

Nebraska Conservation Mentorship Network

Facilitating peer-to-peer relationships among Nebraska's farmers and ranchers that foster learning and advance the adoption of conservation practices.



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Introduction

Why peer-to-peer education matters

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to farming and ranching, and the implementation of conservation is no different. What works for one farmer may not work for his or her neighbor five miles down the road. What does work, however, is having someone to talk to who knows the nuances of being an agricultural producer and can speak to soil type, micro-climate, and needs of a specific piece of ground.

The implementation of conservation practices can be a risky business, one that may not be favorable to the eyes of curious neighbors, so sometimes it is challenging to find someone in your backyard who shares the same values and beliefs in sustainable practices. The Network is designed to make our state feel a bit smaller and help producers locate like-minded individuals to talk about challenges, identify solutions, and celebrate wins.

This booklet will introduce you to farmers and ranchers from across the state who have graciously volunteered to put their own ideas, expertise, and experiences on display for others through field days, webinars, small-group discussions, and one-on-one conversations. They are here to help you learn, so don't hesitate to reach out. Maybe we'll see your face and name in our next publication.



Andrew Tonnies
Policy Associate

About the network

Fostering peer relationships and conservation practices in Nebraska

The Conservation Mentorship Network was launched in 2024 to facilitate peer-to-peer education among producers interested in learning from one another. To accommodate the diverse needs of participants and geography of the state, mentors from across Nebraska have been selected to participate in network activities and provide one-on-one guidance to producers interested in adopting sustainable agriculture practices.

Engagement: Come as you are

- The network is designed to be producer-led, allowing for spontaneity and flexibility.
- Participants choose the level of time and energy they wish to invest.
- Multiple outlets are offered for learning and to meet producers where they are.

Eligibility: Who can participate?

- Producers of all experience levels are welcome.
- Participants should express an interest in and willingness to implement conservation practices.
- Individuals must be in Nebraska and operate (or directly influence the management decisions of) a farm or ranch.

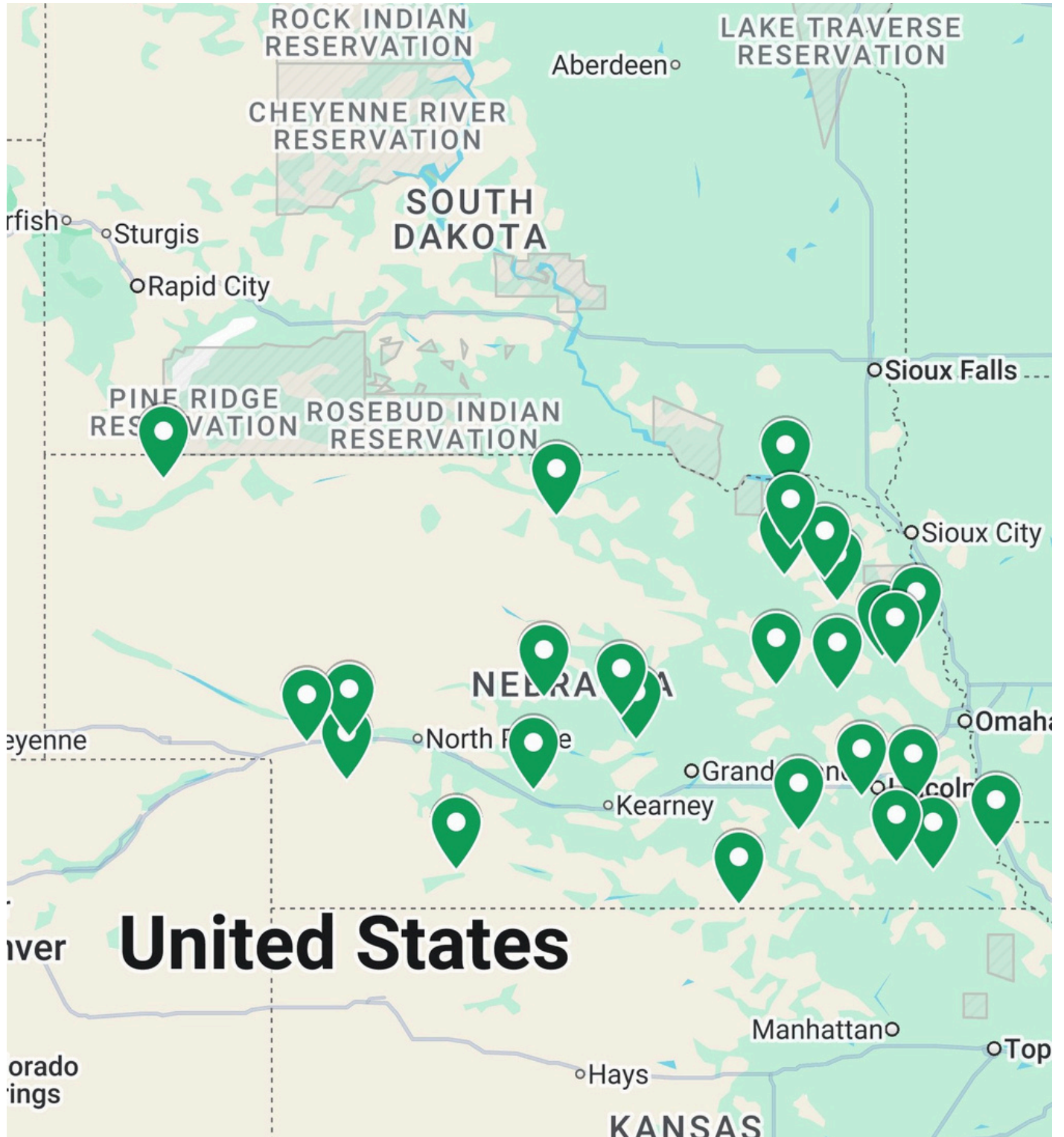
Benefits: Why join the network?

- You'll receive invitations to field days, farm tours, and small-group discussions.
- Participants will gain access to one-on-one mentorship.
- You will meet with like-minded producers to discuss conservation practices and programs.
- You'll be invited to an online group to exchange information and ideas.
- Participation is free!

Events: Connect and learn

- Network participants are invited to field days, farm tours, and small-group discussions (both in-person and online).
- Attendance is voluntary; participants are encouraged to attend and connect with other producers as their schedules permit.

2026 Mentor Map



Mentors



Alex McKiernan

Lancaster and Pawnee counties

Alex's passion for conservation is driven by his belief that good food can sustain healthy people and a healthy environment. Owner of Robinette Farms, Alex's experience spans vegetable to meat production, using a broad range of techniques to build an operation that minimizes off-farm inputs, reduces detrimental environmental impacts, and provides opportunities for community education.

Having come from a non-farming background, Alex understands the significance of peer education among farmers. As such, he now uses his expertise to teach producers of all experience levels about topics such as grazing management and infrastructure, multi-species grazing, and transitioning crop ground to perennial pasture, as well as business skills including direct marketing strategies.



Brian Brhel

Lancaster County

Brian comes from a diverse family farm near Denton, where “out of the box” thinking was and still is the norm. The farm has 400 acres of non-irrigated cropland and 300 acres of grass. Brian has built his farming operation over the past 22 years with a focus on soil building, using livestock and cover crops. He is also interested in seed production of cover crops rye, oats, forage peas, buckwheat, and hairy vetch, through which he is able to supply seed for his own operation and those of area farmers. He focuses on the roots of living plants and cattle as a driver of soil health, which contributes to the economic health of his farm while protecting soil as a resource.



Chris Trumler

Sherman County

Chris is a first-generation farmer and rancher who graduated with an animal science degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1994. Through hard work, perseverance, and holding an off-farm job, Chris has been able to expand his operation to include cow-calf and yearling herds in addition to no-till alfalfa, corn, and soybeans on irrigated and dryland acres, implementing practices such as cover crops and rotational grazing.

Previously a conservation technician for the wildlife division of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Chris has a passion for agricultural practices that increase opportunity and habitat for wildlife. In addition to planting native range through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), he implements structures that support wildlife, such as shelter belts and corridors, and practices that support clean water bodies.

Mentors, continued



Clay Govier
Custer County

Clay is a fifth-generation farmer from the Broken Bow area. His family grows corn, soybeans, cereal rye, yellow peas, and alfalfa, largely on center-pivot-irrigated land. Regenerative practices, such as no-till and cover crops, are the foundation of the farm, and the Govier family continually embraces more soil health principles.

Clay has a degree in information systems from Doane University and has completed the University of Nebraska's LEAD program. He has also served on the Nebraska Soybean Board.



Clint Osborne
Phelps County

Clint lives near Lexington with his wife and seven kids. He graduated from UNL with a degree in agronomy in 2008 and worked for Syngenta, Case New Holland, and Nutrien until striking out on his own 13 years ago. The Osbornes own and operate Midwest Ag Consulting LLC, offering crop consulting, soil moisture probes, soil sampling options, and cover-crop and whole-farm plans. They also own and operate Osborne's Custom Farms LLC, planting custom seed cover crops and seed soybeans with a 20-inch, high-speed planter. They have a small dryland farm on the far west edge of Phelps County.

Clint has been passionate about agriculture all his life, working with his dad as a child. He hauls corn, works with livestock, and does anything else that needs to be done.



Dan Stelling
Pierce County

Dan and his sons, Matt and Mike, farm approximately 1,850 acres of irrigated land in Pierce County, where they also run 400 head of commercial Red Angus cows on 1,800 acres of pasture. Their operation is built on a philosophy of flexibility that takes into account factors such as field location and land ownership, with the use of practices such as cover crops, no-till, crop diversification, livestock integration, and prescribed grazing remaining a top priority.

When it comes to implementing regenerative practices, Dan points to multiple motivating factors: improved soil health, increased profits, decreased erosion, and increased wildlife and insect habitat, in addition to making "farming and ranching more interesting and fun!" He has also used support from Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), and CRP. The family's efforts to care for the land have earned it conservation awards from the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (NRD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).



Daryl Obermeyer
Nemaha County

Daryl has been experimenting with conservation practices for more than 50 years, proving that it's possible to reduce input costs and improve efficiencies on his dryland corn, soybean, and cattle operation. Through rotational grazing, no-till, and cover crops, among other practices such as planting pollinator habitat, he has become a better land steward and manager, improving soil health, erosion control, and the water-holding capacity of his farm. Daryl also has experience with federal conservation programs, including the CSP.



Dennis Demmel
Keith County

Dennis is semi-retired after farming 1,800 acres in Perkins County. He was a certified organic farmer from 2007 to 2016, and has since been an advocate for organic and regenerative practices as a way to build soil health and improve bottom lines, despite potential dips in yield. He also advocates for grazing systems, working with a neighboring cattle owner to graze his own perennial grasses and legumes.



Ed Olson
Washington County

Ed farms approximately 800 acres across Washington, Burt, and Dodge counties. A no-till farmer for more than 25 years, he employs cover crops, terraces, filter strips, and grassed waterways to slow erosion, reduce run-off, and build soil health. An avid sportsman, Ed has also invested in field borders, windbreaks, and pollinator plots to create habitat for local wildlife. He has participated in federal cost-share programs including EQIP and CRP, as well as those offered through organizations such as Practical Farmers of Iowa, his local NRD, Pheasants Forever, and Nebraska Game and Parks.



Greg Keller
Platte County

Based near Monroe, Greg manages a 1,000-acre corn and soy operation defined by innovation and soil stewardship. With 26 years of continuous no-till farming and 11 years of cover cropping, he has built up his hilly Platte County soils to withstand heavy precipitation events while increasing yields. Greg credits his reduced inputs and his higher bottom line to his twin-row rye system, soil-building practices, and transition to conventional, GMO-free corn.

Greg also oversees a significant hog operation and has diversified into a custom cover crop drilling and seed business. He is a great contributor to the network and welcomes folks to see his operation for themselves.

Mentors, continued



Homer Buell
Rock County

Homer is the fourth-generation co-owner of Shovel Dot Ranch, a 15,000-acre operation of hay meadows and pastureland. With a strong family history of ranching dating back to 1883, the Buell family is dedicated to making its ranch, land, and cattle the best it can through conservation and information systems focused on proper management.

Homer has been an advocate for agriculture and the cattle industry through multiple trade organization leadership roles. He is a former president of the Nebraska Cattlemen's Beef Association and the Nebraska Hereford Association, and he has held many other positions within the National Cattlemen's Beef Association in his 14 years of board service.



Jeff Steffen
Knox County

Jeff and his wife, Jolene, farm 600 acres in northeast Nebraska, approximately 10 miles south of the South Dakota border. Of these acres, 500 are used to produce corn, oats, soybeans, buckwheat, cereal rye, and peas for cash crops, as well as non-GMO soybeans and oats for certified seed. The couple has implemented continuous no-till for more than 30 years, concentrating on soil health for the past 10 years through the use of cover crops across the entire farm. In addition to crop production, the Steffens graze cow-calf pairs on full-season annual cover crops and winter graze cover crops and crop residue. Over time, Jeff has kept meticulous records to document the profitability of their farming system.

He serves on the Nebraska Natural Resources Commission and the board of his local NRD. West Bow Creek runs through their land, and he and Jolene love nature and wildlife.



Jordan Uldrich
Fillmore County

Jordan is a fifth-generation farmer working to build soil health through a holistic, systematic approach on his corn and soybean operation. Through a combination of conservation practices, he is experimenting with systems that use cover crops as a tool to reduce weed suppression and inputs. Additionally, his focus on adaptive multi-paddock grazing allows him to more closely align his livestock management with natural processes.

Jordan's passion for peer-to-peer education is evident in his willingness to show up and share his experience with other farmers. He serves on the board of the Nebraska Soil Health Coalition.



Junior Pfanstiel

Pierce County

Junior farms with his wife, Katelyn, and their four children near McLean. After leaving the retail ag industry and being fed up with high input prices, he dove head first into regenerative farming practices. His farm operation consists of 330 acres (50/50 dryland/irrigated), all of which will be fully regenerative, organic-certified in July 2026. In 2022, he received the Lower Elkhorn NRD's Sustainable Agriculture Award.

Junior is an agronomy enthusiast and founder of Outside the Box Agronomy, where he demonstrates high clearance cover crop inter-seeding applications and other alternative agronomic farming practices. Roller crimping cover crops has significantly accelerated the advancement of his soil health, and cover crops have allowed him to eliminate the need for synthetic inputs. In addition, his diverse rotation has allowed habitat to thrive—in 2025, an extremely rare blue bee was spotted in his field.



Kevin Fulton

Sherman County

Kevin owns and operates Clear Creek Land and Livestock, a holistically managed organic farming and ranching operation in the Central Loess Hills region near Loup City. He has more than 50 years experience as a land owner practicing regenerative methods. His diverse operation focuses on profitability, soil health, ecosystem management, year-round grazing, and value-added markets. He has used CRP, CSP, and EQIP through the NRCS to help meet his goals. Providing habitat for wildlife and pollinators is also a priority, along with preserving the historical sites on his property. Crops include corn, soybeans, wheat, oats, hay, cover crops, irrigated pasture, and native prairie. Extensive water and fencing systems allow for high stock density grazing and overall higher stocking rates.

His advocacy work has taken him on the lecture circuit from New York City to Los Angeles, educating diverse audiences about farming issues. He has hosted visitors on his farm from every continent except Antarctica and held numerous leadership positions in agricultural organizations on state and national levels.



Mark McConnell

Keith County

Mark has spent more than 30 years experimenting with practices that improve soil quality and water use efficiency on his farm near the Nebraska Panhandle. His long-standing commitment to building a sustainable operation has included terracing, no-till, cover crops, and livestock integration to address erosion, improve soil biology, and create a system that can rely on natural biology and organic matter to reduce inputs.

He believes that in order to implement a system that will be sustainable in the long term, producers should focus on doing everything they can to protect our basic natural resources, while using the available building blocks to make needed improvements along the way.

Mentors, continued



Matt Bailey
Colfax County

Matt raises corn and soybeans on primarily irrigated acres—both pivot and gravity flow—with his dad and brother. While the family has some farmland outside of the Platte Valley, a fair percentage of their acres are where the water table is high, soils are light and sandy, and nutrient management is key.

Matt believes being a good steward of the land should be a high priority to anyone involved in production agriculture. But the real motivation for his family's initial turn to sustainable practices came down to two hard facts: time and money. In the early 2000s, they turned to no-till given \$4-a-gallon diesel and a limited workforce. With no-till, they could cover more acres with fewer passes. Matt has also taken acres out of production and planted them into buffer strips. With the help of incentives, he is able to forgo the production income and eliminate maintenance on marginal acres. He serves on the Lower Platte North NRD.



Mike McDonald
Otoe County

Mike and his wife, Janet—both lifelong Nebraskans—live and farm near Palmyra. As a retired educator, Mike continues to learn and teach through peer groups, often offering his own fields as a learning lab for others. The couple's 200 acres include an orchard, bees, pollinator habitat, annual/perennial cover crops, and a diverse crop rotation focused on carbon sequestration, weather resiliency, and soil and water health intentionality.

Mike is a founding member and treasurer of the Nebraska Soil Health Coalition. He previously served as co-chair of the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force, secretary of the No-till on the Plains board of directors, and other education- and conservation-focused boards.



Nathan Mueller
Dodge County

Nathan and his brother grow corn, soybeans, and winter wheat on a small farm in Dodge County. He wears many hats, including independent contract work for Nu Horizon Genetics and the Nebraska Corn Board. Previously he worked for UNL as a cropping systems extension educator and USDA-NRCS as the Nebraska soil health specialist.

He has a passion for soil health, crop rotational diversity, cover crops, prairies, and lilacs. With a doctoral degree from Kansas State University in agronomy/soil fertility and more than 10 years as a Nebraska Certified Crop Adviser, he values leveraging experience, on-farm research, and continuous learning. His farm has used conservation cost-share programs through his local NRD and Nebraska NRCS and on-farm research through the Nebraska On-Farm Research Network.



Paul Poppe
Dodge County

Paul farms both owned and rented ground in north-central Dodge County, where his family has had roots since 1926. In addition to growing corn, soybeans, and hay, he raises 25 head of cows with two bulls that graze summer pasture and winter crop ground.



Riley Reinke
Gage County

Riley is the owner and operator of Cottage Hill Farm, which incorporates grains and produce. His farm consists of 1.25 acres of diversified vegetable production in a permanent bed system with living mulch walkways and 500 acres of milo, soybeans, oats, and alfalfa.

His approach focuses on non-GMO products, with some acres managed using organic systems. He also incorporates soil health practices, such as planting diverse cover crops, roller crimping, and no-till, and conducts regular soil and plant SAP testing.



Ron Bolze
Dawes County

Ron and his family own and operate Bolze Ranch Angus, a 48-year Angus seedstock operation in Dawes County. The family holistically grazes upward of 5,000 acres of native range in northwest Nebraska's semi-arid environment, supporting approximately 150 cow/calf pairs on year-round grazing with minimal winter supplementation. He is a retired professor of rangeland management at Chadron State College and serves on the board of the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition.

Mentors, continued



Scott Heinemann
Wayne County

Scott is a third-generation farmer in Wayne County, where he grows corn, soybeans, oats, cereal rye, and a variety of cover crops. Passionate about soil health and protecting precious water resources, Scott is always looking for practical ways to improve the land while keeping his operation productive and resilient.

Over the years, he has planted hundreds of trees and shrubs, established grassed waterways, and created pollinator borders to support wildlife and strengthen the farm's natural systems. He also works closely with neighboring livestock producers to graze cover crops, turning them into an additional benefit for both soil health and local agriculture.



Tracy Zink
Red Willow County

Tracy is a third-generation producer in southwest Nebraska, farming both irrigated and dryland acres of corn, soybeans, sorghum, and wheat. After pursuing a professional career in health and wellness, as well as senior housing, she returned to her roots on the farm, where she remains committed to the health and wellness of soil, water, plants, and community.

Tracy is a board member of the Middle Republican NRD, Nebraska Sorghum Producers, National Sorghum Checkoff, Nebraska Ethanol, Nebraska Rural Radio Association, and Red Willow County Extension, and is a delegate for the U.S. Grains and BioProducts Council.



Vance McCoy
Perkins County

Vance has farmed dryland and irrigated crop ground for nearly 30 years, focusing on a diversified rotation of corn, soybeans, wheat, and cover crops. In addition to cover crops, he experiments with practices such as no-till, adaptive multi-paddock grazing, relay cropping, intercropping, and composting to build soil health on his operation. As owner of Triple Creek Cover Crops, he spreads the message that keeping soil covered can help improve producers' soils and bottom lines.



Will Corman
Nuckolls County

Will returned to his family's farm in 2014 to work with his father, uncle, and cousin to build the operation's profitability and sustainability. Together, they manage roughly 5,000 acres of corn, wheat, and soybeans, as well as 120 cow-calf pairs.

The Corman farm focuses on a number of conservation practices to improve its bottom line and the natural resources that sustain it. Over time, support from conservation programs such as the EQIP and CSP have helped him implement practices including nutrient management, irrigation water management, and pest management conservation systems. Combined with precision agriculture technologies, these practices help reduce nutrient run-off, improve water quality, and build soil health.



Zeke Brummels
Stanton County

Co-owner of Lightning Creek Cattle Co., Zeke runs a medium-sized cow/calf and niche grass-fed beef operation on 200 acres of tall grass prairie in northeast Nebraska, all of which was enrolled in CRP for 30 years prior to being adapted to grazing land. From 2020 to 2023, Lightning Creek used EQIP cost-share to assist with the removal of generations of volunteer cedar and Siberian elm trees and to modernize watering facilities across the property. Zeke and his partners use a rotational grazing philosophy, designed to put pressure on individual paddocks followed by up to a year's worth of rest.



Join the network

The simplest way to join the network is to get in touch! Whether you're interested in sharing your knowledge as a mentor or learning from others as a participant, we'll make sure you're connected to the people and resources you need.

Visit the network website at cfra.org/cmn or reach out to:

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Find additional print and digital resources at the links below.



Watch network webinars on YouTube



Visit the network website



Partners

The Nebraska Conservation Mentorship Network is conducted in partnership with:



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