



BIRD FRIENDLY FARMING *WHAT IS IT?*

Healthy farms and healthy bird populations go hand in hand! Many kinds of birds are beneficial on farms. One benefit is pest control. During the nesting season, adult birds deliver many insects or rodents each day to their nestlings. Songbirds and grassland game birds consume insects that damage crops. Predators like hawks, owls, and kestrels help control mice, voles, and other rodents.

Farmers can help ensure birds have food, shelter, and nesting sites by adding or preserving bird-friendly features: native plant species, hedgerows, grasslands, wetlands, nest boxes, and perches. The result can be a farm where birds flourish and farmers reap the rewards of natural pest control.

This exhibit explores ways Minnesota farmers have created farms that welcome birds—supporting biodiversity, strengthening natural pest control, and supporting more resilient agricultural landscapes.



Green Lands
Blue Waters



Audubon Upper Mississippi River
Minnesota Grown
Lakewinds Food Co-op
Seward Community Co-op
Rivers Co-op Markets



BIRD FRIENDLY FARMING MORE THAN A PRETTY SONG!

Bird-friendly farming matters beyond the farm. As bird populations decline and natural habitats disappear, farms can provide important places for birds to feed, nest, and rest.

For farmers, a healthy bird population can reduce pest pressure, strengthen natural systems that support the farm, and reduce reliance on pesticides.

For consumers, food grown on bird-friendly farms offers a way to support farming practices that protect water, soil, wildlife, and the broader environment. By choosing foods from farms that make room for birds, we can help create a more resilient food system—and a more vibrant landscape for everyone.

ADDING BIODIVERSITY BACK TO FARMLAND

Farmers who plant trees and other native plants provide year-round habitat for wildlife on the agricultural landscape.

Agroforestry systems support biodiversity by layering trees, shrubs, and crops to create a variety of habitats for birds and other wildlife that need different types of nests, food sources, and shelter.

Best farming and grazing practices can make supporting bird habitat more possible while making farms more profitable.



TREE SWALLOWS

Tree Swallows are agile aerial insect hunters commonly found around farms, wetlands and pastures. They catch thousands of flying insects during the breeding season, making them valuable partners in natural pest control.

- Feed on flies, mosquitoes, beetles, winged ants and other flying insects.
- Nest readily in nest boxes near fields, wetlands and open grasslands.
- Help reduce insect pests without pesticides.

Similar insect-eating birds include Barn Swallows, Purple Martins, Eastern Kingbirds and Eastern Bluebirds.

DID YOU KNOW...

Tree Swallow parents feed their brood an average of 18 insects per visit every five minutes for 15 hours a day. That means over a 20 day nesting period, two parents will deliver about 120,000 insects to their nestlings!



SILVOPASTURE



BENEFITS OF SILVOPASTURE

Silvopasture is an agroforestry practice that intentionally integrates trees, grazing livestock, and forage management on the same land, creating a multilayered production system.

FARM MANAGEMENT BENEFITS

- Provides animals with shade, shelter, and diverse food sources
- Helps manage weeds, insects, and other agricultural pests

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Provides shelter, food, wildlife corridors, and critical habitat for birds, pollinators, and other wildlife
- Improves soil health and keeps nutrients cycling within the farm

FARM INCOME BENEFITS

- Produces additional crops such as fruit, nuts, seedpods, and timber
- Diversifies farm income and strengthens economic resilience

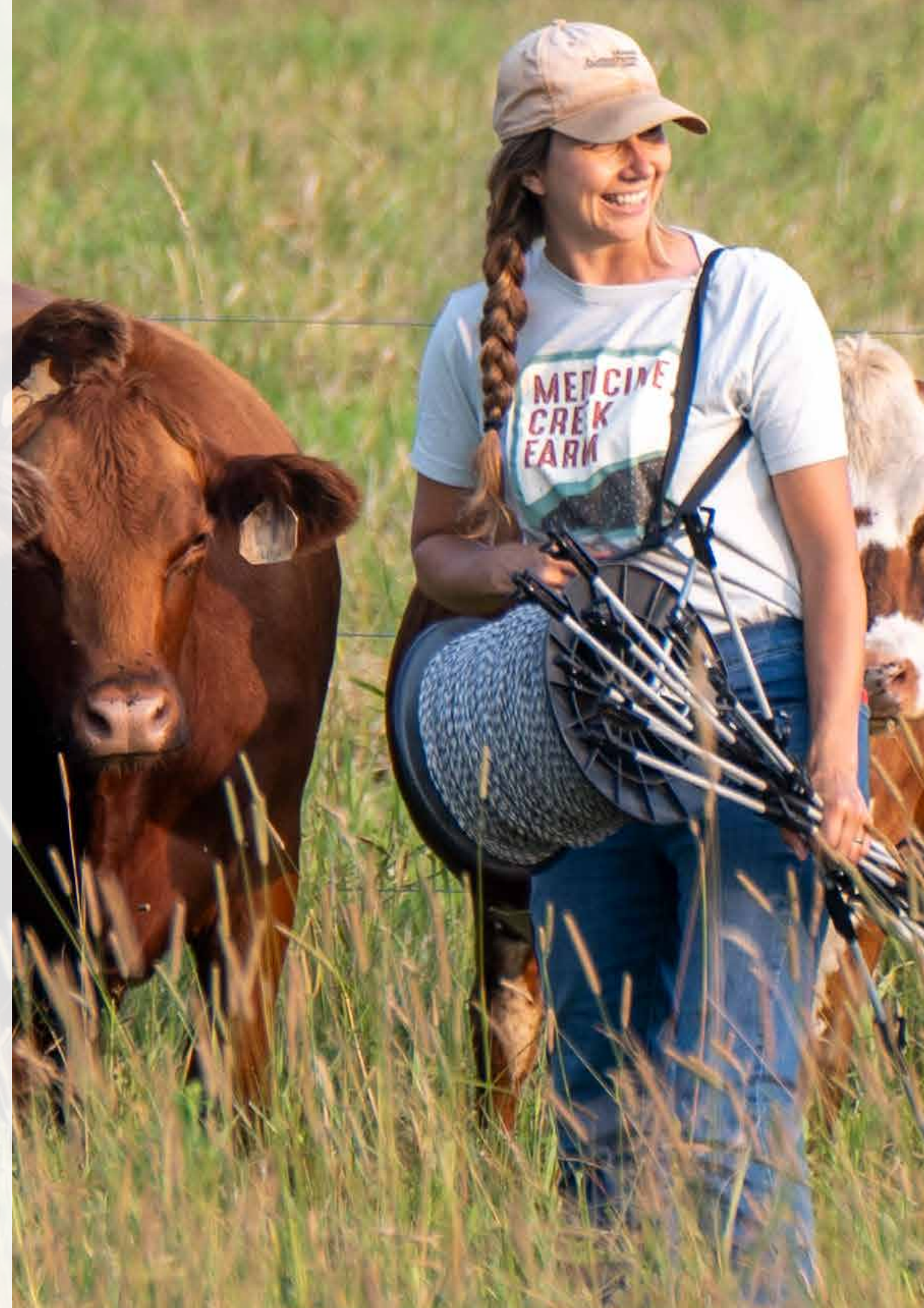
FARMS

MEDICINE CREEK FARM

Midwest farmers are attracting Tree Swallows as partners in reducing fly pressure, supporting animal welfare, and strengthening biodiversity on working lands. Installing nest boxes welcomes insect-eating birds into pastures to reduce the presence of flies.

At Medicine Creek Farm, farmer Hannah Bernhardt has always enjoyed seeing birds on the land and was inspired to attract more after learning about their pest control benefits from Wild Farm Alliance. She enlisted the help of a high school woodshop class to build 35 nest boxes. Her interest in supporting birds aligns with her family's stewardship ethos. "We are guided by animal welfare," says Bernhardt. "And for us that is both for the livestock we're raising and for the wildlife that are already here."

Bernhardt explains "In my experience, there's only a benefit from having birds on the farm. Installing bird boxes is a one-time cost and then you have this benefit for many years, letting nature do the work for us."



EASTERN MEADOWLARK

Eastern Meadowlarks are colorful songbirds of Minnesota's hayfields, pastures and prairies. They spend much of their time on the ground, eating insects during the growing season and helping support healthy grassland ecosystems.

- Feed on crickets, grasshoppers, caterpillars and other crop pests during the spring and summer.
- Nest in undisturbed grasslands, pastures and delayed-harvest hayfields.
- Benefit from rotational grazing, native prairie and diverse perennial cover.
- Their presence is a strong indicator of healthy grasslands that also support pollinators, soil health and other beneficial wildlife.
- Studies show grassland bird communities can reduce grasshopper populations by 25–55%, providing another natural benefit to working farms.

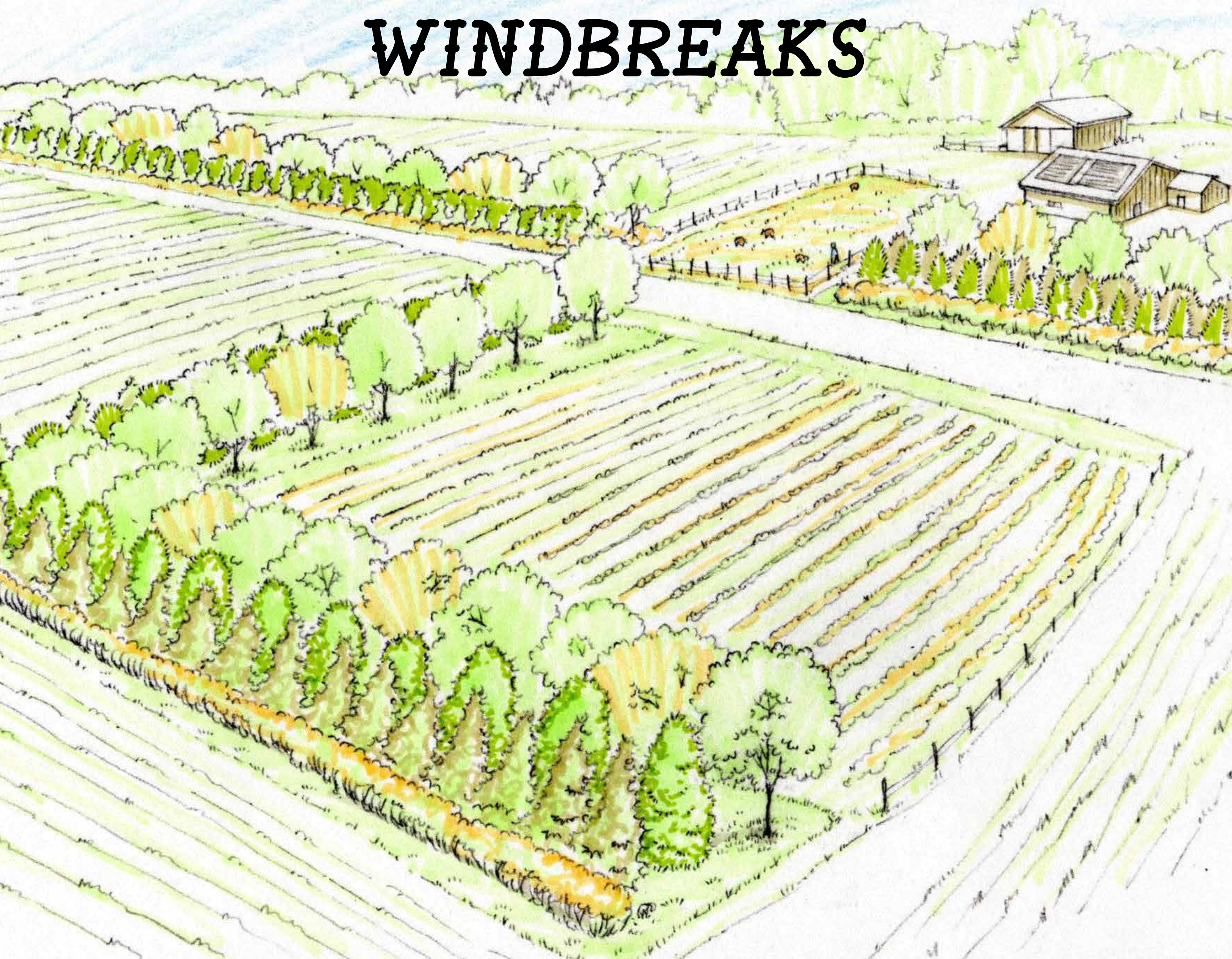
Similar grassland birds include Bobolinks, Dickcissels, and Grasshopper Sparrows.



DID YOU KNOW...

Eastern Meadowlarks create their nests by making a “grass igloo”: a domed, woven grass nest on the ground with a side entrance and often a short covered runway through vegetation.

WINDBREAKS



BENEFITS OF WINDBREAKS

Windbreaks are an agroforestry practice in which linear plantings of trees and shrubs are strategically placed on farms to protect soil, crops, and livestock from wind while also providing environmental and economic benefits.

LANDSCAPE & FARMING PRACTICE

Windbreaks are rows of trees and shrubs planted along field edges to protect crops and farm animals while providing environmental benefits and wildlife habitat.

FARM MANAGEMENT BENEFITS

- Increases water availability for nearby crops
- Provides livestock with shade and protection
- Protects wind-sensitive crops from damage

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Reduces soil erosion caused by wind
- Provides habitat for birds and other wildlife

FARMS



STONEY CREEK FARM

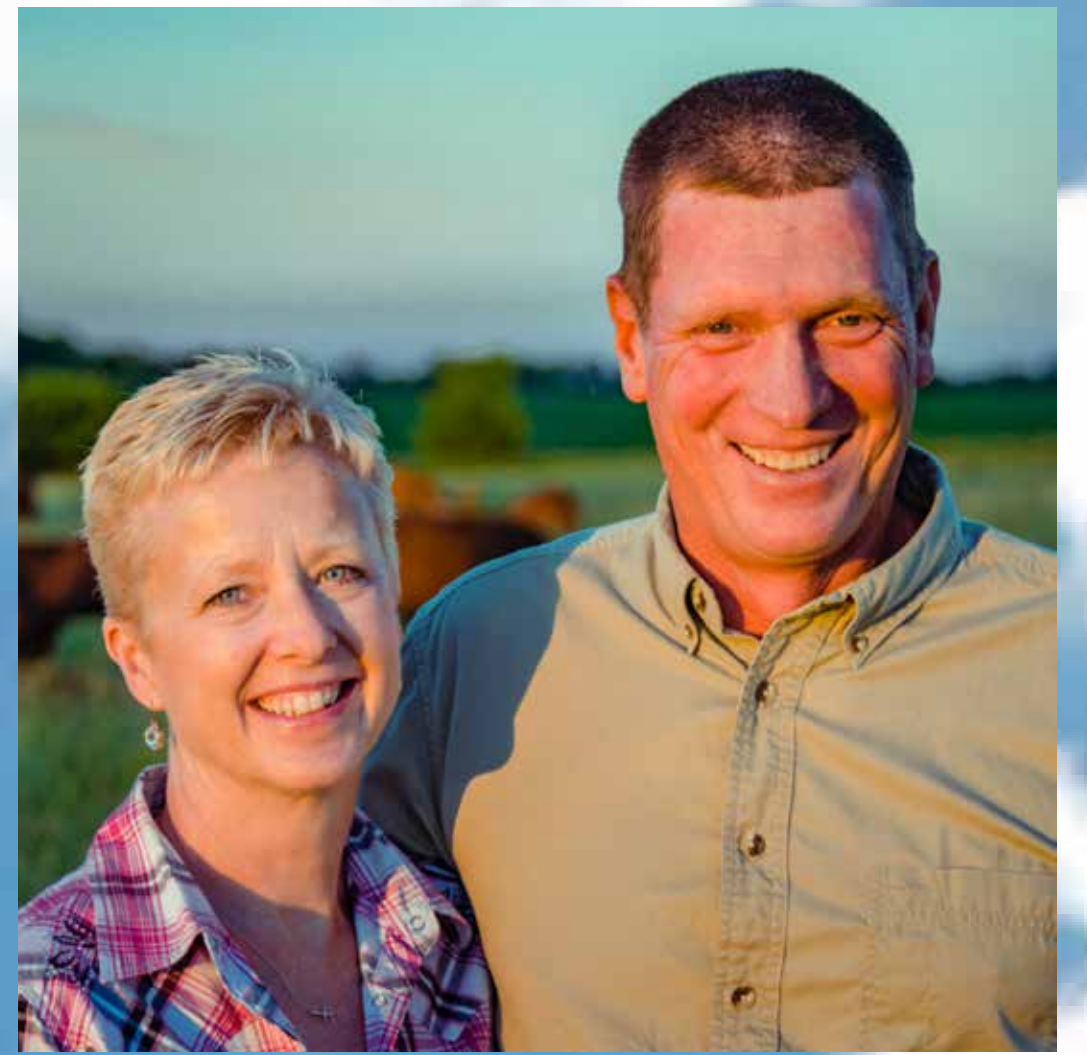
When Grant and Dawn Breitreutz took over Stoney Creek Farm in 1996, declining crop yields and poor livestock health put the operation's future at risk. They responded by gradually replacing conventional practices with a regenerative system focused on restoring soil health, improving forage and reducing purchased inputs.

Today, the Breitreutzes manage 1,759 acres with no-till planting, cover crops and a diverse rotation of corn, soybeans, oats, cereal rye and alfalfa. About 100 Red Angus cow-calf pairs graze rotationally across 675 acres of pasture and cover-cropped fields. Nearly half of the pasture was converted from cropland; the rest includes remnant prairie.

Adaptive grazing has increased forage production, extended the grazing season and given pastures more time to recover. On some fields, grass production doubled after the family introduced paddocks and watering systems. Even without reseeding, the number of native grass species found in the pastures grew from three to more than forty.

Cover crops keep living roots in the ground for more of the year, reducing erosion, improving water infiltration and helping protect the nearby Minnesota River. A transition to non-GMO grains has also allowed the farm to substantially reduce—or, in some cases, eliminate—synthetic fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides.

The changes have brought ecological and economic benefits. Deer, pheasants, grouse and bobolinks have returned in greater numbers as habitat has improved. Meanwhile, lower input costs, higher forage production, more beef raised per acre and direct sales of pork and poultry have made the farm more profitable and resilient.





AMERICAN KESTREL

American Kestrels are Minnesota's smallest falcons and valuable allies on farms. They hunt rodents, large insects and small birds from fence posts, utility lines and nest boxes, helping reduce crop pests naturally.

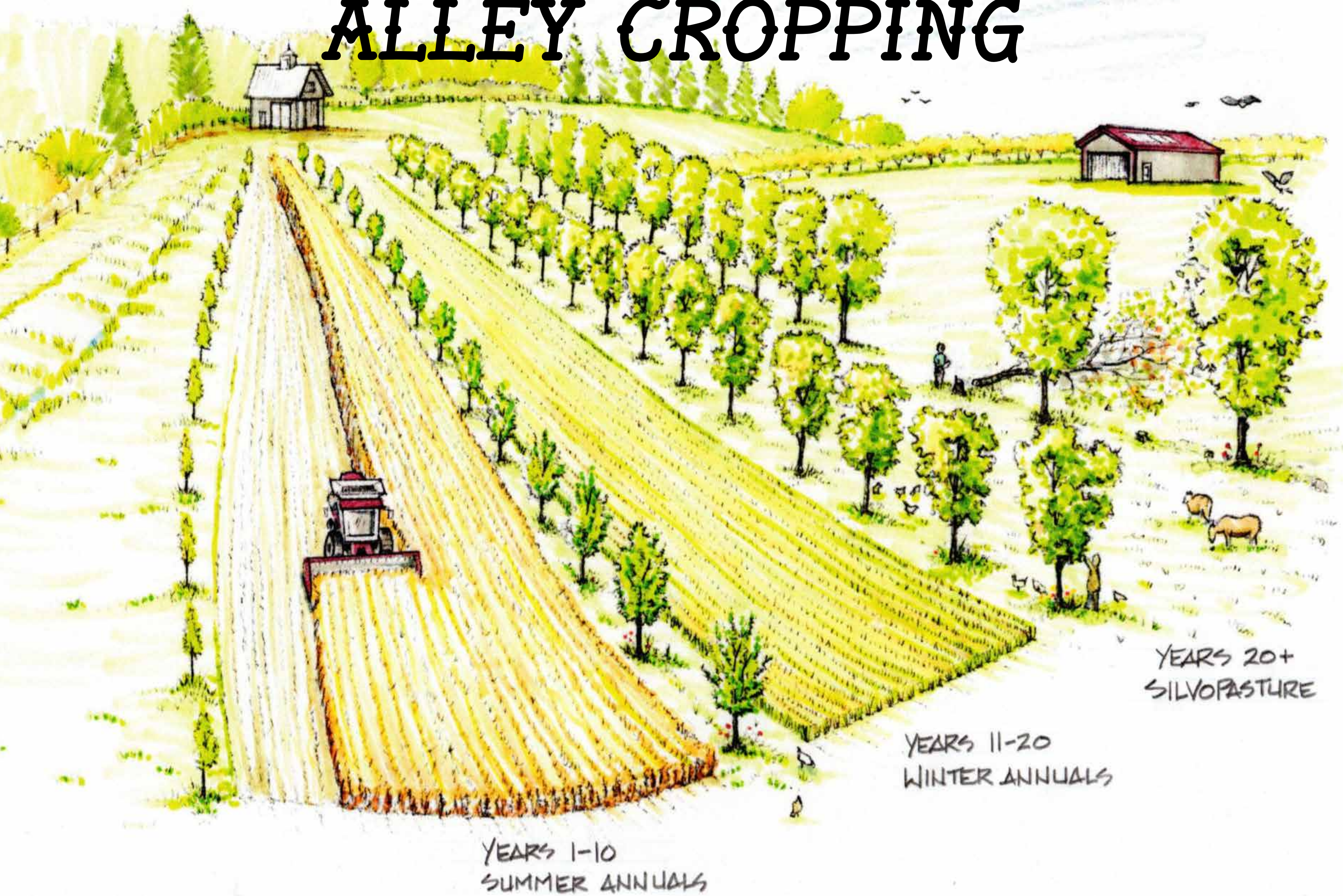
- Feed on voles, mice, grasshoppers, crickets and other large insects.
- Readily use nest boxes where natural tree cavities are scarce.
- Can help reduce rodent damage in hayfields, orchards and crop fields.
- Research found that orchards with kestrel nest boxes experienced significantly less fruit damage from pest birds, with every \$1 invested in nest boxes returning an estimated \$84–\$357 in protected sweet cherry crops.

Similar beneficial raptors include Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawks, American Barn Owls (rare in Minnesota) and Merlins.

DID YOU KNOW...

Kestrels can stay completely motionless in mid-air over a field by rapidly beating their wings and using their tails for lift. They are the hummingbirds of the raptor world.

ALLEY CROPPING



BENEFITS OF ALLEY CROPPING

Alley cropping is an agroforestry system in which crops are cultivated between widely spaced rows of trees or shrubs. The trees' deep, perennial roots capture water and nutrients improving soil health and increasing the land's productive potential. Timber, fruit, and nut trees can also generate additional revenue.

FARM MANAGEMENT BENEFITS

- Reduces wind stress and protects crops
- Improves soil health and fertility
- Helps stabilize temperatures around crops

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Supports soil regeneration and reduces erosion
- Provides habitat for birds and other wildlife

FARM INCOME BENEFITS

- Produces marketable products from both the crops in the alleys and the trees and shrubs
- Creates additional and more diverse farm income streams



LAKE SIDE PRAIRIE FARM

When Bryan and Jessie Simon established Lakeside Prairie Farm near Barrett, Minnesota, they envisioned agricultural production working alongside ecological restoration. They began converting row-crop fields to perennial vegetation and used managed grazing, wetland restoration and prescribed fire to rebuild native prairie, wetlands and oak savanna.

The farm raised and direct-marketed grass-fed beef, pastured pork and poultry, eggs, grains and vegetables. When the 195-acre operation could not produce enough beef income to support two families, the Simons shifted toward custom cattle grazing and a targeted goat-grazing service that makes conservation work a source of revenue.

Their goats control buckthorn and invasive plants on the farm and at client sites. Clearing dense brush brings sunlight back to the ground, helping native grasses, wildflowers and young trees recover. This varied vegetation creates food, nesting areas and protective cover for birds, pollinators and other wildlife. Deer, pheasants, grouse and bobolinks have become more abundant, reflecting the farm's improving habitat.

Perennial cover and managed grazing also reduce erosion, cycle nutrients, improve water infiltration and help protect nearby waterways. Supported by a 2024 Minnesota Department of Agriculture grant, continued oak savanna restoration shows how Lakeside Prairie Farm connects livestock, resilient farm income and lasting habitat conservation.



SHARP TAILED GROUSE

Sharp-tailed Grouse are iconic grassland birds that thrive where native prairie, grazing lands and working farms overlap. Their presence signals healthy, diverse habitat that also benefits livestock, pollinators and many other wildlife species.

- Depend on large areas of grassland with scattered shrubs.
- Nest in undisturbed cover and feed on seeds, insects and green plants.
- Chicks rely heavily on insects, helping keep insect populations in balance.
- Their presence is a strong indicator of well-managed, resilient grassland ecosystems.

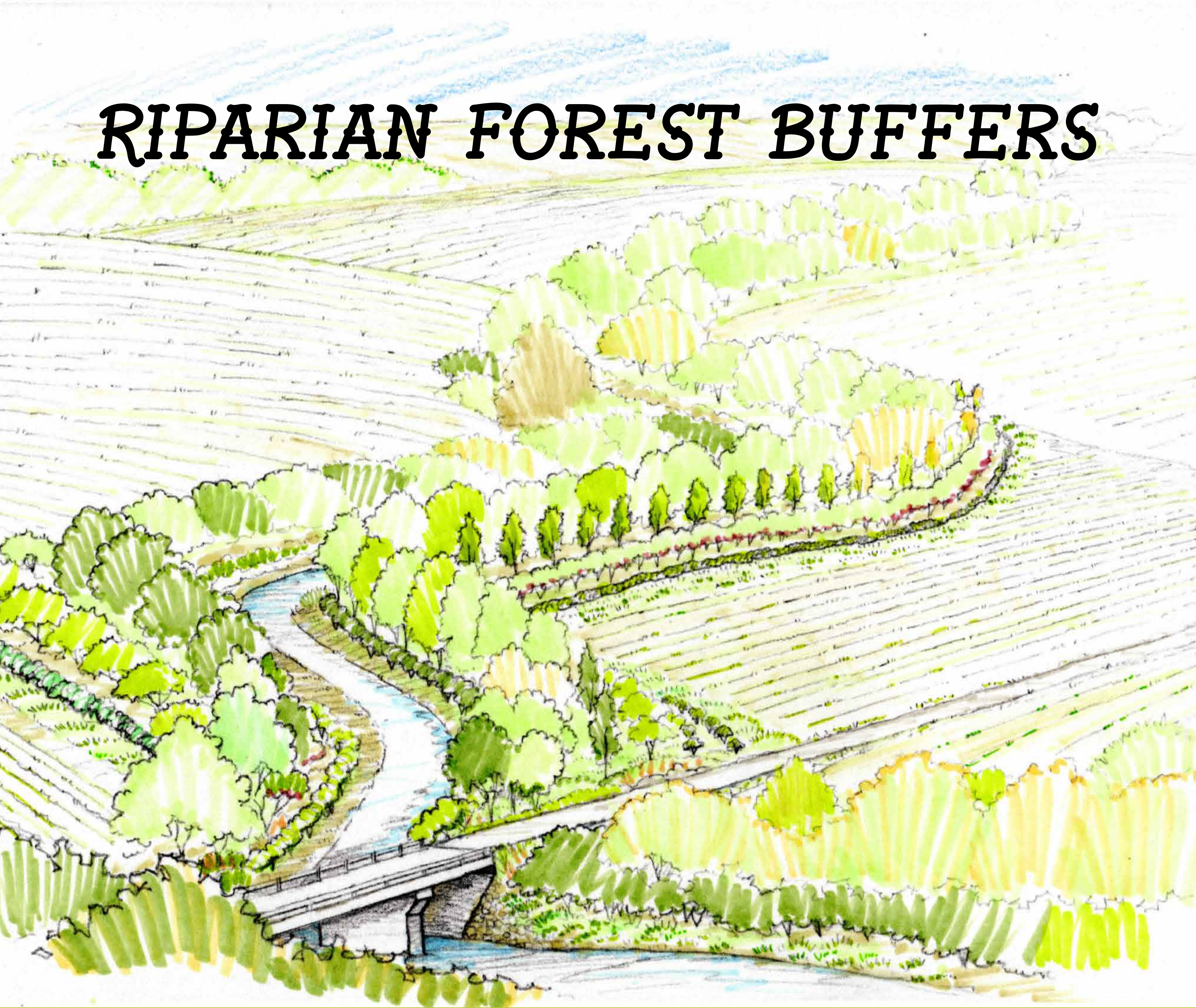
Similar grassland birds include Greater Prairie-Chicken, Ring-necked Pheasant and Upland Sandpipers.

DID YOU KNOW...

Male Sharp Tailed Grouse stomp their feet up to 20 times per second, making a sound like a rolling drum.



RIPARIAN FOREST BUFFERS



BENEFITS OF RIPARIAN BUFFERS

Riparian forest buffers are an agroforestry system in which trees and shrubs are planted alongside streams, lakes, and wetlands. By creating a protective transition between farmland and waterways, these buffers support cleaner water, healthier ecosystems, and more resilient farms.

WATER BENEFITS

- Slows runoff from fields during heavy rain and flooding
- Filters excess nutrients before they enter waterways
- Stabilizes streambanks and reduces soil erosion

WILDLIFE BENEFITS

- Provides food, shelter and nesting habitat for birds and other wildlife
- Shades waterways to maintain cooler temperatures for fish
- Supports pollinators when planted with diverse native vegetation



BOSSIE COW FARM

Bossie Cow Farm is a small, family-run organic dairy and beef farm nestled in the rolling hills of southeastern Wisconsin. As proud members of Organic Valley, the nation's largest organic farmer-owned cooperative, Thelma and Ricky are committed to producing wholesome organic milk while caring thoughtfully for their cows and the land.

The farm practices intensive rotational grazing, allowing the cows to spend the growing season on lush pastures filled with grasses, clovers, and other plants. This grass-based approach supports healthy animals while building soil health, protecting water, and sustaining the farm for future generations.

Protecting wildlife is a part of life at Bossie Cow Farm. "We intentionally encourage habitat on the farm," says Thelma, "Last year I put up 10 bluebird boxes in our pastures. This year I found out we regularly have nesting dickcissels on our farm along with many other bird species that rely on its grasslands for food, shelter, and nesting habitat."

For the Bossie Cow Farm family, farming is about more than producing Organic Valley milk, certified organic eggs, and pasture-raised grass-fed beef. It is about nurturing a living landscape where livestock, wildlife, people, and healthy ecosystems can thrive together. Here, thoughtful grazing, organic agriculture, and conservation naturally go hand in hand.



WHAT ARE SOME BIRD-FRIENDLY GRAZING PRACTICES YOU MIGHT SEE OUT IN THE COUNTRY?

DELAYED GRAZING:

Managed rotational grazing means some parts of pastures can be left to grow tall during the summer. Tall grasses are preferred habitat for some birds.

BALE GRAZING:

Farmers set out hay bales in a field to let cows eat outside in the winter. This attracts rodents, which are food for birds of prey.

VIRTUAL FENCE:

If you see cows, sheep, or goats wearing collars with a blocky-looking thing attached, those are virtual fence collars. They allow a farmer to use satellite signals to control where the animals can graze. Virtual fence helps farmers do bird-friendly grazing practices even in places that don't have fences.

MANAGED ROTATIONAL GRAZING:

Pastures are divided up into sections and cows, sheep, or goats are moved often from section to section. This keeps grass fresh for the grazing animals, which deposit manure that attracts insects that birds can eat.

WOODLOTS NEAR PASTURES:

The trees provide shelter and nesting places for birds, and shade for livestock.

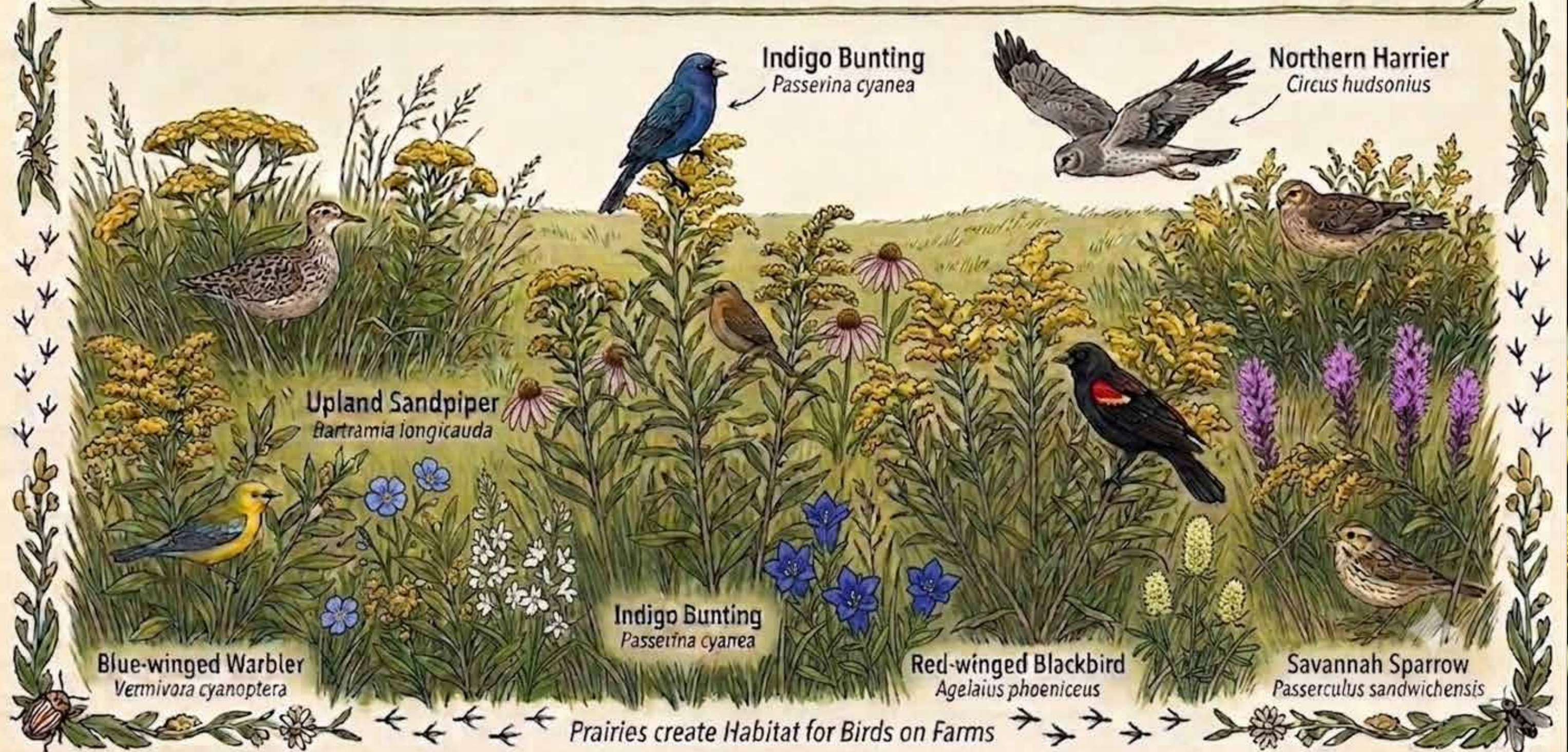
BRUSH CONTROL WITH SHEEP OR GOATS:

Sheep and goats love to eat brush and weeds. Using these animals to control unwanted brush without chemicals is helpful to birds that need open grassland habitats, or wooded habitats without a lot of thick underbrush.

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE AT HOME TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

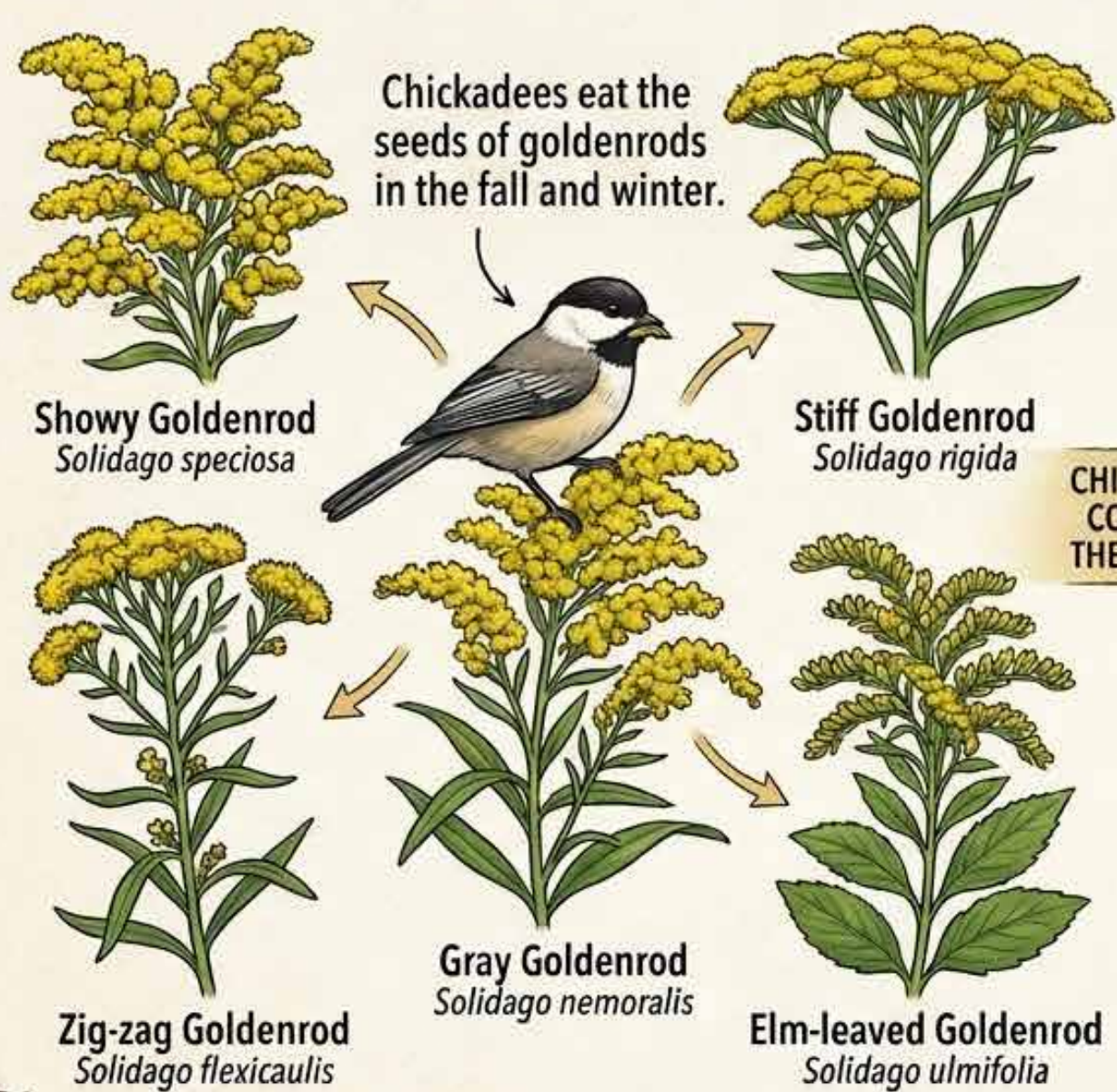
There are many native plants you can incorporate into your landscape at home to support wild bird habitat. Here's a quick look at how the beautiful and very easy to grow Goldenrod can benefit native bird populations.

BIRDS THAT USE GOLDENRODS FOR NESTING HABITAT

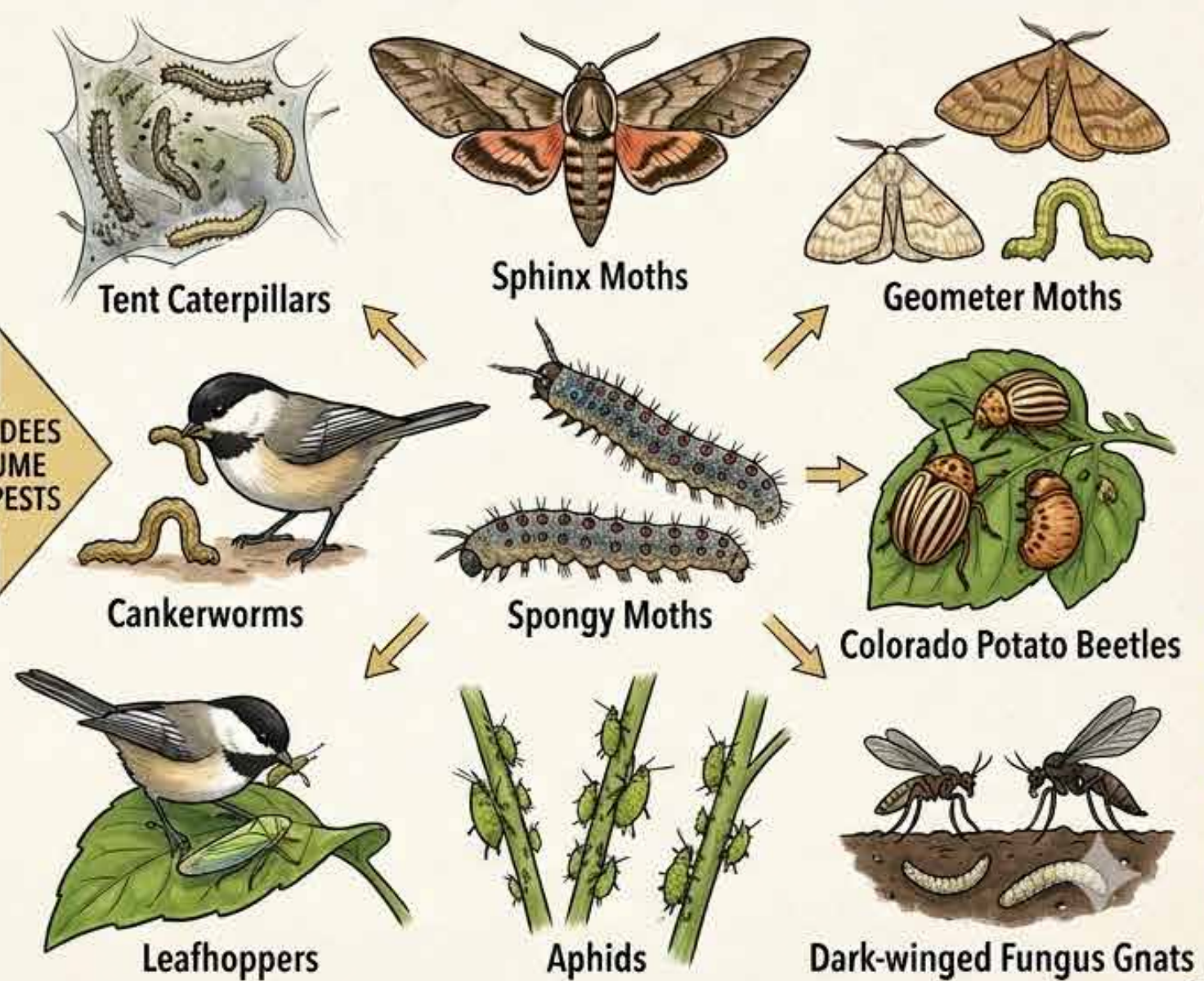


BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES: BENEFICIAL PREDATORS ON THE FARM

GOLDENROD (*Solidago* spp.): A CRITICAL RESOURCE

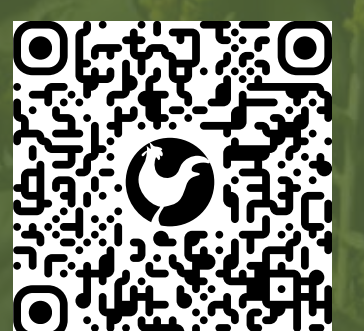


CHICKADEES REDUCE MAJOR FARM PESTS



Promoting natural pest control on farms.

INTERESTED IN MORE BIRD FRIENDLY PLANTS
Scan here for other native plants you can incorporate on your farm or urban back yard - check out this great resource.



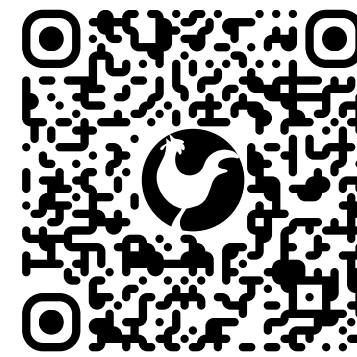
HOW CAN I SUPPORT BIRD FRIENDLY FARMING?

Seek out local food retailers, directories, and brands that support best farming practices.



Farmers' markets give you a direct line to farmers. Don't hesitate to ask them about their farms and farming practices. They'll be happy to answer your questions! Find a market near you at the Minnesota Farmers' Market Association.

mfma.org



Minnesota Grown's free online directory connects Minnesotans directly to farms, farmers' markets, and on-farm experiences. Search by location or product to find fresh fruits and vegetables, meat and dairy, garden centers, wineries, and local items like flowers, honey, maple syrup, wild rice, and fiber.

MinnesotaGrown.com



LAKEWINDS
FOOD CO-OP

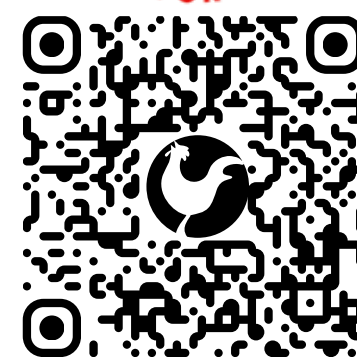
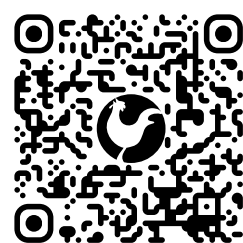
Seward
COMMUNITY CO-OP

Cooperative grocery stores like Lakewinds, Seward, Rivers Co-op Market and other food co-ops are committed to bringing the best products to their shelves. Ask them about the products they carry.

lakewinds.coop

seward.coop

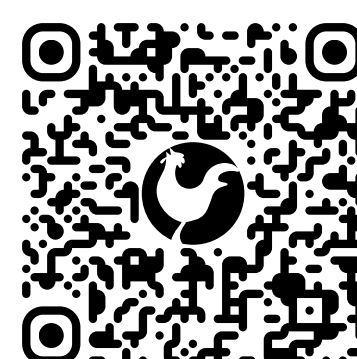
rcm.coop



Great coffee can do good, too.

Peace Coffee roasts organic, fair trade beans in the heart of Minneapolis, supporting the local community and coffee farmers around the world.

peacecoffee.com



Audubon Conservation Ranching aims to stabilize declining grassland bird populations in partnership with farmers and ranchers. Audubon certifies beef and bison products that are regeneratively grazed in a way that creates high quality habitat for grassland birds. Conservation Ranching has certified almost 5 million acres and is now on grocery store shelves in all 50 states.

audubon.org/conservation/ranching



Organic Valley products start with what nature provides — clean air, fresh water, healthy soil, and plenty of sunshine. Add to this the wisdom gained through generations of farming and an unwavering commitment to USDA Organic standards and the result is extraordinary — delicious, certified organic products produced on family farms.

organicvalley.coop

MANY THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

GOLD SPONSORS



Inspired by the oak savannas native to the region, the Savanna Institute conducts research, education, and outreach to support the growth of diverse, perennial agroecosystems in the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi watersheds. Savanna Institute and its partners are working to expand agroforestry to foster ecological resilience, climate stability, economic prosperity and vibrant communities.



Seven Sundays is a brand built on an ounce of hope that breakfast could be better, like Sunday morning better. We make breakfast foods you grew up loving with ingredients you can feel good about all the way back to the farm. For families like us, for the farmers behind our food, and for all the folks who have given up on breakfast, welcome back to the table.



Renewing the Countryside strengthens rural areas by championing and supporting rural communities, farmers, artists, entrepreneurs, educators, activists and other people who are renewing the countryside through sustainable and innovative initiatives, businesses, and projects.

BRONZE SPONSORS



The Mission of Green Lands Blue Waters is to support the development of and transition to a new generation of multi-functional agricultural systems in the Upper Mississippi River Basin and adjacent areas that integrate more perennial plants and other Continuous Living Cover into the agricultural landscape.



Wild Farm Alliance's mission is to promote healthy, viable agriculture that helps to protect and restore wild nature.

SUPPORTERS

