

December 2021

## **Nomination for the Wisconsin Land + Water 2022 Outstanding Conservation Employee Award**

**Nominee:** Marie Raboin, 608.228.6324, [raboin.marie@countyofdane.com](mailto:raboin.marie@countyofdane.com)

**Award Category:** Category 2

**Title/Years of Service:**

- Conservation Specialist – Senior, Dane County Land & Water Resources Department, ~6 years

**Education/Background:**

- BS in Soil & Land Management – UW Stevens Point
- MS in Agroecology – UW Madison
- Approximately 10 years of service with NRCS as a Soil Conservationist
- Director of Agroecology at the Kusamala Institute of Agriculture & Ecology in Malawi, Africa
- Agriculture Research Technician at the USDA Agriculture Research Service in Maryland
- Owner/Operator of Brix Orchard and Cidery in Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin

**Nominator:** Amy Piaget, 608.212.9172, [piaget.amy@countyofdane.com](mailto:piaget.amy@countyofdane.com)

**Nomination Summary:**

Marie Raboin has been working in the conservation field for over 15 years. She brings a “just do it” attitude to work each day with her passion and enthusiasm, especially as it relates to regenerative agriculture and healthy landscapes. She strives to find solutions exploring management feasibility and economic benefits that will work best for the landowner and their goals. If she does not know an answer, she will seek out someone who does either within the department, county structure, or externally from public or private sector partners. Her experience working with NRCS brings added value to the staff and producers she works with.

**Nomination Criteria:**

The following are examples of the work and efforts Maria conducts that demonstrate her commitment to soil and water conservation and how to make these efforts more efficient going into the future:

- On a daily basis, Marie comes to work with a “just do it” attitude to get things done. She is always thinking outside the box and pushing the limits of conservation programs with the soil, water, and landowners’ best interests at heart.
- With her experience as a grazing specialist, Marie has effectively more than doubled the adoption of rotational grazing in Dane County. She has worked with at least 15 producers on improving their existing pastures, expanding their total pasture acres, or conducting full

conversion from row crop to pasture. She is also a meta-stakeholder for Grasslands 2.0 serving as a project advisor providing knowledge, perspectives, and expertise for the project.

- Through partnerships and creative grant writing to the tune of over \$100,000, Marie has built a network of producers and experts on grazing topics to build farmer networks for sharing ideas, information, and education. This network empowers the producers to take ownership of their ideas while providing them the support they need to answer questions and get assistance along the way. As such, Marie was instrumental in aiding in the creation of the Biological Farming Friends producer-led group – the first in Dane County to partner with the county as a collaborating entity.
- With regard to participating in the association, Marie has presented at a number of the annual conferences on grazing and other county programs. She spent a virtual happy hour showcasing her personal business, Brix Cidery, at a county conservationist meeting to rave reviews. She has assisted where needed on training efforts related to grazing and has assisted with providing educational support to other counties and partners with regard to the rainfall simulator. She most recently has been accepted on the SOC Team for a rewrite of the Conservation Crop Rotation NRCS 328 Technical Standard.
- These are just the highlights from Marie's time at Dane County. She has over 10 years of successes with NRCS, a nonprofit organization in Africa, and operating her own orchard, cidery, and restaurant focused on locally sourced foods. Marie breathes conservation in both her professional and personal life.

*Attachments: Letter of Recommendation*



Dear WI Land + Water,

It's my absolute pleasure to recommend Marie Raboin for an Outstanding Conservation Employee Award. Marie and I have been official colleagues in Dane County for two years now, and I continue to be impressed by her dedication to conservation, her relentless push towards innovation, and her unique approach to conservation.

Marie's positive attitude and approachability allows her to build relationships with the most hesitant landowners and she has a history of getting conservation contracts with huge phosphorus reductions per dollar spent. She doesn't stop at the minimum though, she continues to coach producers through farm management changes and builds their confidence in decision making. This increased confidence causes conservation decisions outside of contracts to be made, as cost share funds producers receive are often reinvested in more conservation. A testament to her relationships with farmers, is the constant phone calls she gets while farmers are chopping alfalfa and the requests for a carpool friend for far equipment pickups.

Marie has championed small group meetings and farm tours where everyone has a chance to speak and feels comfortable enough to ask questions. She connects new and experienced farmers and agribusiness professionals alike, she highlights everyone's strengths and makes sure everyone feels valued in the process. This year Marie's work has culminated in a second year of funding for a new Producer Led Watershed Group in the lower Yahara watershed which encompasses her ideology of peer to peer learning and network building. In the group first's year Marie started a video series called *Lawn Chair Farming*, participated in the DATCP producer-led webinar series, and secured private funding to explore mobile seed cleaning equipment and additional cost-share dollars to get an additional 1,400 acres of cover crops established. Did I mention she did this accomplished most of this on crutches?

Outside of the group she has continues to better her department and other agencies. Marie successfully wrote a DATCP SWRM grant in 2021, joined an NRCS work team for the Conservation Practice Standard, and continues to serve a significant role on the Grassland 2.0 stakeholder team. She not only goes the extra mile for landowners but is always willing to collaborate and help the next generation of conservationist, as I know she takes the time to network with many new graduates. She never hesitates to share her expertise and experiences to help other organizations with similar conservation goals (UW-Madison, Sand County Foundation, and Upper Sugar River Watershed Association). Marie continues to push me, her colleagues, and her farmers to work towards the next level. The support and vision she provides, allows all of us to dream big and accomplish more than we could ever imagine.

Marie is the number one relationship builder I know, and her commitment on and off the job to transforming agriculture for producers and consumers alike is an inspiration. Without a doubt, I recommend Marie Raboin to be an Outstanding Conservation Employee for 2022, as I know the landscape of Southern Wisconsin would not look the same without her. Please feel free to contact me at 608-224-3716 should you like to discuss Marie's qualifications and experience further. I'd be happy to expand on my recommendation.

Best wishes,

Chelsea Zegler  
UW-Madison Division of Extension- Ag and Water Quality Educator