Happy Fall!

Fall brings excitement to everyone. The kids are back in school. There are plenty of football games to watch. And it’s time to tune up the combine and prepare for harvest. This fall, the crew at SHP is excited to deliver your farmer reports! Although we missed seeing everyone at the summer research meetings, our field managers and lead scientist stayed busy working together to develop comprehensive farmer reports that will be distributed to you later this year. We are also planning in-person SHP meetings that will take place early next year.

This summer we celebrated SHP’s 5-year anniversary. SHP remains enthusiastic and focused on our mission to increase the wide scale adoption of soil health building practices for economic and environmental benefits for farmers and rural communities. Our well-rounded team is working together to strengthen the organization for continued success and maximum effectiveness. We are eager to see where the next five years takes us!

Thank you for your part in this important soil health work. Thank you for welcoming us on your farms to conduct this industry-changing research. By pairing on-farm engagement with science and knowledge, we can improve productivity and sustainability for years to come.

We hope you have a safe and bountiful fall!

Maria Bowman, Jack Cornell, Anne Dietz and John Mesko
SHP’s National Team

SHP Celebrates 5 Years

The Soil Health Partnership (SHP) has been fostering transformation in agriculture through improved soil health since 2014. This year, SHP celebrates its fifth anniversary and the foundational collaborations that developed the program.

“I am encouraged to see how many farmers are investing in their land and inviting SHP to be a part of that process. We continue to look for new ways to diversify our offerings and enable farmers from a broad range of geographies and operations to be a part of our program,” stated SHP Lead Scientist, Maria Bowman. “We credit our growth in large part to farmers investing in the SHP network. The farmers we work with place their trust in us to collect the right data and measure the outcomes of these practices.”

The SHP network now spans across 16 states and includes over 100 partner organizations at the federal, state and county levels. SHP has grown from 17 active farms in 2014 to 220 active farms in 2019, with trials on over 7,000 acres.

SHP was founded by a diverse group of organizations with a shared vision of developing a farmer-led research network to measure the impacts of implementing soil health practices on working farms. The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Bayer, the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), alongside the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA), came together to see this vision through. This program was based upon work supported by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S Department of Agriculture.
Finding Efficiencies: Scouting with Drones

Scouting with a drone provides a flexible option for quickly collecting high resolution imagery from fields that can occur during multiple growth phases. With most commonly used scouting drones, it is possible to fly and collect images from a 60-80 acre field in less than 30 minutes. This helps to quickly identify problem areas in the field.

It is very important to compare what’s being seen on the ground versus what is being seen in the air. From the ground it is difficult to get a full idea of stand and uniformity across the entire field. From the air we can identify thin areas, and then ground truth them to try to determine why there is a lower population.

Once imagery is collected it is possible to use it in other precision agriculture applications. It can be compared to yield data, as applied maps, or soil maps to further dive in to what is happening in your field.

Drones can be used to scout fields many times throughout the year; not just during the growing season.

Flying early in the spring when the ground is bare helps to get a bird’s eye view of areas of the field that might have standing water or erosion issues.

Flying early after emergence gives you an idea of crop stand and early season vigor. This timeframe can also help to show early issues like weed outbreaks or drowned out spots. Drones can be an essential tool for cost analysis of the field for replant activities.

During the middle of the growing season, flights for scouting for nutrient deficiencies and plant health can be key to maintaining profitability of the field.

Flying late in the season during drydown can help with scouting harvestability of the field.

SHP continues using drones to diagnose problem areas and variability in research fields that aid in scouting efforts.

To learn more about scouting with drones, visit bit.ly/SSDrones.

John Stewart, SHP Field Manager for Central and Southern Indiana, operates a drone.

SHP Hosts Field Days

It was a busy summer with many field days held across the Midwestern states. The groundswell continues to grow for soil health as an on-farm business and environmental strategy.

“Field days are a great opportunity for our key partners such as National Wheat Foundation or state corn groups to mingle with our funders, such as General Mills, and our SHP growers,” says Jack Cornell the Field Operations Director of SHP. This year our SHP field staff focused on telling a positive message on how adopting new soil health management practices were affected in an extremely wet spring. SHP knows outreach is a key component of the SHP program. Cornell says, “If we are doing great things to help SHP farmer’s profitability and sustainability, but not talking about it, then we are not doing our job to educate the farm community.”

Regional field days help SHP share geographically-specific opportunities for soil health management practices. Lisa Kubik, SHP Field Manager for Eastern Iowa says, “To further educate growers on soil health practices and changes farmers can make on their farms, we focus a lot on cover crops during our field days in this part of the country—everything from cover crop demonstrations and walking through cover crop fields to discussing different varieties and different ways to seed cover crops.”

To further explore the topic, several field days in Iowa included a rainfall simulator that compared no-till, cover cropped and conventionally tilled fields for run-off, water holding capacity and infiltration.

“Field days provide a great resource for farmers to collaborate with their peers and are a great way to introduce interested farmers to SHP and our Associate Program,” said Kubik.

Many of our field days are co-hosted. We appreciate the support of partner organizations and look forward to next year’s field day line up. Visit our website to see if there’s a field day in your area: soilhealthpartnership.org.
SHP Founders Reflect on 5 Years of Soil Health Collaboration

"SHP's 5-year anniversary is an exciting opportunity to reflect on the progress that has been made, both in terms of scientific research and relationships that are being leveraged to expand the adoption of soil health-promoting practices."

The National Corn Growers Association (NCGA), the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Bayer led the charge of founding the Soil Health Partnership (SHP). As the founding organizations look back on five years with SHP, they are energized by the momentum and optimistic focus on the future.

All partners endorse the belief that improved soil health can lead to higher yields, improved farmer profitability, better crop resilience to extreme weather, preserved soil and water biodiversity and enhanced utilization and retention of nutrients for the crop. Bayer is pleased to have played an integral role in the development of SHP as the first organization of its kind to bring together farmers, industry and environmental groups to focus on the common goal of improving soil health.

According to NCGA, soil health is the best way to measure decades of farm management and conservation improvements. Growers have been working to improve water management, erosion, nutrient management, crop protection stewardship, soil tilth, and efficiency for generations. Soil health is the perfect way to show the results of combining those practices together and identifying how it can be economical.

EDF is pleased with SHP’s commitment to looking open-eyed at the data and about which aspects of soil health actually contribute to a more sustainable, more resilient farm outcome is what makes this initiative so valuable.

“SHP’s 5-year anniversary is an exciting opportunity to reflect on the progress that has been made, both in terms of scientific research and relationships that are being leveraged to expand the adoption of soil health-promoting practices,” commented Pipa Elias, Director, North America Agriculture Program, TNC.

SHP founding organizations continue to play a vital role of keeping the program true to its mission of developing a farmer-led research network to measure the impacts of implementing soil health practices on working farms.
Inside this Issue
✓ SHP celebrates 5 years
✓ Field Days recap
✓ Drone scouting tips

More updates are on your way!
We will be contacting you more with data results and insights. Please add this email to your account so you don’t miss an update!
soilhealth@ncga.com

Fall calendar
See soilhealthpartnership.org for a full list of upcoming events.

Events:
Research meetings: schedules will be emailed.

Webinars:
See website for the schedule of upcoming webinars.

Soil Health Partnership – a data-driven, on-farm effort to support more productive and sustainable agriculture through soil health
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We are increasing our communications – follow us on your favorite channel. Be sure to use the hashtag #SoilHealth or #SoilSmart, and tag us!

Twitter: @SoilPartners
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LinkedIn: Soil Health Partnership