



# PARTNER CASE STUDY

# Silverwood County Park



**PARTNERSHIP TYPE:** County parks department & nonprofit organization (MOU), grower partners (rental agreements)

**PARTNERS:** Friends of Silverwood Park, Dane County Parks, multiple farming partners

**LOCATION:** Edgerton, Wisconsin—Dane County

**ESTABLISHED:** 2013

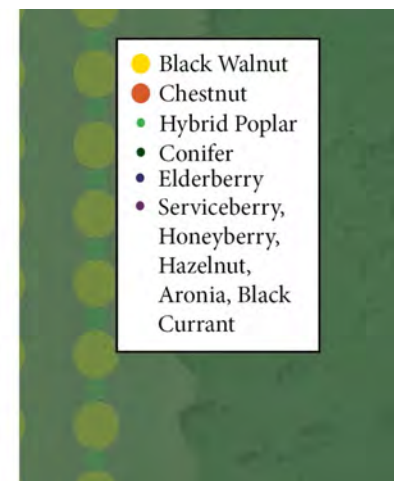


*“We started a project in 2017 with the Savanna Institute. We have an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) that we periodically go over to make sure that we’re all following best practices and working toward the same goal.”*

**KATIE WHITTEN**  
Park Manager

SILVERWOOD COUNTY PARK is a 300-acre property near Edgerton, Wisconsin, managed by Dane County Parks in cooperation with the nonprofit organization Friends of Silverwood Park and over 15 grower partners. The land was donated to Dane County in 2001 by a retired teacher named Irene Silverwood, who stipulated that the park should be used for both agriculture and education.

After completing a strategic planning process in the mid 2010s, Silverwood Park now boasts a wide variety of farming demonstration partnerships and educational events, in addition to being open throughout the year for public recreation. Farming partnerships include a 27-acre alley cropping demonstration managed by the Savanna Institute, an indigenous corn planting managed by local tribal members, a 15 acre orchard of heirloom apples managed by orchardist Dan Bussey, 160 acres of organic grain production, and more than a dozen smaller-scale vegetable, fruit, and flower growers.



# In their own words...

*“We now have a lot of seasoned growers who are doing a good job. We lease from the county and then we sublease to growers. So the growers function independently under our umbrella. We have about 15 grower partners.”*



**KATIE WHITTEN**  
Park Manager

*“It’s a big job. And so we partnered to get this job done and to showcase the agroforestry.”*



*“We have a fair amount of structured education with taking people on tours, and walks, and summer school, but there’s also a significant amount of casual education that happens as visitors walk around and take time to talk to growers. I regularly have people come up and ask ‘what are you doing? What is that?’”*

**JOHN STEINES**  
President of Friends of Silverwood Park



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## PARTNER CASE STUDY

# Red Fern Farm



**PARTNERSHIP TYPE:** Family business partners

**PARTNERS:** Kathy Dice & Tom Wahl

**LOCATION:** Wapello, Iowa

**ESTABLISHED:** 1986



*“So it’s really important for partners to be on the same page, with the same goal, because it’s a really stressful situation if one person’s really into agroforestry and the other person is not... So it’s important that both of you enjoy what’s going on.”*

**KATHY DICE**

*Owner / Operator, Red Fern Farm*

RED FERN FARM is a family-owned nursery and farm, owned and operated by Kathy Dice and Tom Wahl. Kathy and Tom raise and sell container-grown tree seedlings and rootstock, manage a profitable U-pick operation, and continue to experiment with a wide variety of tree crops and forest farming systems.

Red Fern Farm grows over eighty species of fruit and nut crops, with chestnuts serving as the primary source of income. Other crops include paw paw, persimmon, heartnut, Asian pear, and honeyberry. Although Red Fern Farm has previously explored raising chickens, turkeys, goats, and sheep, they currently are not raising livestock on their farm. In addition to hosting hundreds of U-pick customers, Red Fern Farm has recently hosted participants in the Savanna Institute’s Agroforestry Apprenticeship Program.

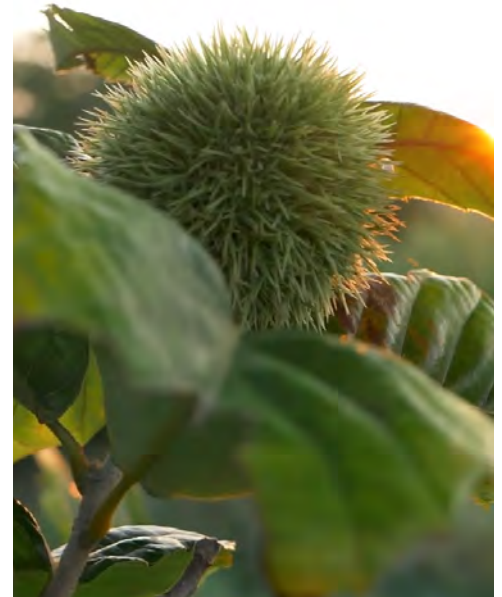


# In their own words...

KATHY DICE

Owner / Operator, Red Fern Farm

*“If you’re doing this by yourself, then you can just say ‘I’ve got this land and I want to do this’. But if you’re in a partnership with somebody, then you’ve gotta make sure that partner has the same outlook as you, and the same goals, and are as committed as you are. Because it’s hard. I mean, any kind of farming takes a lot of time, but when you’re doing a farming technique where you’re not getting any reward for the first five years, it can put a lot of strain on a relationship.”*



*“So I would always advise: do your research, start small—it’s really exciting, but restrain yourself—go at it easy, and carefully, and you will have a much better time in the long run.”*

*“It took Tom and I around 20 years to get our agroforestry system to the place where it is now. And it’s been a lot of frustration and hard work. I would tell people that Tom was the one with the vision, and I was the enabler, because for about twelve years I worked off-farm to bring in income to keep his habit going, and that’s how I referred to it for a while: his tree planting habit.”*



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PARTNER  
CASE STUDY

# Organic Compound



**PARTNERSHIP TYPE:** Capital investment by food brand

**PARTNERS:** Carly & Wil Crombie (Organic Compound), Tree-Range® Chicken, family and local community members

**LOCATION:** Faribault, MN

**ESTABLISHED:** 2012



*“Our parents helped us overcome one of the biggest challenges to even implement agroforestry, which is land access. We were able to partner with our family and get the support to plant our dreams out here.”*

**CARLY CROMBIE**  
Owner / Operator

ORGANIC COMPOUND Organic Compound was formed in 2012 when Wil Crombie started tending a homestead owned by his parents in southeastern Minnesota. The land (where Wil was raised) had been in row crops for generations, tended by his mothers side of the family. After a few years of exploring organic gardening and experimenting with different specialty crops and diverse cropping systems Wil and his wife Carly were introduced to Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin. With Reginaldo and two other business partners Carly and Wil formed a business to launch the Tree-Range® Chicken brand, and began transitioning their land toward the regenerative poultry production practices developed by Reginaldo. Through this work they became the first commercial scale production site for Tree-Range® Chicken.



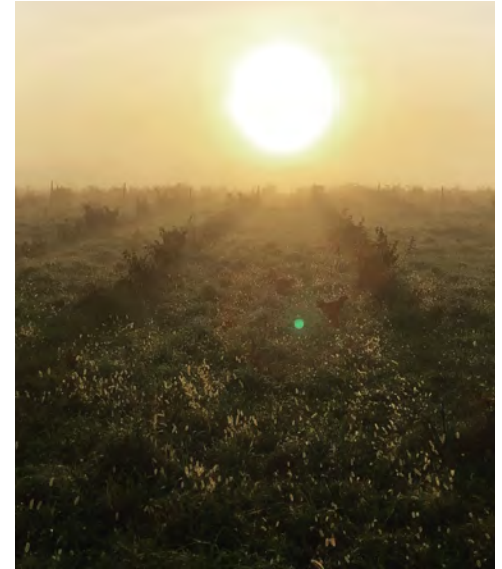
# In their own words...

*“So one thing that makes our partnership successful is that we had also done the work to build a strong community...that helped support us in getting the trees planted, and all throughout this journey.”*



**CARLY CROMBIE**  
Owner / Operator

*“Two key elements that hold a lot of people back: the startup capital or the operating loans... and then having land.”*



*“Agroforestry really allows for so much diversity, so many different layers of enterprises can be established on the land. I would just love to continue to create space for more diversity of partnerships.”*



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# PARTNER CASE STUDY

## Southern Ohio Chestnut Company



**PARTNERSHIP TYPE:** Long-term lease

**PARTNERS:** Chris Smyth and Badger Johnson, Southern Ohio Chestnut Company, and Woodcock Nature Preserve

**LOCATION:** Athens, OH

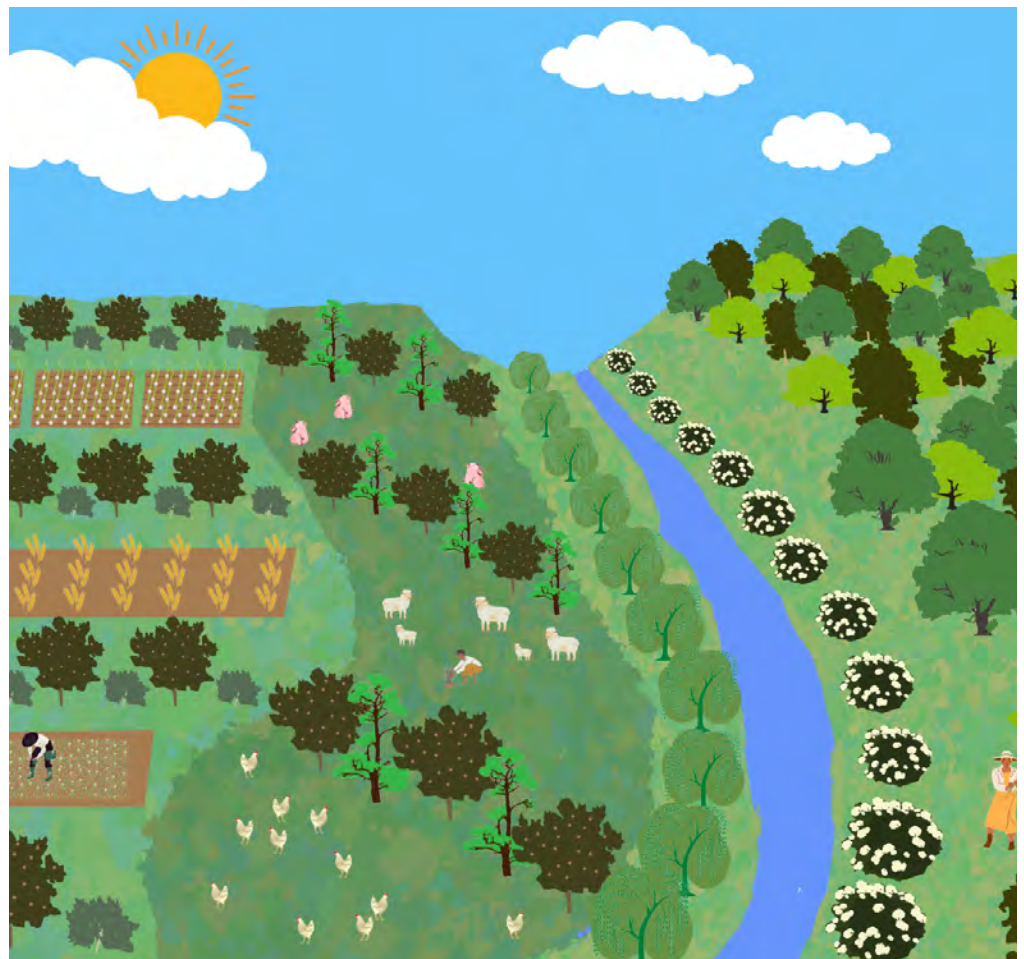
**ESTABLISHED:** 2020

THE SOUTHERN OHIO CHESTNUT COMPANY is a multi-farm business co-founded by Chris Smyth and Badger Johnson, operating on properties in southern Ohio. With a focus on Chinese chestnut varieties, the company currently manages 25 acres through a long term, 75-year lease with the Woodcock Nature Preserve. They have also begun pairing their chestnut trees with paw paw trees.



*“We are on 25 of [Woodcock Nature Preserve’s] hundred acres. We have a long-term lease, a seventy-five year lease, so hopefully the chestnuts will be there long after we’re gone.”*

**CHRIS SMYTH**  
*Cofounder, Southern Ohio Chestnut Company*



# In their own words...

*“You could even think of this larger nature preserve as agroforestry itself—there’s timber stand improvement going on, there’s prairie burns happening on the property, it’s quite a diverse property, and now a third of it is this chestnut farm.”*

CHRIS

*“We spent a year and a half writing business plans. There were a lot of things we didn’t end up doing, because it turned out it just didn’t make sense.”*

BADGER



## CHRIS SMYTH & BADGER JOHNSON

*Founders, Southern Ohio Chestnut Company*

*“If you have a hobby farm and you are in the Baby Boomer generation and worked a job for 30–40 years, you may have enough money to transfer that land into a profitable agroforestry operation and to bankroll somebody like Chris or I who comes to you with a business plan...”*

*“A lot of people who are in that position—they have the cash or the land, but don’t have the time or energy—people don’t realize the barriers to entry for Millennials or Generation Z folks starting out.”*

BADGER



*“I think one of the biggest things you can do in looking at a new partnership is analysis. But really, it is about discerning the equity between partners, and really being clear about that. I’ve seen other landowners kick people off farms... It’s highly unlikely [the nature preserve] will. I think it’s important to identify what’s likely, and what’s possible, with the various partners.”*

CHRIS



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## PARTNER CASE STUDY

# Nettle Valley Farm



**PARTNERSHIP TYPE:**  
Incubator Farm Program

**PARTNERS:** Nettle Valley Farm  
(Dayna Burtness and Nick  
Nguyen), 1–3 year  
incubatees

**LOCATION:** Spring Grove, MN

**ESTABLISHED:** Incubator Farm  
Program began in 2019



*“So when you’re thinking about deploying some agroforestry practices on your land, that’s your opportunity to think about how you can collaborate with other people who have the skill sets that you don’t.”*

**DAYNA BURTNES**  
Owner / Operator  
Nettle Valley Farm

NETTLE VALLEY FARM is a 70-acre pastured pork farm outside Spring Grove, Minnesota, owned and operated by Dayna Burtness and Nick Nguyen. Dayna, who is part of the sixth generation of her family to farm in Houston County, Minnesota, does most of the day to day farm management and livestock care. In addition to raising hogs, Dayna and Nick manage an incubator farm program to host young livestock farmers who are interested in silvopasture and other agroforestry practices.

The incubator farm program invites young and beginning livestock farmers with some experience and vision of the operations they want to establish, but who aren’t quite ready to own or rent their own farms yet. The program is a stepping stone for them so they can get experience managing their own enterprise—and all the stresses and benefits that come along with that—in a protected environment. The goal is that at the end of the 1–3 year incubator farm period, participants are ready to rent or buy their own land, ideally in the area.



# In their own words...



**DAYNA BURTNES**

Owner / Operator, Nettle Valley Farm

*“My whole thing is that we don’t all have to do everything. Whether it be planting trees or managing livestock or marketing - we just don’t all have to do it alone. That’s the way of the past!”*

*“I had worked for other people on their farms, and learned a lot, but by being at Nettle Valley Farm I was able to try being my own boss... it was a really good way to be able to try out managing my own farm in a way that I didn’t have a lot of money sunk into it and I could step away.”*

**HEIDI EGER**

Incubator Farm Participant

*“The way incubatees pay for the experience and access to land and equipment is through a work trade, so usually three or four Fridays a month we do a half day of work all together. It’s really fun to have that camaraderie and people power while you’re trying to get a big project done.”*



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## PARTNER CASE STUDY

# Lily Springs Farm



### PARTNERSHIP TYPE:

Apprenticeships (formal program) and volunteer events (informal)

**PARTNERS:** Farm apprentices and volunteers

**LOCATION:** Osceola, WI

**ESTABLISHED:** apprenticeship program established in 2019



*“It’s important to treat those natural players, whether it’s fungi, or clover, or migratory birds, like the coworkers they are. They’re all contributing to the land just as much as humans are.”*

**ELLE SULLIVAN**  
*Farm Manager*

LILY SPRINGS FARM is a 100-acre property located on the shores of a spring-fed lake in western Wisconsin near the town of Osceola. The farm hosts events, classes, and on-site lodging rental and tourism. The farm’s mission includes building a perennial-based farm system that fosters health in the community and the land, and educational programming flows naturally from that work. In 2022, Lily Springs Farm intends to transition into Wild Path Collective (WPC), an intergenerational, multicultural, and interfaith community.

Lily Springs Farm features multi-story agroforestry designs incorporating rows of elderberry, aronia, black currant and raspberry. They also grow hazelnut, apple, plum, apricot, and cherry, and other tree varieties. It includes an industrial hemp trial plot and sells its own hemp teas and oils. A herd of goats is being used to transition a former red pine plantation into a silvopasture area, and shaded areas of the farm are used for mushroom production.



# In their own words...

ELLE SULLIVAN

Farm Manager, Lily Springs

*“We try to always incorporate some elements of mentorship for anyone that’s coming and doing work on our farm, whether that’s a volunteer for a day or an intern or apprentice that’s coming for a specified amount of time.”*



*“With every different group that comes through we want to be giving something that feels meaningful and relevant to them. It’s a really dynamic process. It doesn’t feel like we’re just assigning menial tasks and then letting those apprentices and interns and volunteers work themselves into the ground—it’s way more rewarding to treat it as a shared learning experience.”*



*“We don’t want anyone to leave the work day or the work season feeling broken and beat down... So our general employment approach is to incorporate lots of the more uplifting educational opportunities.”*

*“When you’re coming into a project, it’s important to assess what components are missing—what animals have been driven off the land, what native plants are no longer present, what nutrients in the soil are no longer at the quantities you need to sustain healthy growth—and treating it like our responsibility to fill in those niches while at the same time working to establish an ecosystem or property that is inviting the natural players back in.”*



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PARTNER  
CASE STUDY

# Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT



**PARTNERSHIP TYPE:** Agricultural loans for sustainable agriculture

**PARTNERS:** Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT, investors, and private farmers

**LOCATION:** Iroquois Valley, IL

**FOUNDED:** 2007

IROQUOIS VALLEY FARMLAND REIT is a public benefit corporation that makes investments in land security for organic farmers by raising capital from impact investors. Since it began in 2007, Iroquois Valley has grown from supporting crop rotations to diversifying into livestock and dairy, and now all sorts of diversified forms of agriculture, including agroforestry.



*“We worked with Savanna Institute on our own agroforestry project, on our own Rock Creek Farm, where we planted nearly 10,000 trees in the spring of 2020.”*

**CLAIRE MEESAN**  
*Vice President,  
Farmer Relations*



# In their own words...

*“Our initial leases run for seven years, and they’re renewed in three year increments and they can be renewed indefinitely. There’s not a point when the farmer is required to buy the land, although they become eligible to buy after that for a seven year period. They can keep renting it from us. They can transition it to a mortgage if they’re ready at that point.”*



**CLAIRE MEESAN**  
*Vice President, Farmer Relations*

*“I think we need more partners who are willing to fund agroforestry projects and to really be there for the long haul with the farmer. It’s hard to model a cash flow that really shows the benefits of agroforestry within a five year timeline. And I think as lenders, we need to embrace looking at longer term financials and understanding that what we’re doing and what we’re supporting can yield really big benefits in the future.”*



*“Iroquois Valley, I think, sets itself apart because we are really invested in the long term. We’re built to hold the land indefinitely. So when we offer a lease to a farmer, that is something that is indefinitely renewable as long as everything is in good standing. So a farmer could conceivably work with us for generations.”*



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PARTNER  
CASE STUDY

# Delight Flower Farm



**PARTNERSHIP TYPE:** NRCS financial assistance for agroforestry

**PARTNERS:** USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Savanna Institute

**LOCATION:** Champaign, IL

**ESTABLISHED:** 2011

MAGGIE TAYLOR OWNS AND OPERATES DELIGHT FLOWER FARM, a commercial cut flower farm just west of Champaign, IL. The farm began as a backyard project for Maggie, but has grown over the past ten years to include a cut-flower CSA, farmers market sales, and on-farm workshops serving the Champaign-Urbana area.



*“I didn’t grow up in a farm family and didn’t inherit land. The first thing you realize when you become a farmer without those resources is that land access is really hard. It’s one of the biggest challenges to overcome if you want to be a farmer.”*

**MAGGIE TAYLOR**  
Owner / Operator  
Delight Flower Farm

Maggie worked with Kaitie Adams, Savanna Institute’s Illinois Community Agroforester, to apply for NRCS financial assistance for her farm to establish alley cropping and windbreaks. These two USDA agroforestry practices were new for Maggie, but aligned well with her farm operations and her vision for the farm. Kaitie made suggestions for tree varieties and low bushy crops to include, which would also provide wildlife habitat and provide biological pest control options for managing the flowers. Maggie helped choose crops for the windbreak and alley cropping that could also be sold commercially in the floral industry.



Delight Flower Farm staff and community.

# In their own words...

*“I initially pay for whatever the agreed practices are, then NRCS officers come out and walk around, which they did several times during the application process to make sure we’re on the same page, but then once the practice is established and it meets their criteria and they can come take a look at it, they will direct deposit right into my account a partial payment for the project.”*



*“The benefits of working with NRCS and the Savanna Institute are many. Some of them are very tangible... I can see the actual dollars that NRCS is going to contribute towards this project and this practice, but some of them are intangible in that you’re just spending time and learning from a like-minded individual.”*



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## MAGGIE TAYLOR

*Owner / Operator, Delight Flower Farm*

*“It’s going to take a few years, and it’s a large expense to invest in, so the USDA grant is really going to help support me in being able to establish these things that I strongly believe are valuable to the farm.”*



*“Finding people to partner with—that is going to go a long way to overcoming these barriers.”*

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# PARTNER CASE STUDY

## All Seasons Farm



**PARTNERSHIP TYPE:** Public and private cost-sharing for agroforestry practices

**PARTNERS:** Organic Valley, Wisconsin Land + Water Association, Savanna Institute, The Nature Conservancy, Monroe County Climate Change Task Force, Monroe County Land Conservation Department

**LOCATION:** Cashton, WI

**ESTABLISHED:** planted silvopasture in 2022



*“We’re just trying to find people willing to try things on the landscape. There’s a lot of partners out there. We’re just looking for participants.”*

**BOB MICHEEL**  
Monroe County Land  
Conservation Department

ALL SEASONS FARM is a fifty-cow organic grassfed dairy farm in southwest Wisconsin. The farm was “one of the first to get on the grassfed truck,” says Tucker Gretebeck, who runs the farm with his wife Becky. Becky grew up on the farm, and Tucker grew up on a farm several miles away. Their farm has been organic since 2006.

In May of 2022, volunteers from a variety of organizations including Organic Valley, Savanna Institute, Wisconsin Land + Water Association, The Nature Conservancy, Monroe County Climate Change Task Force, and the Monroe County Land Conservation Department gathered to help plant 1,100 trees in pastures at All Seasons Farm. The Gretebecks see agroforestry as the next step in the growth of their farm, and the organizational partners in attendance are working to develop cost-share mechanisms to support more farmers like the Gretebecks implementing agroforestry practices on their land.



# In their own words...



*“The thing that intrigued me about putting trees in the pasture is...the cows need shade. They just don’t do well if they’re not cooled down. If I get another hour of eating, I’m gonna get more milk, and more milk means we’ve got a way to pay this project off.”*

*“It’s a huge project. It was overwhelming just thinking about it and getting going today, it takes a lot of hands to make something like this go.”*

**TUCKER GRETEBECK**  
*Owner / Operator, All Seasons Farm*



**TUCKER GRETEBECK  
& BOB MICHEEL**

*“You’re not going to have a landowner just on their own spend five to ten thousand dollars putting all these trees and tubes out there. That’s where the partners come in for cost sharing, whether it’s The Nature Conservancy, Monroe County Land Conservation, Organic Valley, or others coming forward.”*

**BOB MICHEEL**  
*Monroe County Land Conservation Department*



The Savanna Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Spring Green, WI and Champaign, IL that works with farmers and scientists to lay the groundwork for widespread agroforestry adoption in the Midwest US. Inspired by the native savanna ecosystems that once covered much of this region, the Savanna Institute conducts research, education, and outreach to support the growth of diverse, perennial agroecosystems.

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ARE YOU INTERESTED IN PARTNERING FOR AGROFORESTRY?

Visit Savanna Institute’s [Getting Started webpage](#), or the [National Agroforestry Center’s Resources webpage](#), to learn more about how to make agroforestry work for you and your collaborators.

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