



Land Access Spotlight:

Silverwood Park
Demonstration Farm
Edgerton, WI

Leasing public land to demonstrate agroforestry in action

The Silverwood Park Demonstration Farm is designed and managed in partnership between the Savanna Institute, Friends of Silverwood Park and a local organic row crop farmer. It sits on land donated to Dane County with explicit instructions that it would remain actively farmed and provide a space for agricultural education. Dane County Parks is the landowner and designates the stewardship of each county park to a "Friends of" group. The Friends of Silverwood County Park holds a master lease to the park from which they can sublease land for agricultural and educational purposes. In spring 2019, an 18-acre alley cropping and windbreak demonstration area was planted into a field currently leased to the organic row crop farmer. The farmer will continue his regular rotations in the tree alleys.



The primary project objectives are education, research on agroforestry crops and best practices, and demonstration of the profitability of the system. Maximizing crop diversity while also demonstrating the feasibility of large-scale alley cropping drove the design. Alley cropping systems in the project include (1) timber trees (black walnut alternated with hybrid poplar) to showcase the potential for growing valuable timber species with minimal inputs while still maintaining cropland, and (2) interplanted chestnut and elderberry to demonstrate the integration of fruit and nut crops into alley cropping. In both systems,

80-foot between-row spacing accommodates the row crop farmer's widest equipment. Additionally, plantings of aronia and black currant were designed for mechanical harvest and to demonstrate the potential of fruiting shrubs in lieu of, or adjacent to, row crop agriculture. Finally, a windbreak on the edge of the field will protect the tree crops from wind and potential pesticide drift from the neighboring conventional row crop field.

This farm provides a great example of how public land can be utilized for both agricultural production and education. In addition to this agroforestry demonstration farm, Silverwood Park also leases land to five farm enterprises. This unique, multi-party land access arrangement hosts some key features that provide protection and avenues for clear communication between all parties.

Key Features:

Long-term lease: Friends of Silverwood Park has a long term lease for the 18 acres from Dane County. The Savanna Institute, in turn, is a long-term sub-lessee. For those 18 acres the row crop farmer is also a sub-lessee of the lease between the Friends of Silverwood Park and Dane County, but on an annual basis.

Establishment & Management: The landowner, Dane County Parks, contributed initial funds for tree purchase, installation, protection, and maintenance, but is not involved with any other aspect of management, product ownership, or research and education. The Savanna Institute has sought external funding from governmental and private grant-makers.

Memorandum of Understanding: A memorandum of understanding is in place between the Savanna Institute and Friends of Silverwood Park. This ensures that the interests, investments, labor, and profits are agreed to formally, in writing, and protections for all parties are in place.



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Land Access Spotlight:

Main Street Project
Northfield, MN

Innovative land ownership allows non-profit farm & training programs to deepen impact

Main Street Project (MSP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization focused on developing programs to increase skills, income, and job access for Latinx immigrants working in low-wage agricultural and food industries. Since 2010, MSP has piloted poultry based agroforestry production systems. Their programs cover business planning, hands-on training, mentorship, and best practices for land stewardship, expansion, and replication. After almost a decade of developing and testing this model, MSP was ready to move into a larger community project beyond their existing half-acre units.



Established in 2018, the MSP Research Farm sits on 100 acres outside of Northfield, Minnesota. The purchase, lease, and management of the land is a unique and community-informed partnership among the original landowners, investors, and the non-profit.

Key Features:

Innovative land ownership: The MSP Research Farm is located on 100 acres, originally owned by row crop farmers who lived next door to previous MSP Chief Strategy Officer Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquín. After a long period of relationship building, the landowners agreed to sell their tillable land for the MSP Research Farm. In Minnesota, non-profit organizations can own 40 acres of land, so MSP owns 40 of the 100 acres of the research farm. An investor-landowner committed to the mission of MSP purchased the remaining 60 acres. The original landowners retain ownership of their farmstead site and nearby wetlands.





Land purchase financing: The 40 acres purchased by MSP was financed through a partnership with Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT, a certified B-Corporation that operates a Real Estate Investment Trust focused on organic farmland. Two key factors, facilitated by Iroquois Valley, allowed MSP to own the land: (1) Iroquois Valley’s Soil Restoration Notes waive land payments for the first two years allowing farmers to invest in soil and business building and (2) Iroquois Valley’s commitment to financing small acreage purchases, which is uncommon for farmland investors.

Lease structure: The research farm is managed by an LLC. The LLC holds a 21-year lease with the original landowners, the non-profit and the investor-landowner for the shared land. MSP tried many different models and worked with multiple legal advisors. A challenge was finding people who could work outside of existing legal frameworks to create a new, legally protected way of viewing community land ownership and access.



Landowner responsibility: Both the original landowners and the landowner-investor are full partners in the development of the Research Farm. They all help make decisions and plans for the land. The original landowners still live next door and are working towards regenerative land management, something they were not interested in before being approached by MSP. The investor-landowner is currently building a 2-acre homestead on the Research Farm to deepen their involvement with MSP and connections to the community.

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Land Access Spotlight:

Kevin Wolz

Midwest Agroforestry Solutions
Saturn & Vulcan Farm, Central Illinois

Unique lease structures create a supportive environment to build long-term commercial success

Midwest Agroforestry Solutions, founded by Kevin Wolz in 2013, establishes agroforestry-focused farms in the Midwest USA. The company currently has two farms, Vulcan Farm and Saturn Farm, both under long-term leases; each farm has distinct lease structures, operations, and goals.



Vulcan Farm, was established in 2015 on 10 acres.

The landowner currently lives on the property and runs a small livestock business with fiber sheep, as well as broiler chickens, laying hens, and turkeys. She was looking for a way to incorporate trees into her grazing practices for shade, fodder, and biodiversity, but knew she did not have the skills to take on such a project. Kevin was looking to lease land and was attracted to the benefits of incorporating livestock into his agroforestry operation. Sheep now graze between tree rows, creating a win-win situation.

Saturn Farm, established in 2016, has a different business model and landowner. This property is 21 acres and is designed as a commercial chestnut, hazelnut, and currant operation. Kevin and the landowner at Saturn Farm knew each other for several years prior to signing the lease. When the landowner decided to move out of state, the two worked together to negotiate a long-term lease that would support her desire for agroforestry on the farm. The landowner was uncomfortable with a 99-year agreement, so they settled on a 30-year term with the option to renew at the end of the term. Both parties thought the duration was long enough to see a return on investment. Kevin worked with outside investors to provide capital for tree establishment and maintenance. There are some restrictions delineated by the lease (e.g., no use of genetically modified crops and no aerial spray applications), but there are no use or access rights reserved by the landowner.

Key Features:

The Vulcan and Saturn Farm leases include several important characteristics that facilitate long-term, stable relationships between the farmer and landowners:

Long-term leases: Vulcan Farm is leased via a 99-year cash rent lease, which is the maximum permitted length of an agricultural lease in the state of Illinois. In contrast, Saturn Farm is leased via 30-year, cash-rent lease, which both parties thought was long enough to see a return on investment.

Reserved landowner rights: Since the landowner is the livestock farmer in the partnership at Vulcan, she reserves the right to hay or graze the alleys between the tree rows. Saturn Farm has no reserved landowner rights.

Market-adjusted lease rates: The annual lease payment is below-market; the price reflects the value of the landowner's reserved rights. To ensure that neither party is caught in an unfavorable economic situation, the lease price adjusts every 5 years in accordance with standard market rates.



First right of refusal: The lease is attached to the deed of the property and is registered with the county so that any potential buyers are aware of the existence of the lease. The lease also includes detailed language that determines how the property is appraised if Midwest Agroforestry Solutions were to purchase it.

Tree value: Recognizing the potential for mutual benefit, Kevin and the landowner at Vulcan Farm have also partnered in the investment of trees on the property. The landowner paid for the cost of wild-type trees for the habitat and shade value they provide, since she and her sheep reap the benefit from the ecosystem services provided by the trees regardless of their fruit and nut productivity. Kevin paid for the higher cost of using improved genetics for fruit and nut production, i.e., trees as crops. He benefits from the crop yield that comes from particular cultivars over and above their value as wild-type trees. This unique investment structure is also tied to appreciation of the property; if the landowner sells the property, it will be appraised considering only the value of trees as trees, so that Kevin does not pay twice for the value of productive trees. At Saturn Farm, Kevin has invested in extensive infrastructure on the land, including installation of a well and an irrigation system. At Saturn Farm, he and outside investors paid for, own, and will reap the profits from the trees.

USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP): At Vulcan Farm, the landowner enrolled in CRP, paid and was reimbursed for establishment of a CRP windbreak and pollinator strip, and receives all related incentive payments. She contracted Kevin to establish both practices. At Saturn, Kevin enrolled in CRP (windbreaks and pollinator habitat) and receives the incentive payments.



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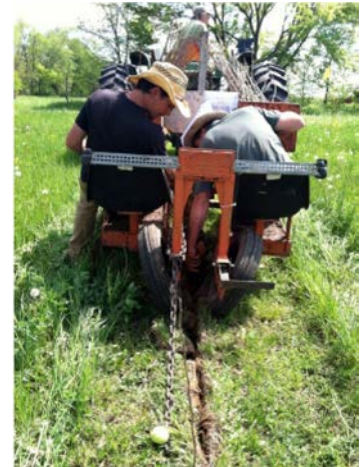
Casey Dahl
Feral Farm
Jefferson, WI

Long-term lease with another farmer allows flexibility & support, especially when managing from a distance



Feral Farm is a 10-acre chestnut alley cropping operation located on land leased from a 290-acre grass-based grazing farm in Wisconsin. Farmer Casey Dahl started the farm in 2014 as a perennial polyculture operation that included small fruits and other plantings. The operation and business model has since shifted to focus on chestnuts to accommodate changes in Casey's lifestyle, including moving over 200 miles away. Despite the challenges of distance, he and the landowner have worked closely to keep their arrangement mutually beneficial. The landowner has continued to operate the grazing farm and communicates with Casey when the chestnut operation requires attention.

Before founding Feral Farm, Casey previously grew annual vegetables and managed established orchards on leased land without written agreements. These handshake agreements worked well, but he wanted to establish his own tree crops. Lacking the capital to buy land, he sought out the possibility of a longer-term land lease. He found an opportunity through a casual conversation with a landowner who was interested in implementing agroforestry on her farm. However, the landowner did not want to make the investment and lacked the time and expertise. Recognizing a good match of skill and opportunity, the landowner offered to let Casey plant trees on her land; the two parties signed a lease within a year.



Key Features:

The Feral Farm lease has held strong over the first five years, despite some changes in circumstances and objectives, because of the inclusion of these elements:

Long-term lease: Feral Farm has a 15-year lease, which is the maximum permitted length of an agricultural lease in the state of Wisconsin. The lease does not include any provisions for renewal, due to state law. Dahl expects 15 years will provide sufficient time to establish his business value as collateral for a loan for further expansion. He pays a fixed annual rent informed by the average county farmland lease rate at the time of signing.

Reserved landowner rights: Although Casey's lease includes use of 10 acres, he pays a reduced rental price attributable to rent on the equivalent of the two acres occupied by his widely spaced rows of chestnut and fruit plantings. The landowner reserves the right to manage and harvest hay in the alleys between the tree rows, and Casey must keep the alleys clear for landowner use.



First right of refusal: If the landowner chooses to sell the leased land, Casey has the right of first refusal to purchase his 10 acres of land. If the land is sold to another party, the lease is designed so the buyer would have to honor his lease.

Tree, infrastructure, and equipment cost: Casey pays all costs associated with the tree establishment and maintenance. The landowner waived rent for the first two years, which allowed Casey to invest more money into establishing the farm. If Casey needs help from the landowner, he must hire her to do custom work. They share a strong commitment to keep everything transparent and professional, but also help each other with small tasks.

Liability: The Feral Farm lease includes clear language about who is legally responsible if something goes wrong. This includes loss or damages to equipment and infrastructure, as well as injuries to people. For example, there is a clause regarding parties and visitor groups.

Communication schedule: Several provisions in the lease detail requirements for communications between Casey and the landowner. One requirement is an annual, in-person meeting. This ensures dedicated space to talk about any issues that have arisen. For example, when Casey started making plans to relocate his residence to over 200 miles away. Another communication provision relates to the expectation of future grazing in the leased area. If the landowner decides she would like to incorporate her cattle into the leased area, she must submit a grazing plan and have it approved by Casey.



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Land Access Spotlight:

Greg & Jan Judy
Green Pastures Farm
Clark, MO

Leasing land helps build business while improving the ecosystem through silvopasture

Greg and Jan Judy own Green Pastures Farm, a grazing operation in Missouri that includes 16 separate properties; twelve of these properties are leased from nearby landowners. Green Pastures' primary products are grass fed and finished beef, hair sheep, timber, and log-grown mushrooms. Greg and Jan also lease land to two other farmers who raise and manage hogs and goats. Their animal management strategy focuses on keeping inputs low by working in balance with the natural landscapes of their properties. Green Pastures currently manages 1600 acres, with 700 acres in grass and 900 acres in woodland.



Since the mid-1990s, Greg and Jan have worked to increase the beauty and value of the land through infrastructure improvements such as fencing, forest management, and targeted multi-species grazing to manage understory and open pasture vegetation. They have established silvopasture areas on several of the properties, both owned and leased. The goals for the silvopastures are to improve the forage availability, livestock access to shade, timber quality, and aesthetic aspects of the property. Culled logs are used as much as possible for timber and mushroom production.

Each lease agreement is unique to the property and the landowner. The Judys emphasize that leasing land rather than purchasing it frees up equity to invest directly into the animals and other aspects of growing the business.

Key Features:

Written, long-term lease: All Green Pastures leases are legally binding, written leases lasting at least seven years. For the Judys, this duration ensures a return on investment.

Custom rent: Leases range from \$0 to \$25 an acre. The price reflects the infrastructure and land improvements the land needs to support grazing (installing ponds for water access, building permanent fencing, restoring overworked or poor land, etc.) This custom rent price recognizes the regenerative and beautification work Green Pastures conducts on the land.



Infrastructure cost: In general, Greg and Jan plan for two years of infrastructure and land improvements, followed by five years of good production through sustainable grazing. Costs for fencing and materials are also written clearly into each lease to designate responsibilities for purchase, maintenance, and whether costs are accounted for separately or in the rent price.



Landowner communication: The key to successful leases is in the relationships the Judys build with the landowners from whom they rent. The Judys invite landowners to experience how the cattle move and improve the land, sending updates monthly in a picture-rich email. As a gesture of goodwill, the Judys also provide meat to the landowners from cattle raised on the land leased from them. The Judys say it is the responsibility of the farmer to maintain clear lines of communication. These strong relationships lead to long-term lease agreements and lease renewals.



Connected lease properties: Most of Green Pastures' leased properties are adjacent to each other so the properties share resources, such as electricity and fencing. For example, one of the leased farms has the capacity to charge fences on five other properties.

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