



# Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative

**Improving Soil Health on Indiana Crop Land**

**2022 CCSI Strategic Plan**

## Goal 1: Provide Training to ICP staff in the concepts of soil health, conservation promotion, and the implementation of soil health practices

Current Situation:

CCSI currently provides

- Training curriculum on conservation cropping systems
- Teleconferences (access to programs and curricula)
- Develop and deliver one-off programs, i.e. Continuing Soil Health Education
- CCSI Events Calendar provides information on upcoming field days, workshops, and webinars
- Communication trainings
- "Programs in a Box"

*Strategic Priority 1a: Continue to adapt and use existing training curriculum that encompasses beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels.*

*Strategic Priority 1b: Expand ICP Training to include opportunities to work with successful soil health practitioners*

- Activities include:
  - On-farm field trips with ICP staff and other partners preceded by class-room style soil health trainings.
  - Provide opportunities to see adoption of soil health systems in a variety of phases
  - Provide farmer-mentor opportunities
  - Develop virtual trainings based upon on-farm concepts

*Strategic Priority 1c: Develop strategies to meet farmers "where they are" with soil health adoption and chart ways to help them make incremental changes to their cropping system*

- Activities include:
  - Identify and utilize potential trainers
  - Identify topics

*Strategic Priority 1d: Establish consistent methods of delivering soil health demonstration trainings to ICP staff*

- Identify regional training leads
- Develop method to identify ICP staff and partners who need training along with levels of training needed
- Develop standard curriculum to ensure consistency of trainings across Indiana

*Strategic Priority 1e: Ensure new(er) ICP staff are identified and attend CCSI trainings and supported events*

- Each ICP partner has a training specialist or lead who identifies new(er) employees and level of training needed; Training lead will work with CCSI to enroll employees in trainings
- Maintain dataset of employees who have attended trainings

*Strategic Priority 1f: Develop “on-demand” trainings within CCSI Regions*

- Develop mechanism of communication for a topic of high interest / need for timely development and delivery of trainings
- Establish a catalogue of trainings offered along with suggested frequency
- Identify subject matter experts
- Develop self-guided basics
- Establish mentor program/access

*Strategic Priority 1g: Increase Staffing Capabilities*

- Obtain funding needed to increase staffing capacity
- Secure support from agribusiness and others to underwrite

KPIs

- Number and percent of projects implemented
- % increase in demand for services
- Number of percentage of counties holding CCSI-associated programs
- Number of non-CCSI-taught soil health programs
- Performance on ICP skills assessment
- Number of ICP staff attending trainings

**Goal 2: Expand knowledge, education, and collaboration with ag professionals, including farmers and youth advisors, on the long-term importance and management of soil health.**

Currently Situation:

CCIS offers limited support to local events such as:

- TNC training programs; Fisher Soil Health led training programs
- Local outreach efforts for youth education
- Collaboration with ag retailers on local events
- German American Ag Lender training pilot

Strategic Priority 2a: Invite and financially support youth ag advisors to soil health trainings.

- Leverage organizations that have contact lists to connect with youth ag advisors such as those leading FFA, 4H, and other ag-oriented youth organizations
- Inventory existing programs and identify gaps
- Explore obstacles to attending soil health trainings
- Explore and submit grants to financially support youth ag advisors' soil health training attendance

Strategic Priority 2b: Offer assistance with soil health programs

- Develop curriculum with reference to existing materials developed by CCSI, the NRCS Soil Health Division, the Soil Health Nexus, and American Farmland Trust
- Identify organizations engaged / seeking to expand soil health knowledge
- Evaluate capacity and identify gaps

Strategic Priority 2c: Engage existing partners to expand partnership

- Engage groups such as Indiana Farm Bureau to create and strengthen connection with new partners
- Assist local level partners to make new connections

Strategic Priority 2d: Develop survey systems to evaluate behavioral and attitude changes

KPIs

- Number of youth ag advisors who attend trainings
- Number of organizations and schools integrating soil health curriculums
- Number of students considering ag and conservation as a career
- Number of ag retailers providing information on soil health management systems
- Number of customers (acres) engaged in climate smart / sustainable production programs

## Goal #3: Engage and involve farmers in increasing adoption and promotion of soil health management systems on Indiana cropland

Current situation:

- CCSI supports and facilitates roundtables, workshops, and field days
- Agronomist is a technical resource for farmers
- Podcast, newsletters, and social media provide information streams
- Soil Health Events Calendar provides information about upcoming learning opportunities
- Training (presentation and media skills) for farmer-mentors
- CCSI website and YouTube provide learning opportunities
- The Root Project
- CCSI has a strong network of personal contacts

*Strategic Priority 3a: Identify and promote benefits / co-benefits of soil health practices*

- Develop a list and value of co-benefits
- Demonstrate economic benefits, both on-farm and within local communities
- Assess eco-system services, including down-stream water quality
- Emphasize economic consequences of soil loss, especially to middle and late adopters

*Strategic Priority 3b: Use county-level assessments to help identify local education needs*

- Work with partners to develop trainings, workshops, and other education/outreach methods to address these needs
- Work with partners to identify other gaps (financial, cultural, etc) that should be addressed

*Strategic Priority 3c: Increase mentorship opportunities at both farmer and staff levels*

- Identify potential mentors and mentees
- Develop and deploy mentor training program

*Strategic Priority 3d: Promote and support local level partnership efforts*

- Ensure conservation program opportunities are promoted at events and across agencies
- Work with local level partners to increase engagement of younger farmers and landowners on SWCD Boards, Extension Advisory Committees, FSA County Committees, and other groups leadership roles

KPIs

- Increase in number of acres with cover crops
- Increase in number of acres no-tilled
- Support/collaboration with X number of farmer-led round-tables
- Decrease in TMDLs
- 20% increase in workshop attendance
- 10% increase in number of farmers mentored
- 10% increase in ICP staff mentored

## Goal 4: Care for and encourage the growth and development of partnerships

### Current Situation:

- CCSI Regional Teleconferences share information across partnership / agency boundaries and provide opportunities for partner updates
- Program Manager “meet and greets” with local level partnerships provide opportunities to better understand individual LLP needs and connect them with other partners
- Newsletter, Website, Social media
- “Blank label” event support allows local level partners to use their time concentrating on program promotion/enrollment instead of things like event logistics
- CCSI staff provides updates at partner meetings
- CCSI staff attend conference to enhance the program’s network
- Leverage existing partnerships
- Facilitate introductions

### *Strategic Priority 4a: Partnership visioning sessions*

- Hold facilitated visioning sessions
- Articulate assessment of partners and identify roles
- Develop plan of action

### *Strategic Priority 4b: Care for and encourage the growth and development of partnerships*

- Add new partners to CCSI outreach
  - Enumerate current partner and identify level of interaction
  - Identify list of potential new partners, including identification of contact person; Develop and act on engagement strategies. *Note - ag retailers should be a priority*
    - Sales pitch - What can CCSI do for you?
    - Identify their current soil health initiatives and GAPS
    - Identify what the potential partner can bring to the table - both for CCSI and local level partnership
- Increase the number of collaborations
  - Identify potential new partners by networking at conferences and other events
  - Identify common goals / needs
  - Attend listening sessions

### KPIs

- Number of downloads and impressions
- Number of new collaborations
- Number of events supported
- Number of new partners introduced to planning
- Percent increase in self-identifying partners and strength of partnerships (survey)