

WISCONSIN LAND+WATER CONSERVATION 2024 OUTSTANDING CONSERVATION EMPLOYEE AWARD
NOMINATION INFORMATION

1) Please provide the following information:

- Name, address, and contact information (phone and email address, if available) of the nominee.

Tonya Gratz

608-325-4195 ext 121

Tonya.Gratz@wi.nacdnet.net

- Award category, county department name, title, and years of service of nominee.

Outstanding Conservation Employee Award 2024

Green County Land and Water Conservation Department -

- Education and background, past and present career responsibilities, level of professional knowledge and ability.

June 2003-Present - Soil Conservationist – Green County. Ensure and encourage landowners to be compliant with county and state rules and programs focused on agriculture production. Protect and enhance the natural resources including soil and water in the county. Educate farmers and citizens how and why to practice conservation.

BA Geography from UW-Whitewater Dec 2001.

Nominated by:

Marie Raboin

5201 Fen Oak Dr, Madison WI 53718

608-630-3325

Raboin.marie@countyofdane.com

Todd Jenson

Green County Conservationist

1627 4th Avenue West

Monroe, WI 53566

(608) 325-4195 Ext. 119

Todd.Jenson@wi.nacdnet.net

2) Summarize your entry in five sentences or less.

Tonya is a dedicated conservationist who goes above and beyond for her county, her farmers and the natural resources in Green County. She has generated excitement and passion around conservation and regenerative farming in the region and has supported the farmers in her area that are trying new farming techniques to improve soil health and water quality. Her passion and hard work has resulted in a successful farmer-led watershed group, The Farmers of the Sugar River, as well as other clean water initiatives in the county. Tonya is a prime example of a government employee who truly is “here to help.”

3) Tell us in 500 words or less how the nominee meets the award criteria and guidelines.

From Marie in Dane County:

According to the farmers and organizations that work with Tonya, she is a tireless Land and Water Conservation Department employee for Green County. She demonstrates her dedication to the department as well as the state's natural resources through her unwavering efforts to provide timely and productive assistance to the residents, farmers and landowners in Green County. She organizes field days for Farmers of the Sugar River, writes and manages their grant, and organizes their budget. According to several farmers in the group, she has grown in confidence over the past few years in the area of soil health and has brought her passion and knowledge to the county through field days, projects, and focusing on one-on-one interactions that bridge the sometimes widening divide between farmers and government. Tonya not only researches new farming ideas, but take the time to listen to her farmers, follow up as needed and make sure they are supported in their farming decisions.

In addition to her work with farmers and landowners in her county, Tonya has been active in youth engagement activities in the county like high school soil judging.

Through her dedication to strengthening partnerships between the county, state and non-profits, like Wisconsin Women in Conservation, Tonya has been able to reach underserved farming and landowner communities. Her work with women farmers and landowners differentiates her conservation portfolio and allows her expertise and care to reach further into the community. I have personally witnessed her use the rainfall simulator at events held for women farmers, as well as co-present with her local NRCS partner staff at events to promote conservation programs.

At the end of the day, it is dedicated staff, like Tonya who are effective in not only getting conservation practices established in her community, but supporting others in doing the good work that is needed to maintain and improve Wisconsin's soil and water resources. She has earned the respect of farmers and landowners in Green County, she has taken the initiative to go above and beyond what is asked of her as a county employee and she is a leader in conservation in the State of Wisconsin. We should all be lucky enough to have someone like Tonya working in our county.

From Todd in Green County:

Tonya Gratz was hired in 2003. She was green, but up to any challenge. She fit well into the staffing family and works well with co-workers, other agencies, and landowners. She is constantly looking at how to better serve customers.

She started a nutrient management program for farmers numerous years ago. Manure scales were secured to go out and weigh spreaders. Soil sampling techniques were taught to the farmers. She went the extra mile and did a lot of the preliminary work in writing the plan for the farmer. She loaded the fields, soil types, soil test results, etc. before the first class started. Three classes were scheduled for the writing of plans, but for those who needed it, one-on-one was done either at their home or in our office.

Tonya restarted the youth conservation field days. She organized volunteer speakers, fifth grade classes to attend, worked with the City of Monroe to obtain permits for using a park, the Green County Conservation League in securing insurance for the event, and Green County Farm Bureau and Compeer for lunch for the speakers. Field days are held one day in May and one day in October. Approximately 300 students attend the event annually and learn about soil, forestry, water invertebrates, fish

management, prairies, watersheds, soil and water conservation, aquatic invasive, drones bee keeping, and wildlife management.

I believe her biggest accomplishment is the startup of the Producer Led Watershed, Farmers of the Sugar River. She works with their Board of Directors in writing of a DATCP grant to secure money, setting up the annual meeting and garnering speakers and lunch for the event, lining up field events, farm tours, and educational activities, and acting as the collaborator for the group.

Tonya has been a great promoter of soil health and the planting of cover crops. She has set up farm field tours of cover crops for farmers. Fliers with maps were available for farmers to go out at their leisure to look at different types of covers that were marked with posts and signs, and explained the type of cover crops planted, seeding date, and what is was seeded in to.

She has a background in GIS. Tonya has set up databases for new wells, properly abandoned wells and all the manure storage structures in the county. She also updates our department website.

At our monthly committee meetings, one of the agenda items is educational demonstration, where Tonya has something prepared to share with the committee and attempt to educate them on something related to conservation.

Tonya increases her knowledge of engineering each year. She works well with landowners and contractors on the installation of practices.

Tonya has a broad range of responsibilities in Green County. From surveying and designing projects, construction inspection, administration of various programs, educational activities, and the working with others in the office to others in the community.

Outside of work, Tonya and her husband Tony, have three daughters. Tonya is a 4-H leader. Tonya and Tony recently bought a 35 acre woods to tinker with. She is also a speaker at one of the breakout sessions this year at the conference.



December 12, 2023

Re: Tonya Gratz – Nomination for the 2024 Outstanding Conservation Employee Award

To whom it may concern

It is an honor to nominate **Tonya Gratz for the 2024 Outstanding Conservation Employee Award**. Tonya has been instrumental in amplifying what Wisconsin Women in Conservation means to the women landowners and farmers, and in a big way, supported the program and set it up for success. I am thrilled to nominate her on behalf of the WiWiC Team (Partner organizations: Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, Marbleseed, Wisconsin Farmers Union and Renewing the Countryside).

Tonya exemplifies the power of collaboration and cultivating relationships. She has been instrumental in setting up so many women to be better stewards of the land through this program, by personally visiting their farm, doing land walks and talking them through options and finally providing them with a conservation plan. The women hold these conservation plans so dearly since Tonya has crafted them by weaving the landowners' vision and goals for the land. Tonya wrote 23 conservation plans in Green county alone and set the project moving forward with great vigor. These women were then the ambassadors for the program.

Whenever WiWiC has approached Tonya, she has always been a tremendous source of support for talking our goal forward - helping women with a land walk, a conversation, or educating them on the benefits of conservation, and the programs available. The "Rainfall Simulator" that Tonya brought to every event we had in Green County has vividly increased understanding about the need for conserving the land. By her dedication and creativity, Tonya has helped amplify our outreach and conservation efforts, and reach our goals. For this reason, WiWiC is very proud to nominate Tonya Gratz for this award.

Please do not hesitate to reach me for any information you may need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Esther S Durairaj', written in a cursive style.

(Esther S Durairaj)
Program Director - WiWiC



Dear WI Land + Water,

It's my absolute pleasure to recommend Tonya Gratz for an Outstanding Conservation Employee Award. Tonya and I have worked together since I joined Extension in 2020, and I continue to be impressed by her dedication to local conservation programming, her contribution to many partnerships, and her service for Farmers for the Sugar River.

I started to work with Tonya, while coordinating the southwest regional producer-led groups. Her inquisitive and unassuming nature provided a welcoming and open environment for partnerships to flourish. She provides succinct and pertinent feedback to discussions, always prioritizing farmers' needs. It quickly became apparent what a conservation powerhouse Tonya was. She is a reliable colleague who always attends meetings and provides meaningful feedback to project ideas. She regularly volunteers to help moderate sessions for the Wisconsin Cover Crop Conference and this year, did not hesitate to volunteer to host a roundtable during the Wisconsin Water and Soil Health Conference.

Tonya is always learning and listening for content and collaborations that will fit Farmers for the Sugar River's needs. Her strong relationships with the community became apparent this year while working on both nitrogen and phosphorus projects. She has been working with Kevin Masarik on well water monitoring in Green County, a potentially contentious topic. She was able to get local businesses to sponsor meals for an educational event and went farm to farm promoting the event. The event was a huge success with over 30 people in attendance and has spurred continued work in the area. During strategic planning, Tonya suggested doing nitrogen rate trials to calculate nitrogen use efficiency on county land. That very same day we toured the plot location and had drafted a protocol and outreach plan.

This year I started a soil test phosphorus project that aimed to look at surface levels of phosphorus and if there are systems that minimize risk with continued application of fertility. I was behind on sampling and was worried about the ground freezing. Her positive attitude and commitment started the whole statewide project off on a great foot and renewed by excitement to the work. Tonya had recruited 4 farmer participants. I called on a Friday afternoon to create a sampling plan. She immediately offered to coordinate with all the farmers and even help soil sample. When we started on Monday morning, she had mapped out our route, and each farmer was ready with field maps upon our arrival. Driving around Green County was a testament to her relationships with farmers, the trust and warm welcome we got when arriving on a farm is rare and left a strong impression. She immediately followed through with scheduling a time to go over the results, guaranteeing the whole farmer group would benefit from the outreach.

Tonya always comes to meetings with a new piece of data and questions on how farmers can interpret, always seeking to better her and Green County's understanding of conservation agriculture. Tonya's persistent commitment and excitement for conservation deserves to be recognized this year. I recommend Tonya Gratz to be an Outstanding Conservation Employee for 2024, as I know the landscape of Green County would not look the same without her. Please feel free to contact me at 608-224-3716 should you like to discuss Tonya'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

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EMPLOYEE AWARD

Letter of Support for Tonya Gratz

December 1, 2023

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing this letter in support for the 2024 outstanding conservation employee nominee, Tonya Gratz.

I am the Southwest Regional Outreach Specialist for the Nutrient and Pest Management program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I work with farmers in Green, Lafayette, Grant, Crawford, Richland, and Iowa counties managing nutrients and pests with a heavy focus on nutrient management planning with goals of improving water quality and profitability. In this position, I work heavily with Tonya in partnering with farmers in Green County to implement, research, and demonstrate complex agronomic solutions to improve farm profitability and protect water profitability.

Tonya works collaboratively with farmers, agronomists, conservation professionals (county, state, and federal), producer-led groups, and regional teams to implement conservation practices. Tonya is a driving force in the producer-led groups activity in Green County. Without her leadership, these groups would be much less effective and possibility nonexistent. Tonya is always pursuing professional development and actively shares this with stake holders. She consistently leads the development of outstanding outreach programs and is always pushing others to provide the best and most updated agronomic info to farmers. I have seen her work successfully one-on-one, in small groups, and at large meetings helping provide the best conservation practice advise. She is very deserving of this award and is an excellent role model and example of an outstanding conservation department employee.

Sincerely,

Daniel Smith

Daniel H Smith, CCA
Southwest Regional Specialist
Nutrient and Pest Management Program
University of Wisconsin-Madison
445 Henry Mall, Suite 318
Madison, WI 53706-1577
Cell: 608-219-5170
<http://ipcm.wisc.edu>

I thought it was really important to include this letter of recommendation from Jerry Daniels, a farmer in Green County.



MILWAUKEE WI 530

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- active with the soil pit judging teams for approx 100+ high schoolers
- she has videoed planter layout's & repair projects for viewing at later times

~~Jerry Daniels
2145
Hwy 2
Holt
Wisconsin~~

- she has been in at the ground floor helping us setup & operate FDSugARR

- has grown in her confidence when she is asked the toughest questions about soil health

~~over~~
over

- Pulls us farmers together at ~~the~~ farmer of Sugar River. As we all have different and out of the box IDEAS

- Always takes the time to listen even the nuts & IDEAS

- Has pursued answers to our questions ~~any~~ anywhere, with the world ~~at~~ at our door step via internet.

- Can somehow get certain farmer's to do things and have it think was there IDEA

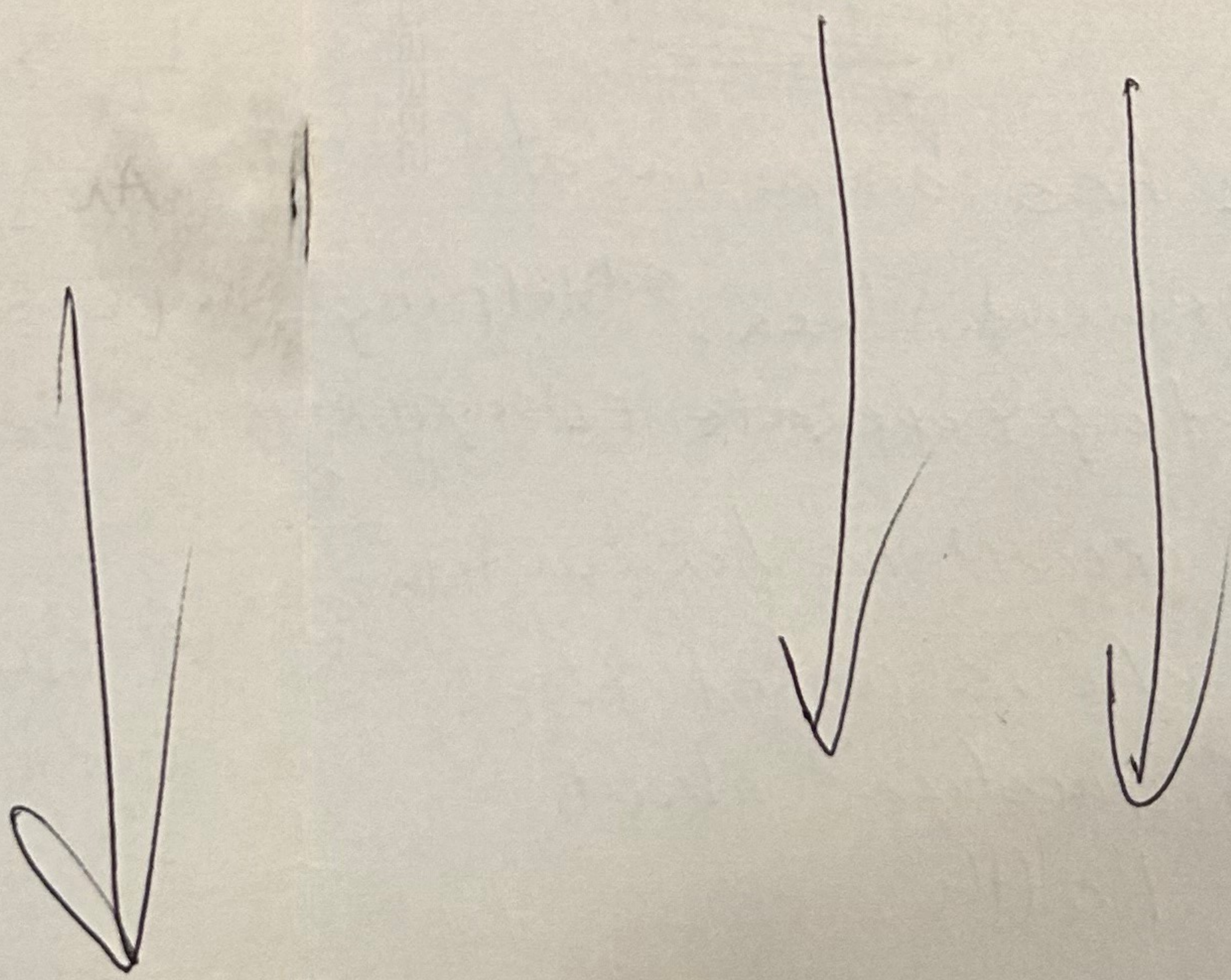
• She has earned the trust of many farmer's and has bridged the gap very well between farmer's & government

• She is always curious on new thoughts & IDEAS

• And let's us farmer's lead our watershed group with ~~our~~ con-jolling when needed,

• Has secured speaker's from out of state & Even canada from UW

• She is building ~~our~~ web sight, with ~~Resources~~ added on a ongoing basis
Resources



NO MOISTURE REQUIRED
OVERLAY FLAPS TO SEAL



To: Todd Jenson

From: The Farmers of the Sugar River Watershed Group

Letter of recommendation for Tonya Gratz

We have had the benefit of Tonya providing:

1. The initial opportunity to gather farmers interested in forming a watershed group here in Green County.
2. Providing the needed responsibility of doing the behind the scene paperwork and coordination to make the group a viable entity. The coordination of information flow thru and follow-up, the work of establishing our footprint to this group.
3. Meeting with farmers where they are! Easily conversing at their farms, providing go to persons, information sources, follow thru - all the while allowing the farmers within the group to grow on their own, share with others and being a good tool for the Group. The opportunity to know and understand the importance of being a tool for farmers is tremendous!
4. Being quick to acknowledge she may not have the expertise in a given area, she is a good learner, a good listener, someone who can connect many areas and provide pathways to help during the conversations and meetings.
5. Definitely not squeemish about new ideas outside of 'conservation', but embracing 'regenerative' agriculture to make improvements vs. just conserving what we have. Growth in the regenerative direction will only benefit the entire agricultural community. The opportunity to be PROactive, versus REactive is necessary.

We would be remis not to recognize Tonya's commitment, direction, belief and heartfelt honest dedication to the work, her outreach, who she is and what she is able to do for others. As a group, as individuals, we have profited from her in many ways of growth, and learning and connecting opportunities.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this recommendation.