

DAN GILLESPIE

SOIL HEALTH FUND

OUR PURPOSE

The Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund honors Dan Gillespie, a life-long farmer and a long-time no-till farming practitioner and advocate, by making grants to support the following charitable causes and/or charitable organizations:

Education and educational practices related to soil health and regenerative agriculture, including but not limited to no-till farming, water conservation, tree conservation, and planting cover crops. Grants from this Fund may support educational events and programming for youth, current farmers and ranchers, and others involved in agriculture. The geographic focus of the Fund is Nebraska and surrounding states.

WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

Soil is a critical natural resource—it directly impacts our food, water, air, and the health of all living things. However, there is consensus among scientists that our precious soil has experienced significant loss—about half—of its organic carbon since the advent of the plow. Water and wind erosion have also been significant factors in organic carbon loss. To counteract these forces, many farmers are using improved crop genetics, inorganic fertilizers, irrigation, precision agriculture, and other agricultural advancements. Yields were going up with the technology improvements, but the damage done by mining the soil was unappreciated. Combining soil health practices with advanced technologies will lead to maximum profitable yields and mitigate further damage to soil biology and microbial life that are fundamental to the natural cycling of soil nutrients and the natural defense and health of growing plants.

WHAT WE CAN DO

There are numerous modern farming practices—and more being developed all of the time—that help slow down the breakdown of our soils and work to restore carbon, improve water conservation, and reduce nutrient loss. According to the Nebraska Health Soils Task Force, no-till farming, for instance, reduces erosion. Precision agriculture can tailor nutrient applications to reduce soil degradation.

Dan Gillespie dedicated his life to furthering the no-till and regenerative agriculture movements. The Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund is working to ensure this important work continues long into the future and the health of our soil continues to be restored and protected.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Please join us in our mission. Use the QR code to learn more about our work, meet our Fund Advisory Committee, and support the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund.

The Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund is an affiliated fund of Nebraska Community Foundation.



WHO IS DAN GILLESPIE?

Nebraska no-till farmer and advocate Dan Gillespie sought to leave any land he farmed in better condition than he found it. Dan started using no-till practices in 1986 after an early spring rainfall event on frozen soil resulted in extensive erosion. He joined the National Resources Conservation Services in 1987, where he helped develop a cost-share No-Till Incentive Program. Dan served as NRCS State No-Till Specialist from 2004 until his retirement in December 2020 after 33 years of service.

He was often greeted as “Dan the Tree Man” in his hometown of Battle Creek. For over 30 years he took seeds (some harvested from oak trees on his farm), potting soil and grow boxes into fourth through sixth grade classrooms. Students loved the hands-on planting exercise, as well as the accompanying conservation talk about trees, healthy soil, and natural resources. Dan’s annual visits resulted in 3,000 trees being planted over the years.

Shortly after retirement, Dan was diagnosed with ALS, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a terminal neurodegenerative disease. By establishing the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund, Dan’s family, friends, and soil health enthusiasts across the nation can carry on his work indefinitely.

CONTACT US

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