



KALAMAZOO  
CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT

# Kalamazoo Conservation District

## Annual Report 2023



*"Protecting Soil & Water for Generations;  
not only today's generation but future generations."*



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Kalamazoo Conservation District is a governmental agency established under state law to carry out programs for conservation, use and development of soil, water, and related resources at the local level.

Established in 1946, KCD is an independent county level resource assisting Kalamazoo County residents in resolving natural resource concerns. The District is self-funded serving the public with revenue obtained through an annual tree and shrub sale, grants, sponsorships and donations.

At KCD, we partner with federal and state agencies to coordinate and implement conservation and environmental programs throughout the community. We have capabilities in protection, development and management of natural resources.



## Conservation District Board of Directors

Ed Cagney, Chair

Lynn Coville, Vice Chair

Mike Klooster, Treasurer

Tricia Keala, Director

David Benac, Director

## Conservation District Staff

Molly Buckham, MAEAP Technician

Linda Zabik, Conservation Program Assistant

Elizabeth Rochow, District Manager

Sara Heutteman, BCK-CISMA Invasive Species Coordinator—housed at Barry CD

Patrick Gordon, Produce Safety Technician—housed at Berrien CD

## Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Staff

Di'Shun Melbert, District Conservationist

Brandon Fisher, Soil Conservationist

### **2024 BOARD SCHEDULE**

The KCD Board is scheduled to meet at 8 am on the third Friday of the month at the District Office. Please check the district website for up-to-date meeting information.

\*\*note changes to the scheduled dates

These meetings are open to the public and everyone is welcome to attend!

**January 19**  
**February 23\*\***  
**March 15**  
**April 19 cancelled**  
**May 17**  
**June 21**  
**July 19**  
**August 16**  
**September 20**  
**October 18**  
**November 15**  
**December 20**

Dear Friends of the District,

Good things are happening at the Kalamazoo Conservation District! In 2023, the District completed an Urban Agriculture Community Needs Assessment survey. The goal is to use the results of this survey to guide the District and others in their support for small and urban farmers. For KCD, April showers brought the annual seedling sale which resulted in over 12,000 seedlings planted in 2023! During the summer months, thousands of passenger scrap tire were collected. These events provided by the District continue to be a popular program helping county residents recycle old car tires. KCD is pleased to announce that we were awarded a second MDNR Wildlife Habitat Grant in order to continue improving oak habitat in the Gourdneck State Game Area. In August, the District invited our area leaders to our Next Generation of Agriculture Tour in order to learn more about the importance of agriculture in Kalamazoo County. Throughout the year, KCD continues to actively provide land owner assistance through MAEAP (Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program), BCK-CISMA (Barry, Calhoun, Kalamazoo—Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area), and Produce Safety Programs. We hope you enjoy reading about our programs, partners, and accomplishments from 2023. All of these are only possible with the support of Kalamazoo County residents. Whether you work with our technicians, purchase trees at our sale, or participate in any of our other programs, we thank you for joining us in conservation efforts.

Elizabeth Rochow, KCD Manager

## MAEAP: Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program



The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program is an innovative, proactive program that helps farms of all sizes and commodities voluntarily prevent or minimize agricultural pollution risks. That's why the Kalamazoo Conservation District is helping farmers to enroll in MAEAP - the voluntary program that assists farmers adopt cost-effective practices that reduce soil erosion and water runoff into ponds, streams, and rivers. This helps farmers comply with state and federal laws. Through this program, conservation districts are able to recognize and reward top stewards of the land. There are four categories of recognition: 1) Cropping, 2) Livestock, 3) Farmstead, and 4) Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat.

In 2023, the Kalamazoo MAEAP program conducted 3 new MAEAP verifications, 16 MAEAP reverifications, 32 risk assessments, and over 85 risk reductions. In addition 2023, \$3,000 in cost share funds were distributed to Kalamazoo County farms which included the following items and/or practices: spill kits, analyses of drinking water for nitrates and coliform bacteria, manure and soil nutrient testing, backflow valves, roof gutters, fire extinguishers, and retaining blocks.



The MAEAP Field Event, *Understanding Carbon Credits and Carbon Markets*, was held on September 6. This program featured Tess Van Gorder of the MI Farm Bureau who provided education and public policy regarding carbon credits and markets and Monica Jean from MSU Extension who discussed the implementation and adaption of farming practices to create carbon credits. Josh Appleby of MDARD and Molly Buckham provided MAEAP program information and updates.

If you are interested in learning more about MAEAP and MAEAP verification, please contact the office!

### Produce Safety Program

The focus of this program is to assess risks involved with the growing, handling, harvesting, storing, and transportation of fresh produce, covered by the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR). All services offered are free, voluntary, and confidential. The primary goal is to assist area growers to reach or maintain compliance with regulations and educate on best practices for preventing contamination of fresh produce. Southwest Michigan's Produce Safety Technician, Patrick Gordon, is a part of the Michigan On-Farm Produce Safety Team. The team is a close working group that includes the six Produce Safety Technicians throughout the state, Michigan State University Extension, and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD).

Last year our technician worked extensively to continue fostering relationships with local partners and continued to work closely with the ValleyHUB, MDARD, MSUE, and other agencies and organizations planning and facilitating multiple events catered to growers of SW Michigan. This has allowed our technician to reach an even greater audience, educate additional growers on the Produce Safety Rule, and work to ensure that produce reaching consumers is of great quality and safe to eat. Attendees were able to learn more about growing and supplying safer produce, what technicians can do for them, and how to schedule farm visits.

In fiscal year 2023, the SW Michigan Produce Safety Program conducted 69 farm visits, completed 18 Produce Safety Risk Assessments and two On Farm Readiness Reviews, worked with farms to implement 180 risk reduction practices, published three Newsletter articles and held/assisted with four educational outreach events. During 2024 Patrick will continue participating as an expert in round tables and trainings for farmers at multiple events, writing and submitting articles for the Produce Safety Team newsletter, and working to create a larger footprint in the coverage area to assist a greater number of farmers in Southwest Michigan.

Please contact Patrick Gordon, the KCD office, or the Produce Safety Team Website to learn more!

## BCK-Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area



Barry, Calhoun, Kalamazoo Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (BCK CISMA) continues to develop partnerships in the tri-county area in an effort to increase awareness and treatment of invasive species. Services are available to control high-priority species, such as mile-a-minute weed, Japanese knotweed, phragmites, and black swallow wort.

In 2023, the CISMA strike team was able to control invasive species across 149 acres, the majority of which was mile-a-minute weed at 120 acres in eastern Calhoun County. This vine is known for growing up to six inches in one day! The goal is to eradicate or at least limit the spread of this invasive vine.

### **Red Swamp Crayfish**

Another year of controlling red swamp crayfish in Vicksburg, MI resulted in over 480 adult red swamp crayfish and hundreds of babies removed from a tributary of the Kalamazoo River. This was completed once a week at night using headlamps and hand-grabbing individuals from a creek. The goal is to reduce their spread to uninfested areas down stream.



### **Spotted Lanternfly Surveys**

Spotted Lanternfly has caused concern in the agricultural community especially among grape growers. Adults feed by sucking the sap from plants which can reduce grape yield and can kill young plants. As adults feed in large numbers, they secrete honeydew which is a sugary, sticky substance that sooty mold can grow on. When mold grows, it can block sunlight from reaching the plant and stop photosynthesis from occurring. While they feed on grapes and other plants, its preferred food source is the invasive tree-of-heaven which is their host plant in native China.



In coordination with MDARD, the CISMA strike team again monitored shipping and travel routes for spotted lanternflies. This was done using traps on trees that attract these bugs. We are happy to report no individuals were discovered. The threat of these insects is ever increasing with new sightings found in Indiana and Illinois in 2023.



In 2024, we look forward to expanding our outreach efforts for mile-a-minute weed and continuing to assist landowners in controlling invasive species in Barry, Calhoun, and Kalamazoo counties. We will have landing blitz events taking place at popular boating access sites in each county to promote “clean, drain, dry” procedures for boaters. We will work with local contractors and municipalities to train seasonal staff on some key invasive species to look out for and educate on best management practices during the growing season. We'll also work with partners to schedule workshops and presentations to reach landowners and volunteers interested in managing invasive species.

For more information regarding CISMA, please visit the KCD website!



## Kalamazoo County Urban Agriculture Community Needs Assessment Survey

The KCD conducted an Urban Agriculture Community Needs Assessment Survey, employing digital surveys, focus groups, and engagement with farmers' markets and meetings. Through this process, we connected with local small-scale farmers, beginning farmers, and underrepresented households to focus on the agricultural needs of our urban areas. The goal was to determine the farmers' primary technical and business needs, explore partnership opportunities, and gather feedback on urban agriculture farm infrastructure needs, including leasing space and equipment rental.

The survey was designed in collaboration with agricultural education leaders at the Kalamazoo Valley Community College's Food Innovation Center and The W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. The survey was open between January and May 2023, with continued outreach to our list of farmers, agencies, and other partnering groups during this time to encourage participation. A Spanish language version of the survey was prepared to prioritize outreach to relevant organizations. Feedback was also sought from local organizations regarding their understanding of gaps in urban agricultural programming and infrastructure.



There were 65 completed surveys submitted and of those 54 were farmers and 11 were partnering agency personnel. Additional demographic information such as race (25% non-white), gender (72% female), and income level were collected for eligibility participation in USDA farm bill programs and other potential grants. All the survey data and results are available on the Kalamazoo Conservation District website.

During the community needs assessment process, it was apparent that numerous resources exist in Kalamazoo County that support urban and small-scale farmers, including technical and business-related topics. KCD plans to catalog these resources and publish them on our website as a convenient reference for urban and small-scale farmers.

Composting systems and scaling up production emerged as top priorities for both farmers and agency personnel. Common interests among farmers included urban food forests, soil health, cover crops, conservation tillage, and fruit trees. Agency personnel prioritized environmental contamination, climate change adaptation/mitigation strategies, water conservation and irrigation.

The survey highlighted environmental contamination as a significant training need according to agency personnel, although it ranked lower for farmers. Only a small number of farmers reported having their soil evaluated, despite growing food for themselves and others. Agricultural food safety training was not a high priority for farmers, but it could be combined with other more desired training programs as a way of providing this priority information.

Business-related needs overlapped considerably between farmers and agency personnel, including city and township ordinances related to urban agriculture, USDA farm bill programs, business management and enterprise planning, and adapting existing buildings for agricultural use. City and township ordinances related to urban agriculture were a top concern for both groups, with several farmers reporting that they were unfamiliar with local ordinances. Among urban farmers, half reported experiencing ordinance issues related to their farms. Although leasing space was believed to be a farmer priority for agency personnel, only a few farmers expressed the same interest when presented with several other technical training opportunities. However, in a separate question with fewer competing choices, 57% of farmers said they were interested in renting space with greenhouse space, ground to grow small crops, and indoor grow building space in the top three. Grant writing was also deemed an important need for farmers.

The survey indicated that 83% of agency personnel felt a need for an urban agriculture mentoring program in Kalamazoo County, while approximately 64% of existing farmers were open to mentoring someone. Mentoring opportunities and resources will be included on the KCD's urban ag resources.

(Continued on next page)

## Kalamazoo County Urban Agriculture Community Needs Assessment Survey

Based on the needs assessment process and survey results, the KCD and its community partners are well-positioned to address the identified needs of the urban agriculture community. The feedback will be used to provide outreach to those who will benefit from conservation programs, technical assistance, and farm bill programs. The feedback will also be used to plan, design, and implement future conservation-related workshops, informational sessions, and practice demonstrations that will best meet the needs of our urban community. Existing staff, such as the Produce Safety and MAEAP Technicians and the strong NRCS partnerships can help address the highest-priority technical needs.

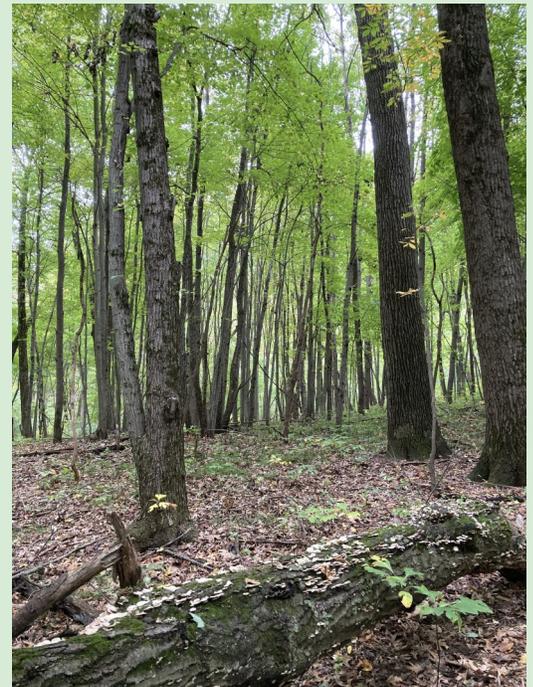
### Oak Habitat Improvement

The Kalamazoo Conservation District is thrilled to announce that they have received a second Wildlife Habitat Grant from the MDNR. This project will provide oak management on 60 of the 223 acres in the Northeast unit of the Gourneck State Game Area (SGA).

The Gourneck SGA in Kalamazoo County, MI was established in 1941 and was gradually enlarged during the following three decades. It is located within the City of Portage and because of its location, Gourneck SGA uniquely serves as a model for urban State Game Areas. Historically, this area was an oak barren/savannah/woodland community bordering grassland on the south. Upon settler arrival in the early 1800's, it was used for agriculture and then later planted with several stands of red pine. Gourneck SGA was purchased as public hunting property and has been primarily managed to provide habitat for white-tailed deer, wild turkey, eastern cottontail, fox squirrels and wood ducks. Species of Greatest Conservation Need including Eastern box turtle, Eastern massasauga, blue racer, monarch butterfly and others have been documented in the oak communities which also provide habitat for migratory and resident birds, reptiles, and amphibians and other wildlife. There are four units that make up the Gourneck SGA complex totaling 2,293 acres. All four of the units share many of the same cover types including oak, mixed upland deciduous, herbaceous open land and various wetland types including rare prairie fen.

This habitat project takes place in an area with a mature oak canopy, but with fire suppression and no management, the forested area is becoming increasingly colonized with shade tolerant red maples. The oak habitat will be improved by cutting and treating selected red maple trees in this subcanopy while leaving the oak mast trees. The invasive understory shrubs will also be removed. This will open the forest canopy as well as clear out the undesirable undergrowth allowing shade intolerant oak regeneration and promoting growth of the previously suppressed native herbaceous layer. Developing this wildlife-friendly matrix of oak habitat will benefit game and nongame species as well as a wide array of migrant and resident bird species and other wildlife.

This and other projects help grow partnerships between the MDNR, Kalamazoo Conservation District, City of Portage, National Wild Turkey Federation, the Audubon Society of Kalamazoo, county residents, and other groups which will ensure the further management and the relevance of the Gourneck SGA in the years to come. This project is done with the assistance of the MDNR Wildlife Habitat Grant to enhance wildlife habitat. These grants are funded through a portion of hunting and fishing licenses that are sold each year with the purpose of providing funding to conservation partners to assist the Wildlife Division with developing or improving wildlife habitat for game species.



## NRCS Partnership

Each year the Conservation District works directly with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service to recruit agricultural producers for the Federal Farm Bill Programs such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). These programs not only offer valuable technical assistance to Kalamazoo County farmers and landowners, helping them become better stewards of the land, but also contribute to the local economy by bringing in thousands of federal dollars to fund conservation practices. This money has a direct impact on the success of local farms, businesses, and contractors.

NRCS and KCD have consistently worked together over the years to increase conservation in the county and funding for conservation. In Fiscal Year 2023 NRCS contracted 1600 acres and obligated \$238,000 of funding to implement conservation efforts across the county. Moving forward in 2024 Kalamazoo County NRCS, will continue to work with the KCD to bring more cropland acres into conservation, incorporate the Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative to better serve urban/small farm producers, and address the invasive species plaguing our forested acres.

Contact Di'Shun Melbert for more information.

### Annual Reforestation Seedling Sale

KCD had another record breaking tree sale, supplying over 12,000 seedlings to local customers. It's amazing that Kalamazoo County residents planted so many seedlings!

Thank you to our dedicated tree crew volunteers who put in 117 hours wrapping, sorting, and bundling the seedlings in preparation for the tree sale and 32 hours during the seedling pick up days. Our tree sale would not be possible without the wonderful volunteers!

We are in need of assistance with the 2024 sale in April. Please contact the office for volunteer details.



## District Events and Activities

### Next Generation of Agriculture Tour

On August 18, KCD hosted Kalamazoo County leaders as a way to educate them about the economic and environmental importance of agriculture in Kalamazoo county for their informed decision making. MI State Representatives, the drain commissioners office, the Kalamazoo county board of commissioners, several county townships, the City of Kalamazoo and others were represented.



The day began with a luncheon prepared with chicken, fruits, and, vegetables sourced from Kalamazoo County farms. Presentation topics included agricultural education for future farmers, precision agriculture, and regenerative farming practices that are used by local farmers. Everyone boarded a bus for the tour which included Myers Farm, a dairy; The Giving Garden, a community garden; and Wiley Farm, a specialty crop farm. At each stop we were able to meet and hear from producers about their natural resource achievements, concerns, and challenges. Besides eating ice cream at the dairy and fresh watermelon at Wiley's, a highlight of the day was learning about soil health and making observations from the Soil Health Rainfall simulation Demonstration.



We would like to express our gratitude to the Kalamazoo Farm Bureau and Enbridge as a major sponsors and for providing input and assistance for this event. Many thanks to Noreen Heikes, Sara Pion, Ed Cagney, Mitch Klein, Climate Field View, Lynn Coville, Ricardo Miller, Rich and Dawn Myers, Jeremy Jubenville, Mike Klooster, Brenda Kolkman, Di'Shun Melbert, Kurt Wiley, Christine Charles, Taylor Ulbrich, Dean Baas, and everyone who made this an educational and special day!



### Passenger Scrap Tire Collection Events

For a second year, KCD offered scrap tire collection events which were made possible with grant funds from Michigan EGLE's Scrap Tire Program. These are community-based grants that support local municipal tire cleanups. During the three summer events, four semi trailers were filled with more than 3,200 passenger tires! These were collected from 245 households throughout 19 zip codes in Kalamazoo County. The tires were hauled off to be recycled.



KCD is grateful for all of the volunteers and College Hunks who helped make these events possible! We would also like to thank the City of Kalamazoo, Schoolcraft Township, and Perkins Tire for providing collection locations and support.

Not only does this project provide assistance with discarding scrap tires legally, the tires are recycled and can be used for a variety of purposes. Road Commission of Kalamazoo County has been participating in a few chip seal projects that have used rubber from scrap tires.



KALAMAZOO  
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# Kalamazoo Conservation District Awards

## 2023 Conservation Farm of the Year

### Jared Harmon - Maple Ridge Farm

The Kalamazoo Conservation District Board and Staff would like to recognize Maple Ridge Farm as the 2023 Conservation Farm of the Year. Jared Harmon was interested in getting involved with MAEAP when he first learned about the program as a newly hired Conservation District technician. At the time of the MAEAP technicians' first visit, he was farming 3.5 acres of the family farm and had a yak, two highland steers, a dexter bull, and some pheasants. Jared's enthusiasm to move forward with MAEAP made it easy to make the required changes to his farming operation and within just a few months, he was verified in the Farmstead, Cropping, and Livestock systems. Examples of a few of the changes that needed to be addressed before verification were adding gutters, an odor management plan, soil tests, manure management plan, and water testing. Jared has since expanded to farming 25 acres and has a herd of Texas longhorns, beef cattle, and dairy goats.



Soon after his MAEAP verification in the farmstead, cropping, and livestock systems, he learned about a new system that he could pursue and be verified in the Forest, Wetland, and Habitat (FWH) system. Jared has 120 acres of wooded land along the Kalamazoo River that would greatly benefit from a management plan. He worked with NRCS to prepare a Forest Management Plan, which is a required component for FWH Verification. Jared met all of the requirements for this system and was verified in the FWH system in September 2023. This makes Maple Ridge Farm the first farm in Kalamazoo County to be MAEAP verified in all four systems!

Jared's father and grandfather operated the farm and raised polled herefords until 2015 when the beef herd was sold after the passing of his father. Jared moved back to the family farm in 2016 and is currently working to expand his

herd of registered Texas Longhorns and beef cattle. His long-range plan involves reclaiming pasture land and implementing rotational grazing on the pastures and utilizing the longhorns and goats to remove invasive species identified in his forest management plan.

Jared is also involved in the NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and Conservation Stewardship Program to address resource concerns on the farmland and woods and continues to work with NRCS to adopt and move forward with conservation and best management practices. Jared is also interested in permanently protecting the farm in perpetuity with a conservation easement. We would like to thank Jared Harmon for being a leader in conservation and voluntarily participating with MAEAP!

## Friend of the District

### Nate Hills

The Kalamazoo Conservation District Board and Staff would like to recognize Nate Hills with the 2023 Friend of the District Award. Nate has been a terrific volunteer with the District over the last two years. In 2022 Nate originally signed up to drop off tires at one of our first scrap tire events. When he heard that we were in need of volunteers to help load tires into the semi-trailers, he offered to help. Even though it is a hot, tiring and dirty job, Nate continued to volunteer again and again, continuing to help at events in 2023. Nate believes that this is a much needed program and he is happy to donate his time to make sure this program continues. Additionally, he has helped the District make contacts within the business community. We really appreciate the time and effort that Nate has shared with the District as well as his enthusiasm for recycling scrap tires!





KALAMAZOO  
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## Kalamazoo Conservation District

### Fiscal year 2023 Financial Statements

#### Balance sheet FY2023

#### Profit & Loss FY 2023

	<u>Sep 30, 23</u>		<u>Oct '22 - Sep 23</u>
<b>ASSETS</b>		<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>	
<b>Current Assets</b>		<b>Income</b>	
Checking/Savings		530 · Items for Purchase	25,523.18
001 · General Checking	14,144.33	539 · State Grants	127,918.16
004 · Petty Cash	330.05	600 · Charges for Services	19,164.42
<b>Total Checking/Savings</b>	<u>14,474.38</u>	664 · Interest & Rent Control	23.56
Accounts Receivable		671 · Other Revenues Control	13,557.97
018 · Accounts Receivable	2,500.00	<b>Total Income</b>	<u>186,187.29</u>
<b>Total Accounts Receivable</b>	<u>2,500.00</u>	<b>Cost of Goods Sold</b>	<u>636.91</u>
<b>Other Current Assets</b>		<b>Gross Profit</b>	<u>185,550.38</u>
100 · Undeposited Funds	17,523.03	<b>Expense</b>	
108 · Tree Inventory	12.13	4000 · Reconciliation Discrepancies	0.96
109 · Platbook Inventory	2,708.40	701 · Personnel Services	122,323.39
110 · Resale Materials Inventory	280.31	726 · Supplies Control	19,098.65
<b>Total Other Current Assets</b>	<u>20,523.87</u>	800 · Other Services & Charges	16,327.56
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<u>37,498.25</u>	900 · Printing & Publishing	40.72
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<u><u>37,498.25</u></u>	902 · Miscellaneous Expense	25.00
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>		955 · Donations	7.16
<b>Liabilities</b>		956 · Nutrient Tests	208.00
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		957 · Dues & Fees	1,000.00
Other Current Liabilities	3,587.13	960 · Meeting Expenses	2,708.94
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<u>3,587.13</u>	964 · Refunds & Rebates	-50.76
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<u>3,587.13</u>	967 · District Overhead for Grant	19,138.42
<b>Equity</b>		<b>Total Expense</b>	<u>180,828.04</u>
390 · Fund Balance	29,188.78	<b>Net Ordinary Income</b>	<u>4,722.34</u>
Net Income	4,722.34	<b>Net Income</b>	<u><u>4,722.34</u></u>
<b>Total Equity</b>	<u>33,911.12</u>		
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>	<u><u>37,498.25</u></u>		

# Thank you donors & sponsors!

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Ed Cagney Farm  
Cross Country Farm  
Myers Farm LLC  
Villa Miller Farm  
Wiley Farms

