

## Coon Creek Group learns about carbon opportunities

By GILLIAN POMPLUN  
Farmers have been waiting to learn more about what opportunities for them will come from the federal Inflation Reduction Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in August. The bill makes a historic investment to fight the impacts of climate change, and will put farmers in the thick of mitigation efforts.

Members of the Coon Creek Community Watershed Council began to learn more at their meeting on October 5. There, the nearly 100 people gathered heard presentations from Monroe County Land Conservation Department, Organic Valley (OV), Savanna Institute, Neutral Foods and CEO of Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) Missy Hughes.

Efforts to fight the impacts of climate change on farms are already underway in the private sector through the work of companies like Organic Valley, Neutral Foods and the Savanna Institute. More information will be coming soon about how public monies will be leveraged in the effort.

### Gathered at Gretebecks

The watershed council gathered at the farm of Organic Valley grass-fed dairy farmers Tucker and Becky Gretebeck – All Seasons Farm. The bottomlands of their farm in rural Cashton suffered severe impacts following runoff from the 2018 rain event that caused catastrophic flooding, and breached the Luckasson Dam on their land.

"You need look no further to see what climate resilience means than Tucker and Becky Gretebeck," Monroe County Land Conservation Director Bob Micheel said. "Here, where we sit, was covered in water above our heads following the breach of the dam in 2018. We can all see how the Gretebecks and the land have bounced back stronger than ever."

Micheel discussed the silvopasture demonstration project that was installed on the Gretebeck Farm in the Spring of 2022. The project, planting over 1,100 trees on the contour marking grazing paddocks, was a partnership effort with the Monroe County Climate Change Task Force, Savanna Institute, OV, Wisconsin Land+Water, and the Nature Conservancy.

"It took partners to make this project happen – from technical support to funding to volunteer labor," Micheel said. "This project will produce carbon sequestration benefits equal to removing 600 cars from the road."

Micheel said that the project would produce not only climate mitigation impacts, but also do more to reduce runoff that produces flooding, protect ground and surface water, and reduce soil erosion. These, he said, are the 'co-benefits' of the climate friendly project.

Micheel said the cost of the trees for the project was \$7 per tree, plus the cost of the protective tubes and zip ties. In total, the project cost \$8,411, and was accomplished with all volunteer labor.

See CARBON Page 8 Col 1



THIS SUNSET VIEW from the Kickapoo Orchard, with the corn maze in the foreground, captures one of those special moments in the Driftless. It is indeed a tranquil beauty. Photo by Rin Corvidae-Sylveter

## Harvest gets underway

# Great growing season is leading to high yields and good quality

### By CHARLEY PREUSSER

The harvest has begun in Crawford County and the initial results are rather encouraging by most accounts.

While the soybean harvest just got underway last week, both the yield and quality look very good.

Longtime Viroqua-area grower Todd Vesbach attributed this year's fine crop to timely rains and otherwise great growing weather. And, the recent dry spell is helping the machinery involved by providing great access to the fields.

The only delay to the soybean harvest was that in many cases the moisture content of the beans was above the acceptable level of 13 percent for storage. Growers were waiting to see the moisture level go down to avoid paying for the cost of drying with a decreased purchase price.

With heavy morning dew, lots of farmers waited until the afternoon to do the soybean harvest, looking for lower moisture levels.

How good are the soybean yields? Pretty darn good.

### Pretty darn good

"We're hearing about 50 to 60 and some cases even 70 bushels per acre," according to Chris Olson, from Olson Feeds and Seeds in Seneca.

Like Todd Vesbach, Olson attributed the big soybean crop to good growing conditions with the right amount of heat and moisture and timely rains.

And prices on soybeans look good as well. Olson noted last week that the price was in the \$12.60 to \$12.70 per bushel range.

One thing driving the price a bit are problems in other growing areas particularly in the west where it's hot and

dry from a persistent drought. Other areas to the south and east have experienced heavy rainfall and flooding.

Swede Knutson, a Ferryville farmer, was also just getting started on his soybeans last week. He confirmed that things looked good and saw the yield coming in at about 50 bushels to the acre.

"The beans are just getting dry enough to go," Knutson said of his crop this year.

Incidentally, many years local yields are closer to 30 to 40 bushels per acre.

### Ag agent agrees yield is up

The local UW-Extension Ag Agent Carolyn Ihde confirmed what others were saying about this year's soybean crop—the yield is up.

"It's just getting started, Ihde said last week. "It's just great weather to start the harvest."

The ag agent mentioned that corn west of the river in Iowa was already being harvested, but the corn harvest was a ways off yet in Crawford County.

"We're all done with the corn silage at this point," Ihde said. "And, the fourth cutting of hay is done. The soybeans are a week ahead of last year, but six days behind the average."

While many farmers are enjoying the current dry weather for the harvest, Ihde is concerned about the possibility of drought going forward.

"Everybody loves a dry fall," Ihde said. "It makes it easy to get the crops in, but we need to be concerned about how much moisture is in the subsoil."

Ihde noted that Iowa is very dry and all but 12 counties are in a drought at this point. She added that a common thought is that drought moves from west to east.

Despite all the good news about the high yields and good quality of this year's soybean crop, there is a dark cloud out there. This year there are shipping problems. The dry year out west has affected the water levels in the Mississippi River. Lots of local soybeans are shipped by barge to the Port of New Orleans.

The trouble is the low water levels in the Lower Mississippi means less can be loaded on the barges from St. Louis on south.

The navigational channel in the Upper Mississippi River is maintained at nine feet by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

However, in the Lower Mississippi River the navigational channel is maintained to the depth of 11 feet. The deeper channel allows barges to be loaded with more weight normally. But, with the lower levels of water in the river the

See HARVEST Page 8 Col 1

## 96th District Loren and Jayne running for a seat in state assembly

By GILLIAN POMPLUN

Jayne Swiggum will face off with two-term incumbent Loren Oldenburg on the November 8 election ballot to represent Wisconsin's 96th Assembly District. Swiggum, a Democrat, will contest with Oldenburg, a Republican, for the right to represent the district that includes Crawford, Vernon and parts of Monroe counties.

Both candidates are lifelong residents of the district. Swiggum grew up in rural Gays Mills. Oldenburg is from rural Viroqua.

Swiggum says she was born here, grew up here, and will likely die here.

Oldenburg points out that he is a fourth generation farmer on a farm that has been in his family for 144 years.

### Jayne Swiggum

Jayne Swiggum, whose campaign literature bills her as 'Nurse Jayne Swiggum,' is an ER nurse at Gunderson Health System in La Crosse. The 55-year-old Swiggum lives on Old Gays Road, in rural Gays Mills.

Swiggum attended North Crawford High School, and went on to attend Viterbo University in LaCrosse, where she earned a BA degree in English Education in 1989. She returned to school, and earned a BS degree in nursing from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1999. She is married to Ed Swiggum, and has three stepchildren and three grandchildren.

"My husband and I are working class folks from Gays Mills – we aren't wealthy people," Swiggum said. "I think of the constituents I would have if elected, and I think of them as my neighbors. I think that all representatives need to think of the citizens in their district this way, and if an elected representative can help people, then that is my definition of successful government."

As might be expected, as a nurse, Swiggum sees healthcare as one of the top priorities that must be addressed.

"Working as a nurse for 22 years, I've seen what the American health plan is – it's basically 'don't get sick,'" Swiggum said. "Americans just can't afford the cost of healthcare, which I see as a right."

Swiggum says a top priority for her, if elected, would be to ensure that the State of Wisconsin accepts funding from the federal government to expand BadgerCare, a move the Republican-controlled legislature has declined to take.

"We need to accept the federal money for BadgerCare expansion, and increase the income limit 150 times," Swiggum said. "If the system has more subscribers then it will be cheaper for everyone."

Swiggum says that Wisconsin needs to ensure that all residents have access to affordable healthcare so that they can access the care they need. The experienced local nurse pointed out that medical debt is not dismissible in bankruptcy, and that the cost of healthcare for someone with a serious medical condition can be ruinous. She says this means some that people will avoid getting the care they need, because of the cost.

### Public education

Education is another top priority for Swiggum. She emphasized that the funding formulas for public schools need to be equitable so that students

See VOTE Page 9 Col 1



TODD VESBACH AND HIS SONS were busy harvesting soybeans Sunday in fields along Pine Knob Road in Utica Township. The Vesbachs, like many local farmers, were very happy with the harvest this year for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the substantial yields they were getting.

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# Carbon as a part of farm income stream and climate solution discussed

## CARBON from Page 1

“When the day came to start planting the trees, it was a daunting prospect, and I didn’t see how we could possibly get it all done,” Tucker Gretebeck remembered. “But then, all these volunteers showed up and before we knew it, the trees were planted.”

Gretebeck said it had taken 12 volunteers 12 hours on two different days to plant the trees. He said that he and his children had put the electric fencing in place to keep the cattle in their paddocks, and out of the tree rows.

“My kids are experts in electric fencing how,” Gretebeck joked.

Michael said that OV and Wisconsin Land+Water plan to model and monitor the carbon sequestration benefits of the pilot project in order to guide future programs that reward farmers for the climate friendly practices they implement on their farms.

## Savanna Institute

The Savanna Institute is an organization approved by USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service to provide technical support to landowners interested in agroforestry projects. North Crawford graduate Keefe Keeley serves as the Institute’s executive director, and was present to address members of the council.

“After my mother, Jane Keeley, almost lost her life in flash flooding in the Tainter Creek Watershed in 2016, flooding has become a very personal issue for me,” Keeley said. “So, it is important to me to find ways to mitigate the impacts of climate change that are causing the catastrophic flooding we’re increasingly experiencing in the Driftless Region.”

Keeley said that it turns out that planting trees is one of the best ways to remove excess levels of carbon from the atmosphere and sequester it in the soil.

“This isn’t rocket science,” Keeley said. “What we need to do is find ways to infiltrate more water into the soil from large rain events, and slow the water down, and planting trees is very effective for that.”

Keeley said that the goal of the Savanna Institute is to make farming part of the climate change solution – and to make it work for the farmer.

“We can provide technical assistance, and help secure funding for agroforestry projects,” Keeley said. “We will help farmers put trees to work for the farm and for the planet.”

## Organic Valley

Organic Valley Sustainability Manager Nicole Rakobitsch discussed the \$25 million Climate Smart Agri-

culture grant the co-op had received, and their goals for use of the funding.

“Our goal at Organic Valley is to be a climate neutral company by 2050,” Rakobitsch said. “Rather than paying farmers and foresters outside our co-op for carbon offsets, we are pioneering a ‘carbon inseting’ program instead, helping member farmers install climate friendly projects on their farms, and paying them for maintaining those practices on the landscape.”

## Neutral Foods

According to Neutral Vice President of Product & Commercialization Jim Jarman, Neutral Foods is the first carbon neutral food company in the United States, and offers carbon neutral dairy products nationwide.

“We are on a mission to radically reduce the nearly 37 percent of global emissions the agriculture industry produces,” Jarman explained.

Neutral was started in 2019 in Portland, Oregon, and is a national brand that works directly with farmers to reduce the carbon footprint of dairy products. Neutral has organic and conventional carbon neutral dairy solutions for retail, food service, and ingredient needs and will be adding more categories in coming months.

“Neutral works directly with farmers to identify projects that have both a carbon-footprint impact as well as other co-benefits that farmers are looking for,” Jarman explained. “Many farmers are looking for opportunities to keep improving the footprint of their farms, but often the solutions can be complicated or expensive, or both. That’s where Neutral comes in. We work with farmers to identify relevant projects, scope them, bring technical expertise, and then fund them – in full or in part – including collaboration with other groups like NRCS.”

Jarman says the company has a menu of about a dozen intervention types that they support for farmers, depending on the needs of their individual farm.

“And we don’t tell farmers which ones they should do, we ask them which co-benefits they’ve already been thinking about and then work backwards to understand where we can help them reach those goals,” Jarman

said. “Co-benefits can range from increased animal welfare, shade, and biodiversity from silvopasture plantings, to improved animal health from forage improvements, to better soil health from improved manure management processes.”

Jarman pointed out that all of the projects have the positive impact of simultaneously mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, which allows Neutral to fulfill their commitment to neutralizing the carbon footprint of their business.

“Neutral combines our up-front funding capability, plus our technical expertise, to turn project ideas into action,” Jarman explained. “We do also often collaborate with other public (eg, NRCS) and

goodness consumers demand with none of the carbon footprint.”

## Economic development

WEDC CEO Missy Hughes seemed right at home on the Gretebeck farm. Hughes spent close to two decades working with Organic Valley prior to being hired by Governor Tony Evers for the state’s top economic development job.

“Flooding has been a big problem for the Driftless Region for a long time, and the impacts of climate change are making things worse,” Hughes said. “It’s going to take a community to tackle the problems, and the work of watershed councils like this one are pointing the way.”

Hughes said that WEDC

water is an asset that we must protect.”

Hughes said that a prime directive Governor Evers had given her when she was hired was to improve the economies of rural Wisconsin. For this reason, the Governor had founded the Office of Rural Prosperity, and housed it under the WEDC umbrella.

“The role of the Office of Rural Prosperity is to insure that rural communities have an avenue into the resources of state government,” Hughes explained. “That office can connect rural leaders to the resources and partnerships that are available to assist them in developing their economies.”

Hughes told the group that the things that are happening in the Coon Creek Watershed as a result of their efforts are “groundbreaking,” and will provide a relevant example statewide.

## In other business

In other business, the group:

- heard from Coon Creek Community Watershed Council historian Marc Moilien that the 700-foot change in elevation in the Coon Creek Watershed between Cashton and Stoddard is greater than the change in elevation between Stoddard and the Gulf of Mexico

- heard that Anna Andrzejewski and Caroline Gottschalk-Druschke of UW-Madison were present with their students to gather oral history stories of conservation and flooding in the Coon Creek Watershed

- learned that the group had applied for a DATCP Producer-Led Watershed Council grant for 2023, and also for a DNR Surface Water grant for comprehensive planning for the watershed

- heard from Monroe County Land Use Planner Roxie Anderson that they had placed a weather/rainfall monitoring station on the Rulland’s Coulee branch of Coon Creek, just below the Gretebeck farm, bringing the total number of stations deployed to 16, with 10 more in the works

- learned from Roxie Anderson that National Weather Service-LaCrosse has hired a new service hydrologist who will continue to partner with Monroe Climate Change Task Force on integrating the data from the weather/rainfall monitoring stations into their Southwest Wisconsin Hydrology Monitor page, depicting river level and rainfall quantity information for the Little LaCrosse and Kickapoo river watersheds, and the Coon Creek watershed

- heard that the group’s next meeting would take place on Wednesday, Nov. 2, with dinner and socializing at 6 p.m., and the meeting starting at 7 p.m., at the Coon Creek Conservation Club. The guest speaker will be Vernon County Forester Nick Gilman who will discuss forest health.



96th ASSEMBLY candidate Jayne Swiggum is seen in animated conversation with Savanna Institute’s David Bruce prior to the start of the meeting.



JAKE SCHMITZ of Neutral Foods (center) is seen in conversation with WEDC CEO Missy Hughes (left) prior to the start of the meeting.

private (eg, farmers, coops, etc) sources of support. In fact, we’re working on a unique partnership now that will make this process even easier for farmers, and we look forward to announcing that in the coming months.”

Jarman told the group that one of the key things that sets Neutral apart in their approach is that they work directly with farmers to generate the emissions mitigation projects, and then “inset” those carbon benefits, so they can neutralize the carbon footprint of their business.

“This means the greenhouse gas emission reductions or removals from our projects accrue to our company,” Jarman said. “We aren’t selling those benefits to others, we are using the actual emissions mitigation to make sure we deliver on our promise to consumers: to offer delicious carbon-neutral foods that deliver all the

is the state’s lead economic development agency, dedicated to improving the state’s economy and preparing for the future.

“Agriculture contributes \$108 billion to our state’s economy, and then there’s the forestry industry,” Hughes said. “Farmers and foresters are all struggling to adjust to the impacts of climate change, and half of the weight of a tree is composed of carbon, making trees a premier climate solution.”

Hughes said that the state’s natural resources are crucial to the state’s economy, and must be protected and stewarded.

“Seventy-eight percent of our state is surrounded by water, from the Mississippi River to Lake Michigan to Lake Superior,” Hughes pointed out. “Our state is home to 20 percent of the planet’s freshwater, and so,

# Mississippi River levels challenge the harvest

## HARVEST from Page 1

navigational channel in the Lower Mississippi has now been reduced to nine feet.

The result is less can be loaded on any given barge, so more barges are needed to carry the product because their load size is reduced by the lower channel depth.

Less barges mean higher costs for the existing barges. The result is farmers with soybeans selling locally in Prairie du Chien are getting \$11 a bushel instead of \$13 as the grain shippers must price in the higher cost of barges, unless they contracted earlier.

“It’s always something,” Todd Vesbach said of the shipping problems. “We have a good yield, a lot better than average, but we’re getting less from Gavilon because of the barge delays and the pricing.”

Todd’s son Ryan Vesbach was headed to the United Co-op, the former ADM in Boscobel, with truckload of soybeans last Sunday. From there, the beans would be rail shipped to a processing facility in Illinois,

The Vesbachs, like some of the other larger growers, have the capacity to store half of their crop on the farm.

Gavilon’s Cody Metsker, who works at the Prairie du Chien grain-loading facility explained the enormity of the problem for that facility.

The depth of river is the lowest he or other Gavilon employees at the facility can remember. Since the company relies so heavily on barges to transport the grain they receive, their volume maybe off by 50 to 75 percent based on river logistics and the decreased barge availability.

Right now the company is paying four times as much to get barges and that cost is passed on to the grower unless they have pre-existing contracts in place.

Metsker explained that Gavilon does not have large storage capabilities at the Prairie du Chien facility. The company can store 150,000 bushels

Feed and grain.com confirmed what was being reported locally.

Tight barge supply has resulted in low grain barge

volumes and high rates, especially recently, according to the news service.

For the week ending September 24, year-to-date downbound grain volumes on the Mississippi river reached 23.9 million tons, four percent lower than the five-year average and 10 percent lower than the same period last year.

Since the beginning of September, 1,890 grain barges have unloaded in New Orleans, about 39 percent fewer than the five-year average.

Similarly, barge freight rates have increased steadily since early August.

The tight barge supply is problematic for grain shippers heading into harvest. Unless barge supply improves, the increased demand for barges from grain shippers during harvest will likely put even more upward pressure on barge rates, the news service noted.

Oh one more thing, Extension Ag Agent Carolyn Ihde reminded farmers to take the time to be safe out there and understand where things are going and where others are located during the harvest.

## NORTH CRAWFORD SCHOOL DISTRICT NOTICE OF ANNUAL SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING

Section 120.08(1) Wis. Stats.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN To the qualified electors of the North Crawford School District, Villages of Gays Mills, Soldiers Grove, Mt. Sterling and Bell Center, and the Towns of Clayton, Freeman, Haney, Marietta, Scott and Utica, Crawford County, Wisconsin; Town of Akan, Richland County, Wisconsin; and Towns of Franklin and Kickapoo, Vernon County, Wisconsin; North Crawford Schools:

THAT THE BUDGET HEARING will be held at 6:00 p.m., **Monday, October 24, 2022**, in the Large Group Room of the K-12 Facility in accordance with Section 65.90(4) Wis. Stats.

THAT THE ANNUAL DISTRICT MEETING of said District for the purpose of transacting such business as may properly come before the meeting, in accordance with Wisconsin Statutes, will be held in the Large Group Room of the K-12 Facility, on **MONDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2022, immediately following the Budget Hearing.**



Dated this 29th day of September, 2022.

Judy Powell, Clerk

### CRAWFORD COUNTY

#### Chemical Clean Sweep, Electronics Recycling & Household RX Drug Collection

**Friday, October 21, 2022**  
**10:00 am — 2:00 pm**  
Crawford County Highway Shop  
21515 State Hwy 27, Seneca WI

**In effort to minimize close contact due to COVID-19, please make sure ALL items are loaded in the rear of the vehicle, trunk, or truck bed to be unloaded by event staff.**

**Stay in your vehicle at all times and the event staff will unload items at each station.**

#### Who may participate in the Crawford County Clean Sweep?

- Any Crawford County resident who can provide proof of residency.

#### Chemicals acceptable under the Clean Sweep

- Unused, damaged, cancelled, banned, or otherwise unwanted agricultural chemicals, including herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, rodenticides, wood preservatives, finishes, and veterinary supplies
- Household chemicals including paint, stain, solvents, acid washes, engine cleaners, used oil and anti-freeze

**\*\*Latex paint is not hazardous when dried/solidified. Please see our website for disposal tips\*\***

- Household CFL bulbs and fluorescent tubes will be accepted (for qty over 25, a \$.50/bulb charge will apply)
- We will collect up to 200lbs. per household at no charge — Larger quantities will pay disposal charges

#### Electronic Recycling

- Televisions & Microwaves — **\$10 Charge**
- Dehumidifiers & Air Conditioners — **\$15 Charge**
- Misc. Electronics (Computers, monitors, printers, scanners, keyboards, VCR’s, DVD players etc.) — **No Charge**

#### Unacceptable Items

- Radioactive, including Smoke Alarms
- Oil Filters, Explosives, & Ammunition
- Propane Cylinders & Compressed Gas Cylinders
- Appliances (washers, dryers, refrigerators etc.)

#### Transporting Materials to Clean Sweep

- DO NOT MIX** like or unlike materials
- Leave materials in original container
- Leaking containers may be placed, as is, in another container-label outside container

#### Prescription Drug Collection is for households only!

**Questions ?? Call the LAND CONSERVATION OFFICE: 608-326-0270**

Please keep in mind we might have to postpone or reschedule the event due to COVID-19. Please call or check our website [www.crawfordcountywi.org/land-conservation-home.html](http://www.crawfordcountywi.org/land-conservation-home.html) for updates.

(Pub. 10/6/22, 10/13/22) WNAXLP