



## USDA & AA Greenbelt Preserve Farmland

When Carol Schumacher and her late husband bought their farm near Ann Arbor in 1947, they were primarily looking for a house. After moving to the farm, she fell in love with the land. After 70 years, Schumacher is still in love with the land.

“It’s a very interesting place, it’s beautiful in all seasons.”

The Schumachers were re-locating closer to their roots after living near Baltimore. With the country’s resources going to the war effort, there were few houses available in 1947, Schumacher said. They ended up buying the house and 100-acre farm, about 7 miles outside of Ann Arbor, as a place to raise a family. The family operated the farm for about 20 years, raising row crops and pasturing sheep but it wasn’t their primary source of income. Eventually they rented the tillable land to a neighbor.

The farm was in poor shape when they purchased it Schumacher remembers. The farm was clear cut and pastured except for a few large oaks, she said. “There wasn’t room for a mouse to be comfortable and make a home.” Schumacher worked diligently over 70 years to change that. She planted



*Barbara Schumacher (above) grew up on the farm her mother Carol enrolled in the Ann Arbor Greenbelt Purchase of Development Rights Program.*

the cropped hillsides with permanent cover and planted trees and native plants anywhere that wasn’t cropped or pastured. She transplanted native plants she found along fence lines and harvested seed from native plants in road ditches.

“I went out with a 5-gallon bucket and a shovel whenever I had time,” Schumacher said.

Today an abundance of wildlife lives on the farm including its woods, two wetlands and a constructed pond. There are numerous flowering trees and a wooded portion of the farm was covered with trillium during a May walking tour of the property with Schumacher’s daughter Barbara.

After seeing a nearby parcel of land that had contained a heron rookery converted into housing, she was determined to preserve her life’s work.

In 2015, Schumacher enrolled most of the farm into a conservation easement through the Ann Arbor Greenbelt Purchase of Development Rights Program. The program receives matching funds for purchasing develop rights from the USDA

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## State Conservationist's Message

In May, NRCS-Michigan announced that it will provide \$718,980 in disaster assistance to help repair damage caused by severe flooding in June 2017. This assistance was provided through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program.

EWP fills an important role in repairing infrastructure that is important to the agricultural community but not always eligible for assistance through other government disaster programs. In Isabella County, the assistance will be used to repair county drains that are vitally important to farmers who rely on tile drains. The assistance provided by NRCS will provide additional resources for the Isabella County Drain Commissioner and reduce the financial burden to county residents.

Severe flooding, such as the 6 to 8 inches of rain Isabella County received over a 12-hour period last year, has become a more common occurrence in Michigan. This year, Governor Snyder declared a state of disaster for Houghton and Menominee counties after June flooding. NRCS is evaluating the damage to determine if EWP assistance can be provided.

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Michigan State University's Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center will utilize a Conservation Innovation Grant from

NRCS to demonstrate soil health conservation practices. Before implementing new practices, farmers rightfully want to see how they perform in conditions similar to their own.

Through this grant, the UP Extension Center will establish demonstration plots for row crop-dairy, and pastured beef operations.



State Conservationist  
Garry Lee

Local producers will be able to see how practices such as conservation tillage, cover crops and conservation crop rotation perform in UP conditions. The Center will also publish information and give presentations on how their demonstration plots performed.

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This is a good time to remind producers interested in enrolling in USDA conservation programs that NRCS accepts applications on a continuous basis. It is definitely not too soon to begin the application process for fiscal year 2019 funds. Last year, NRCS-Michigan held its first round of selections for fiscal year 2018 Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding in December of 2017.



*EWP funds help watersheds recover from flood disasters (above). A CIG grant will demonstrate the use of cover crops, like these oilseed radish in Delta County, and other soil health practices in UP conditions.*



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Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Since 2005, the USDA and Ann Arbor Greenbelt have purchased development rights on nearly 3,000 acres of farmland in the Ann Arbor area.

Ruth Thornton of the Conservation Fund serves as the Ann Arbor Greenbelt program manager under a contract with the City of Ann Arbor. The program was created through a millage passed by Ann Arbor voters in 2003 and is funded through 2034. The program has protected over 5,000 acres of open space and farmland. We'd be happy to reach 10,000 acres by the time the millage expires, Thornton said. The program's goal is to protect natural and open areas and the city's water sources which includes the Huron River. The program also prioritizes concentrating development easements in contiguous areas. The Greenbelt has closed easements on two parcels near Schumacher's farm, Thornton said.

The USDA provides two types of easements through ACEP which operate quite differently. Land enrolled in programs like the Ann Arbor Greenbelt utilize Agricultural Land Easements. These easements are only provided through partner organizations which negotiate directly with the landowners and monitor the easements. Land enrolled in Agricultural Land Easements continue to be used for crop and livestock production and cannot be developed for other uses. Development rights to the property are permanent and held by the partner organization in compliance with USDA easement terms.

ACEP also includes Wetland Reserve Easements, formerly operated at the Wetlands Reserve Program. Landowners who wish to enroll land in a Wetlands Reserve Easement apply directly to NRCS. Wetland Reserve Easements are utilized to restore land to wetland conditions that were formerly converted to agricultural land. The program covers all or a portion of the cost for restoring the land and the land is enrolled in a long-term, or more commonly, permanent easement. Both Agricultural Land Easements and Wetland Reserve Easements give the landowners limited use of the land and control over public access.

Selling development rights to most of her farm provided Schumacher with some extra retirement

income. She can continue to enjoy the property's beauty while knowing that the work she put into restoring it will not be wasted.

"The farm is her first love, it wasn't just for the crops," said Barbara. "She wanted it preserved."



*The Schumacher farm near Ann Arbor contains a pond (above) along with two wetland areas. A woods planted by the farm's owner Carol Schumacher, was in bloom with trillium (below).*



## Organic Right Move for Benzie County Orchard

When he and his wife donated their cherry crop to a food bank in 1995, grower Alan Kobernik made it clear that this was not a “cute” story. The reason they donated their crop was that it would cost the farm more to harvest its cherries than they were worth.

Like many Michigan fruit growers, Cheryl and Alan Kobernik struggled to make a profit with wildly fluctuating fruit prices. In the late 1990s there was no money in tart cherries, said Alan. Even though both Alan and Cheryl have full-time jobs off the farm, they couldn’t continue losing money growing cherries. Something had to change if they were going to keep their farm. After years of losing money growing cherries, Cheryl returned from a conference at the Michigan State University Extension Service Northwest Research Station with a possible solution, going organic.

“We had nothing to lose, we couldn’t put any more money in the farm,” said Alan.

The Koberniks own a 40-acre farm in Benzie County with about 25 acres of mostly tart cherries and some sweet cherries which are primarily sold as u-pick. They have operated their orchard as North Star Organics for 20 years now and have mostly never looked back. “The farm was either going to grow cherries or houses, there’s still only one house here,” said Alan.

“We were organic before organic was cool,” added Cheryl.

Going organic was more a matter of survival than a choice. Before transitioning to organic, the Koberniks took their cherries to a local processor and waited for their fruit to be sold, at whatever price the market determined. As organic producers they still have their cherries processed locally but sell the fruit themselves. They have no problem selling all the cherries they grow. The buyers find us, Alan said.

About half of their cherries are sold frozen and the other half as dried cherries. They sell frozen and dried cherries on the farm and ship dried cherries. Selling their product directly to customers involved a steep learning curve. The Koberniks needed to create a website along with labeling and packaging. I am the shipping department, said Alan.



*Customers are instructed to honk for service when picking up dried or frozen cherries from North Star Organics in Benzie County (above). Alan and Cheryl Kobernik (below) transitioned to organic production about 20 years ago for primarily economic reasons.*



Among the buyers who found them was Martha Stewart. North Star Organics was featured in the July 2011 edition of Martha Stewart Living. Staff from the magazine visited the farm for photos and made dishes from cherries in the Koberniks’ kitchen. Cruelly, the following year the farm had no fruit due to earlier than normal warm temperatures followed by a hard freeze. Statewide, 2012 was the worst cherry crop ever recorded.

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## Soils Scientists Convene for Michigan Planning Conference

Soil scientists from Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin gathered in East Lansing, either in person or virtually, for an annual Soil Survey planning conference on June 7.

NRCS has organized the country into 12 soil survey regions, with three different regions covering portions of Michigan. Annual planning conferences are organized by the state soil scientist and allow the regional soil survey offices and partner agencies to coordinate their work and share research results to meet the needs of soil survey customers in Michigan.

In addition to updates on soil survey efforts, a representative from Michigan State University presented information on ongoing soil research. Other non-NRCS partners taking part in the meeting included the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget. The next planning meeting is scheduled for Feb. 21, 2019.



*NRCS State Soil Scientist Marty Rosek (left) listens to discussion during the annual soil survey planning conference in East Lansing. Pictured are l-r, Rosek, Matt Bromley MLRA office leader Grand Rapids, , Greg Schmidt ecological site inventory specialist Grand Rapids, and Jon Quisler MLRA soil scientist Grand Rapids.*

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## Organic Right Move for Benzie County Orchard

Even before transitioning to organic, the Koberniks participated in NRCS conservation programs and Cheryl served on the Benzie Conservation District Board. Before NRCS began tailoring some of its practices for organic producers, USDA programs fit well with what they wanted to do, Cheryl said.

The Koberniks have continued to make conservation improvements on their farm through both the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program. Most recently, they have established pollinator habitat, planted legumes in some of their orchard alleyways to help add nitrogen to the soil, built a fuel storage facility and an agrichemical handling facility. Through CSP they conduct advanced soil nutrient testing. Their compost supplier uses the test results to create a customized mix to address the specific nutrient needs of their orchards, Cheryl said.

Alan is quick to admit that growing organically is not for everyone. On a large scale it could be problematic, I don't begrudge conventional growers, he said. With organic, you have to pay more attention, said Cheryl. For example, pest

management is less scheduled than when they grew conventionally. They keep a close eye out for pests and act according to what they find. In June, the trees had a light dusting of a silicate that makes it difficult for larvae to feed on the leaves. It was a business decision to change to organic, but it was always unnerving using chemicals while their children were growing up on the farm, said Cheryl.

"It's nothing to walk through their orchard and see praying mantises and other insects you don't see very often," said NRCS District Conservationist Scott Hughey.

Since organic was relatively new to the area when they started out 20 years ago, they sometimes had to rely on guide books from the 1940s and 50s for guidance. Operating an organic orchard is a learning experience and they are happy to share what they've learned with other growers. The move to organic allowed the Koberniks to keep the family orchard their two children grew up on going. Their children may not always come home for Christmas or Thanksgiving, but they will always be back for harvest, Cheryl said.

# Toxic Giant Hogweed Spotted in Branch County

by Kasey Worst, for the Branch Conservation District

An enormous invasive plant that causes chemical burns and contains known carcinogens is back in Branch County.

Early this spring, a cluster of giant hogweed was found on a farm near Sherwood in northwest Branch County. Jared Harmon, the Southern Michigan Invasive Species Team Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area Coordinator for Branch, St. Joe, and Hillsdale Counties, visited the site to confirm the identity of the plants on June 13th, 2018.

“This is something that you really never get to see,” Harmon said during the inspection. “There is not a doubt in my mind that it’s hogweed. One hundred percent.”

Giant hogweed was last seen officially in Branch County nearly a decade ago, but was thought to have been eradicated, according to Kathy Worst, Executive Director of the Branch Conservation District.

“This is right in [the area] where they found it the original time,” Worst said. “So that suggests to me it wasn’t eradicated like they thought it was.”

The sheer size of a giant hogweed plant is the first way to differentiate the dangerous invasive from its less-hazardous cousins, queen anne’s lace and cow parsnip. Fully grown, giant hogweed is typically between seven to fourteen feet tall, with leaves larger than basketballs. Its flowers grow inside a bulbous, green and white pod, before blooming into massive clusters of tiny white buds.

Giant hogweed also has a thick stem, covered in reddish-purple spots and small, spike-like protrusions. Adolescent giant hogweed can have stems almost completely coated in spikes and spots, and the spots can also be spread across the underside of the leaf.

The stem of a giant hogweed plant is also hollow, which Harmon says is helpful for organizations attempting to eradicate the plant.

“You can actually inject [herbicide] right into the base, and send the herbicide right into the roots,” Harmon explained. “It’s got a really deep taproot, so it’s not hard to kill...but it’s more of a health hazard than anything.”

Giant hogweed is considered a noxious weed by the USDA. As such, removing this invasive takes precautions, like protective suits, and goggles.



CTAI Technician Sheila Wald stands next to a patch of giant hogweed in Branch County. The tallest plant measured 8-feet in height.

- photo by Kasey Worst

Giant hogweed’s clear sap contains chemicals that can not only cause cancer, but are also photosensitive, meaning that it is capable of causing severe chemical burns and blindness when exposed to sunlight.

“Whenever the sun gets on you, [the sap] reacts,” Harmon explained, adding that if someone does get giant hogweed sap on their skin or eyes, they need to wash it off immediately.

“If you get this, you’ll know in about twenty four to forty eight hours,” Harmon explained.

When inspecting the plants, Harmon wore thick, rubber-coated gloves to prevent coming into contact with the plant. Simply breaking off a leaf for photographs was enough to coat the gloves in sap.

He then threw away the gloves.

Anyone who believes they might have giant hogweed on their property should contact your local Conservation District, USDA Service Center, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development at [MDA-Info@Michigan.gov](mailto:MDA-Info@Michigan.gov) or Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area for assistance.

## Center for Excellence Field Day - Aug. 8

by Lenawee Conservation District

The Center for Excellence Field Day is just around the corner. Mark your calendar for Wednesday, August 8, 2018. Registration starts at 8 a.m. at Bakerlads Farm in Clayton, and will reconvene at the Raymond and Stutzman Farm in Morenci, for lunch and the afternoon program.



Highlights of the day include morning-long wagon rides to learn more about Field Edge Water Quality Sampling, demonstration of Saturated Buffers, Phosphorus Filters, and so much more. The afternoon will consist of a planter clinic and variable rate application of nutrients with late application of Nitrogen with the OptRx sensors for crop health and needs.

Lenawee Conservation District is requesting people RSVP for the field day by calling (517) 263.7400, Ext. 3. The deadline to RSVP is August 3rd. The show must go on! See you all there.

Antrim and Kalkaska Conservation Districts Present:

# HEALTHY FARMS HEALTHY PROFITS

Field Day & Ice Cream Social

**AUGUST 30, 2018**  
 Providence Organic Farm and CSA, 5691 N M-88 Hwy, Central Lake, MI 49822  
 9:30am Registration  
 10am to 3pm Workshops  
 3-3:30pm Ice Cream Social

**SHOWCASING SUSTAINABLE TECHNIQUES TO INCREASE YOUR FARM'S PROFITABILITY!**

- Soil Health & How to Get There
- Yield v. Profits
- Invasive Species in Farming
- Pollinators on the Farm
- Climate Change & Profitability in the Great Lakes Region

**\$10 REGISTRATION INCLUDES LOCAL FOODS LUNCH!**

\*Pre-register by August 27 to guarantee lunch.  
 Register online at [www.antrimcd.com/healthyfarmshealthyprofits](http://www.antrimcd.com/healthyfarmshealthyprofits)

## District Hosts Biochar Workshop

Slash and burn is an ancient technique where people amended soils by burning trees and incorporating the ashes into the soil to improve fertility.

On June 12, the Leelanau Conservation District presented a workshop promoting the same technology now known as biochar. Like slash and burn, biochar processes organic waste into high carbon particles similar to charcoal.

Biochar proponents claim these particles, when amended to soil, absorb nutrients and provide a substrate for beneficial soil microbes.

"It was the best, most unusual workshop I've ever co-hosted," said District Forester Kama Ross.

About 40 people attended the workshop. Biochar could be a perfect fit for sandy soils in west Michigan, Ross said. A plot amended with biochar will be planted with native perennials next to a control plot, she said. Landowners will be able to compare the two plots and observe any benefits.

*Above right: Tree waste is burned under low oxygen conditions to produce biochar. Right: Biochar is amended to the soil in a plot that will be planted to native perennials.*



# Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events

## July

- 10 Summer Field Day, 5 to 9 p.m., Tabor Hill Winery - Buchanan, for more information and to register contact the Berrien Conservation District at 269/471-9111 ext. 3
- 11 Interseed It Field Demo Day, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Grandpa Tiny's Farm - Frankenmuth, for more information call 810/824-6253 or 989/781-1720, register online at [www.interseed.eventbrite.com](http://www.interseed.eventbrite.com)
- 15 Plasticulture: Season Extension 201, starts at 1 p.m., MSU North Farm - Chatham, for more information go to [www.msunorthfarm.org](http://www.msunorthfarm.org)
- 19 Drainage Monitoring Workshop, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., MSU Extension Office - Adrian, go to <https://events.anr.msu.edu> for more information and to register
- 20 Forestry Field Day, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Victory Township Hall - Scottville, contact the Manistee Conservation District for more information at 231/889-9666 or email [joshua.shields@macd.org](mailto:joshua.shields@macd.org)
- 30 Ann Arbor Permaculture Convergence, 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sunward Cohousing - Ann Arbor, for more information go to [www.greatriversandlakes.org/](http://www.greatriversandlakes.org/)

## August

- 2 Soil: Your Silent Business Partner, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., 3077 W. Hyde Rd. - St. Johns, for more information call the Clinton Conservation District at 898/534-3106 or email [seth.gibson@macd.org](mailto:seth.gibson@macd.org)
- 8 Center for Excellence Field Day, 8 a.m., Bakerlads Farm - Clayton, for more information and to RSVP call 517/263-7400 ext. 3
- 10 Lake Erie Water Quality Workshops at Stone Lab, 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., meet at Miller Ferry Dock - Put-in-Bay, OH, for more information or to register contact Amy Gilhouse, Crossroads Farm and Wildlife Center Inc., at [Crossroadsfarm@yahoo.com](mailto:Crossroadsfarm@yahoo.com) or call 517/673-1655

## August ctd.

- 14-15 Agro Expo, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., 4605 N. Findlay Rd. - St. Johns, for more information go to [www.theagroexpo.com](http://www.theagroexpo.com)
- 23 Conservation Field Day, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 856 Riley Center Rd. - Riley, for more information contact the Blue Water Conservation District at 810/648-2998 ext. 5 or 810/984-3865 ext. 5
- 29 Conservation Field Day, time TBD, Ken Lansburg Farm - Sandusky, contact the Sanilac Conservation District for details at 810/648-298
- 30 Healthy Farms - Healthy Profits Field Day, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Providence Organic Farm & CSA - Central Lake, for more information and to register go to [www.antrimcd.com](http://www.antrimcd.com)

## September

- 8 Forestry Field Day, 9 a.m. to noon, Palmer Woods Forest Preserve - Leelanau County, for more information or to register contact Kama Ross, District Forester, at 231-256-9783, or [kama.ross@macd.org](mailto:kama.ross@macd.org).
- 11 Forest Mushrooms of Northern Michigan, 6:30 to 8 p.m., Leelanau County Building, Community Room - Suttons, Bay, For more information or to register, contact Kama Ross, District Forester, at 231-256-9783, or [kama.ross@macd.org](mailto:kama.ross@macd.org).
- 19 Water Quality Tall Ship Sail Workshop, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., meet at National Museum of the Great Lakes dock - Toledo, OH, for more information or to register contact Amy Gilhouse, Crossroads Farm and Wildlife Center Inc., at [Crossroadsfarm@yahoo.com](mailto:Crossroadsfarm@yahoo.com) or call 517/673-1655
- 20 Growing Green: Improving Forages & Maximizing Results, 2 to 7 p.m., Single Tree Farms - Olivet, for more information and to RSVP call 517/543-1512 ext. 5 or email [tim.redder@mi.usda.gov](mailto:tim.redder@mi.usda.gov)



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