# DAN GILLESPIE
## SOIL HEALTH FUND

**2026 NEWSLETTER**

## INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS BENEFITS SOIL HEALTH



*Claire Schmidt winner of 2026 Nebraska State and 3rd Place National FFA Agriscience Competition.*

We are so proud to showcase our future generation's important soil health work, enabled by your generous donations. In March 2026, Battle Creek High School FFA member Claire Schmidt won the Nebraska State Agriscience Competition with her project, "Optimizing Nitrogen Application to Maximize Crop Yield, Economic Returns, and Soil Health." In October 2026, she went on to win 3rd place in the National Agriscience competition in the Environmental Service/Natural Resource Systems category. Co-funded by the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund and an anonymous donor via a Nebraska Community Foundation Youth Engagement Grant, her research demonstrated how optimizing fertilizer application rates can maximize economic returns while promoting soil health and protecting water quality. Battle Creek FFA Advisor Billy O'Brien and his team worked with Jeremy Grant, a sixth-generation farmer committed to continuously learning how to leave the next generation a better land and life. Claire's fellow FFA members also presented the water infiltration advantages of no-till with cover crop, showing the results of their "Soil Water Intake and Conservation Practices Study," at the January 2026 No-Till on the Plains Conference and the March 2026 Nebraska State Agriscience Competition. Their research found that no-till fields with cover crops had 500% greater water infiltration than conventionally tilled fields. ***Continues on the back . . .***



*Eli Anderson, Camden Ogden, and Cade Fickes of the Battle Creek High School FFA Presenting at NTOP.*

## 2026 GRANTS AWARDED

The Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund (DGSHF) awarded $1,000 to Central Nebraska's Grain Place Foundation, continuing its mission to strengthen Nebraska agriculture through programs that support youth engagement, farmer innovation, and hands-on soil health education.

The organization hosts junior high and high school farm field trips to share information about regenerative organic farming. The grant will allow Grain Place to expand its soil health outreach to schools, communities, and farmers.

DGSHF awarded $2,300 to the Lawrence-Nelson FFA to procure soil testing equipment to enable hands-on soil research. Lawrence-Nelson students will use industry-grade tools to measure soil health indicators and perform analysis of the results for presentation at the 2027 Nebraska Agriscience competition.

DGSHF awarded three Fall 2026 grants enabled by your generous donations and partnership with the NCF Youth Engagement Grant fund. The Rock County FFA has been awarded $1,735 to take on leadership roles to conduct an experiment on optimization of various compost tea additives. Students will prepare four different compost teas with different additives and a control to quantify increased microbial activity in the soil.

DGSHF has again awarded the Central Nebraska Science and Engineering Fair (CNSEF) $700 for students in grades 6–12 across central and western Nebraska to conduct original soil health research. Potential topics include no-till farming, cover crops, erosion, water conservation, soil biology, organic matter, nutrient cycling, and regenerative agriculture.

## OUR FUND ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Randy Pryor, Chair** | UNL Emeritus Extension Educator
**Keith Berns** | Owner of Green Cover (Bladen, NE)
**John Wilson** | UNL Emeritus Extension Educator
**Gary Lesoing** | UNL Emeritus Extension Educator
**Steve Chick** | Retired Nebraska NRCS State Conservationist
**Kerry Hoffschneider** | Co-Founder: Difference in Action and Graze Master
**Jim Schneider** | Retired Agronomist UNL Extension Educator and NRCS District Conservationist
**Rebecca Evert, Tim Gillespie, Brooke Wiese** | Family representatives




***Continued from page 1 . . .*** The Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund, in partnership with Green Cover, recognized outstanding soil health research at the 2026 Central Nebraska Science and Engineering Fair (CNSEF). Left to right: Jay Cecrle, director of the Central Nebraska Science and Engineering Fair; Grace Jones of Ogallala High School, second-place recipient; Beau Bonifas of Silver Lake High School, first-place recipient; and Randy Pryor, UNL Emeriti Extension Educator and chair of the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund Advisory Committee. The awards honored student research advancing soil health, water conservation, no-till farming, and regenerative agriculture.

## DAN GILLESPIE SOIL HEALTH FUND RECEIVES CONTRIBUTIONS FROM WK KELLOGG CO

WK Kellogg Co. has again pledged to support the work of the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund, an affiliated fund of Nebraska Community Foundation. WK Kellogg Co.'s third contribution of $7,500 to the fund brings its total support to $22,500, making the organization the largest donor in DGSHF's five-year history.

"The Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund is creating meaningful opportunities for farmers, students, and agricultural communities to learn, collaborate, and advance soil health practices," said Sarah Ludmer, Chief Wellbeing and Sustainable Business Officer at WK Kellogg Co. "We're honored to continue supporting the Fund's work to expand access to education and resources that can drive long-term benefits for both people and the planet."

Randy Pryor, DGSHF Advisory Chairman stated, "The DGSHF is focused on building an endowment with WK Kellogg Co. and other generous corporate and private donor support. The generosity of WK Kellogg Co. and private donors has enabled the fund to increase award grants to $2,500 twice a year."

## APPLY FOR FUNDING

To learn about what we fund and to apply for a grant, visit **go.unl.edu/dgfund** and click APPLY FOR A GRANT.

## SUPPORT OUR WORK

Our work depends on the generosity of those who share our vision and passion for promoting more sustainable agricultural practices. We humbly ask that you consider making a contribution to further the work of the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund.

*Ray Ward, Ward Laboratories Kearney, will donate a personal handmade clock (with wood from his farm in Saline County) to any donor of $1,000 or more to the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund.*

**DONATE ONLINE**

**go.unl.edu/dgfund**

**GIVE BY MAIL**

**Mail a check made payable to:**
*Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund*
Nebraska Community Foundation
8100 S. 15th St., Suite A
Lincoln, NE 68512

**CONTACT US**
Rebecca Gillespie Evert, Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund
707.322.0670 | revert@sonic.net

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