE SUPPORTS FARMERS BY EASING WORKLOADS, IMPROVING DECISION-MAKING, AND FOSTERING STRONGER CONNECTIONS—BUILDING A HEALTHIER, MORE RESILIENT FARMING COMMUNITY.**

Allysse Sorensen (Minnesota) tested virtual fencing for her goat herd. Moving traditional fencing on rough terrain was labor-intensive and limited the rotational grazing flexibility she wanted to offer to her clients. With SARE support, she used GPS-enabled collars and a mobile app to manage herd movement remotely. The system allowed for better pasture utilization, reduced herbicide use on invasive brush, and dramatically reduced the daily physical toll of her work. Her project illustrates how innovation can ease strain and increase time for other responsibilities.

Farmer Forums, funded by NCR-SARE, have allowed farmers and ranchers to share firsthand experiences at over 40 regional conferences since 2018. These Farmer Forums have turned more than 200 regional producers into educators, fostering confidence, validating local knowledge, and creating lasting support networks that alleviate the isolation many producers encounter.



**NCR-SARE'S UPCOMING REGIONAL TRAINING, "PATHS TO SUSTAINABILITY WITH FARM LABOR," WILL BRING TOGETHER 60–80 AGRICULTURAL EDUCATORS FROM ACROSS THE REGION AND EQUIP THEM WITH TOOLS AND INSIGHTS THAT WILL STRENGTHEN FARM LABOR PRACTICES.**

# FARMERS HELPING FARMERS

## BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES TOGETHER



**INNOVATION CREATES NEW OPPORTUNITIES BUT COMES WITH RISK. WITH SARE AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT, FARMERS CAN TEST IDEAS, MANAGE UNCERTAINTY, AND TAP INTO EMERGING MARKETS WITH GREATER CONFIDENCE.**

Dan Sheild (Minnesota) proved that peaches could thrive in a climate once thought too harsh for such fruit. With SARE's backing, he developed a resilient peach-growing system that survives central Minnesota's brutal winters and produces reliably year after year. Sheild's peach trees can produce 70 pounds of peaches per tree within 27 months. With peaches valued at \$3.75 per pound, a 1,768-square-foot high tunnel housing 24 trees could generate \$6,300 annually, scaling to \$50,400 per acre. His success is paving the way for a new market in cold-climate stone fruits, offering farmers the chance to come together to grow previously unconsidered markets.



**DAN SHEILD**  
PEACH GROWER, MINNESOTA

Julia McGuire has received three SARE grants aimed at enhancing beekeeping education and promoting sustainable business practices in Iowa. Through these projects, McGuire has equipped Iowa beekeepers with valuable tools and knowledge to boost honey production, support native foraging habitats, and improve overall business sustainability.




**JULIA MCGUIRE**  
BEEKEEPER, IOWA



**FROM 2014 TO 2024, NCR-SARE GRANTS SPARKED 3,538 COLLABORATIONS, DRIVING INNOVATION BY CONNECTING FARMERS, RESEARCHERS, AND EDUCATORS.**





# **SARE: A STEADIER PATH FORWARD**



**FARMING IN THE NORTH CENTRAL REGION REMAINS A TOUGH ENDEAVOR, BUT WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT, IT CAN BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE, REWARDING, AND RESILIENT.**

**BY LISTENING TO PRODUCERS, SUPPORTING THEIR IDEAS, AND SHARING THEIR INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS, NCR-SARE HELPS THEM MAKE PROGRESS, NOT BY ELIMINATING CHALLENGES, BUT BY ENSURING THEY'RE EQUIPPED TO FACE THEM WITH CONFIDENCE AND COMMUNITY.**



**OUR LOCATION**  
**120 BAE, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**  
**1390 ECKLES AVENUE**  
**ST. PAUL, MN 55108**  
**NORTHCENTRAL.SARE.ORG**

**CONTACT US**  
**612-626-3113**  
**NCRSARE@UMN.EDU**



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