

A View from the Summit, Part 1

By [kfeterl](#) | March 26, 2022

What a simple joy it was to come together again for the [Midwest Soil Health Summit!](#)

Fruit, vegetable, and perennial presentations kicked the Summit off on Tuesday, March 8. After a welcome from Commissioner Thom Petersen, Sarah Lindblom presented the opening plenary, encouraging attendees to apply a systems thinking approach to soil health.

Lindblom also conducted a simple slake test, using four different soil samples with a range of tillage and chemical application history. The slake test simulated an extreme rain event and how varying soil structures may or may not retain their integrity. You can perform this same test and three others at home too! You'll find video, podcast, and written soil test resources [here](#).

Breakout session topics included the delightfully titled "Keep the Poop Off the Food" (food safety and integrating livestock), financial and technical assistance programs, farm management and quality of life, and new perennial fruit and nut crops. "There's always something new to learn," shared longtime Summit attendee Tom Barthel, known for his soil health expertise and oak savanna restoration with livestock at Snake River Farm.

Les Macare closed out the day by sharing how [Racing Heart Farm](#) implements each of the [five principles of soil health](#) in vegetable production. Macare shared numerous practical tools they use on the farm to make life easier, including occultation with landscaping fabric and the "magical" Japanese paperpot transplanter (which directly translates as the "little farming buddy").

"Things have only gotten easier, more efficient, better" since the farm went no-till, Macare said emphatically. Audience members paid rapt attention. "We always learn something at the Soil Health Summit." Kathy Bushman said. "We picked up some really innovative practices from Les today that we're going to try out on our farm this year."

And it wouldn't be an SFA event without good grub! Caterer [Elbows Allowed](#) sourced locally grown foods for a mouthwatering taco bar, and [Minnesota Farmers Union](#) kept us caffeinated throughout the day.

A big shout-out to the 150+ people who attended, to our wonderful venue hosts at [Oliver Kelley Farm](#), and to our stellar speakers for sharing practical tips and practices that make their operations successful along with new ways to think about soil health. Some of the slide presentations are available for viewing and download on our [Summit homepage](#).

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[Read about Day 2 of the Summit here.](#)