2027 Conservation Farmer of the Year Nomination

Nominee: Jim Hebbe, W1531 Bluffton Road, Green Lake, WI 54941

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1. Jim is a grain farmer that started farming in Green Lake County in 1983 conventionally and switched to no-till farming in 1986. Jim was also the County Conservationist for Green Lake County from 1984 to 2013. During his time, he helped develop conservation standards for the Farmland Preservation Program.

   Jim has done various conservation practices over the years. He added a WASCoB to a field that drains into a Class 1 trout stream, planted native prairie grasses as a buffer along that stream, and added evergreen trees into sandy, highly erodible soil as part of the CRP program. He has also done no till, cover crops, grass waterways, diversions, prairie strips, CSP participant, nutrient management, and contour strips. He won the Sand County Foundation's Leopold Conservation Award in 2012.

   Jim loves to experiment with different cover crops, planting green, and testing out different practices throughout his land for the betterment of agriculture and conservation. He has participated in the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program for the last three years, has done on farm trials with the UW Soils Lab, participates frequently in Wisconsin Farm Bureau events, and was recently on their "The Rural View" podcast in April of 2026. He was elected as the Green Lake Farmers Coalition (DATCP producer-led watershed group) Vice President and is a committee member of the Green Lake Association, which is a non-profit lake group in the county. Jim hosted a field day in 2025 showing his buckwheat cover crop and other test strips he's trying out for covers, with and without herbicide treatments.

2. Jim's dedication to conservation is astounding. He has tried multiple different cover crop concoctions, different planting times to see when certain covers work best, planting green, and frost seeding to name a few. He has put in multiple projects like buffer strips along a trout stream, planted trees for CRP in highly erodible soils, and other structural projects to protect his fields and waterways on his property from

erosion. These include WASCoBs, a grade stabilization structure, a grassed waterway, diversions, and a wetland scrape.

In crop years 2023 & 2024, he participated in the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program with UW-Extension. In this trial, they used PIVOT-Bio, a biological product that would replace nitrogen fertilizers with something unlikely to leach and contaminate groundwater. He is participating again in 2026 & 2027, where he will be looking at cover crop biomass in fields that did and did not receive N treatment (to the cover) in 2025. From this, he will look at the grain yields compared to the amount of cover crop biomass from those fields. He is also placing lysimeters under plots that do and do not have cover crops to show the effect of covers have on N leaching.

Jim has done other projects on his own to test out cover crops and ways of planting that aren't common practice. In 2024, Jim tried buckwheat as a cover crop and then again in 2025. This last fall, he planted winter wheat green into the buckwheat. He also has test strips of camelina, various multispecies mixes, and has areas where he doesn't spray the cover before planting his cash crop, just to see how it turns out.

He is a leader in the conservation farming community. He has shared his experience at many roundtables and soil health conferences. Just this last year he was invited to share his NOPP findings at the WWASH conference in the Wisconsin Dells. He is always up for learning or sharing, regardless of whether it worked the way he wanted it to or not. He's also involved in the county producer-led watershed group, where he is acting vice-president, on the Green Lake Associations committee, and is heavily involved in the Green Lake Farm Bureau. He works with other non-profit organizations like the Sand County Foundation as well.

3. Within the last few years, one of Jim's friends had passed away unexpectedly. He has been helping that friend's grandson take over the farm. He is always willing to lend others equipment or help in any way that he can. He is always looking for an opportunity to expand his knowledge and do what he can to protect our natural resources.

Buckwheat cover crop no-till planted after winter wheat harvest in 2024.

Winter wheat coming through green buckwheat cover crop as of 10/2/2025.

Nitrogen Optimization Plot of 2024.

Multi-species cover crop of volunteer buckwheat, camelina, turnip, radish, and clover.

No-till peas planted into wheat residue.

Jim at a recent Green Lake Farmers Coalition field day using the soil penetrometer.