



NEWS RELEASE

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First Annual Soil Health Summit Awards Honor Best in Soil Health

Four "Seeds of Change" awards given at 4th Annual Summit

(CHICAGO) – Innovators. Educators. Communicators. Those are just some of the words used to describe the four recipients of the newly inaugurated "Seeds of Change Awards" at the 2018 Soil Health Partnership Summit, Jan. 18-19 in Chicago. These awards were developed to highlight those members of the Soil Health Partnership who go above and beyond to advocate for the partnership and for soil health throughout the year.

"The Soil Health Partnership could not exist without the willingness and enthusiasm of our partners—especially the farmers and agronomists on the front lines of our research," said Nick Goeser, director of the Soil Health Partnership. "These four individuals exemplify the very best of our dedicated partners, and we look forward to honoring others as the research continues and our partnership expands."

The four award recipients are:

- **Super Spout: Andrew Reuschel**, Golden, Illinois. Andrew is a first-year member of the partnership who is passionate about soil health, enthusiastic to take on new challenges and is always willing to share his experience with others. Andrew practices reduced tillage and cover crops on his farm and became interested in expanding soil and water conservation efforts. Andrew comes by this interest in soil health naturally— his grandpa tried working with cover crops in the '70s, and his dad in the '90s. He says he is currently enjoying spending less money on chemical and fertilizer inputs!
- **Champion Communicator: Mark Mueller**, Waverly, Iowa. Mark often takes the initiative to tell the story of what's happening on his farm – a vital way to encourage other farmers to consider adopting new practices, and to share the progress agriculture is making with the public. In the last year, he drafted an opinion editorial on the soil health practices on his farm, published in three Iowa newspapers, including the Des Moines Register. He's done several other media interviews, including Wallaces Farmer and Waterloo Cedar Falls Courier. He also spent four weeks journaling for Farm and Ranch Living Magazine, discussing his soil health journey in many of the entries, and hosting a professional photo shoot on his farm. The feature is scheduled to run in 2018.
- **Ace Agronomist: Jack Hardwick**, Beardstown, Illinois. Approachable and knowledgeable agronomists are a critical link between SHP and farmers when it comes to implementing and collecting data on new farming techniques. Both an agronomist and a farmer, Jack's interest in soil health started with his degree in soil science. He then spent 12 years in various roles with FS, AgriGold, and BRANDT before going back to the family farm and starting a crop consulting business. His farmers look to him to answer their questions, and get sound advice and expertise. They often remark on how much they appreciate his insights into their farming operation.

- **Data Digger: Tom Vaske**, Masonville, Iowa. You know there's always that one guy who has perfect records and precise notes. Tom Vaske is that guy. The research of the Soil Health Partnership relies on good data collection. He is always on time, meticulous and accurate with his data, and ensures his trial location is correct each year. Tom started farming on his own in 2001 by renting land from a neighbor who wished to have conservation tillage practices maintained on the farm, so Tom converted an old planter into a strip till bar. He was initially skeptical of the practice and assumed he would eventually want to go back to plowing. Years later, Tom is still utilizing strip till as an important tool in his operation. Tom has been testing the use of interseeding cover crops on his farm through randomized, replicated field trials with SHP.

An initiative of the National Corn Growers Association, the Soil Health Partnership is a data-driven program working to quantify the benefits of practices that support soil health from an economic as well as environmental standpoint.

About the Soil Health Partnership

The Soil Health Partnership is a farmer-led initiative that fosters transformation in agriculture through improved soil health, benefiting both farmer profitability and the environment. With more than 100 working farms enrolled in 12 states, the SHP tests, measures and advances progressive farm management practices that will enhance sustainability and farm economics for generations to come. SHP brings together diverse partners to work towards common goals. At least a ten-year scientific program administered by the National Corn Growers Association, the SHP's vision is driven by initial and continuing funding and guidance from NCGA, Monsanto, the Walton Family Foundation, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative, General Mills, the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research and USDA, with technical support from The Nature Conservancy and the Environmental Defense Fund. For more, visit soilhealthpartnership.org.

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