



WHOLE-FARM SCOUTING

A Tool for Sustainable Pest Management



Whole Farm Scouting (WFS) is a holistic approach to observing and understanding on-farm conditions that support sustainable and resilient agriculture.

Rooted in collaboration between farmers and field scouts, WFS emphasizes regular, season-long scouting to accurately identify trends, risks, and opportunities across an entire farm ecosystem. By “looking far, looking near, and looking close,” scouts can assess everything from landscape-level biodiversity to crop health and soil conditions.

This proactive, whole-systems method helps reduce pesticide reliance, strengthens ecosystem health, and guides informed decisions that sustain productivity.

● *Getting Started*

Download the Whole-Farm Scouting Template/Tool in Google Sheets.

Review the “How to Use This Template” section for guidance.

Customize the Tool with your farm’s crops, pests and beneficials.

● *How Does it Work?*

WFS begins with a planned route and consistent schedule for observing fields, habitat areas, and structures such as hoop houses. Scouts start by **looking far** to note broad landscape features—such as water movement, crop uniformity, or habitat changes—before **looking near** to assess crop rows, soil surfaces and pest or weed presence. Finally, they **look close**, inspecting individual plants, insects and soil conditions—capturing sample counts in the WFS tool.

Observations are recorded systematically using a standardized template that captures crop health, beneficial and pest insects and diseases, and management needs. After each visit, scouts share observations with farmers, discuss patterns or emerging issues, and work together to adjust management or scouting priorities based on observations throughout the season.

The WFS Tool, developed by Jessica Vaughan and Doug O’Brien, provides a designated place to capture these observations. It helps scouts and farmers record data efficiently and interpret patterns over time—such as how pest pressure relates to beneficial insect presence, weather patterns or soil conditions.

● *Why Does it Matter?*

Catch issues early: Identify crop or soil problems before they spread and while there is time to effectively implement IPM techniques.

See the whole system: Monitor beneficials, soil health, and landscape dynamics for a more resilient farm.

Support smart decisions: Use insights to refine practices, cut inputs, and strengthen long-term sustainability.



Lettuce aphid
Photo credit: USDA

● *The Whole-Farm Scouting Tool*

Collect insights from the field:

Date, location, and farm conditions.

Observations of pests, beneficial insects, soil condition and habitat.

Notes and photos to contextualize findings.

Once entered, the data can inform sustainable pest management (SPM) decisions. For example, recurring notes about spider or lacewing abundance may indicate effective natural pest control—reducing the need for chemical inputs.

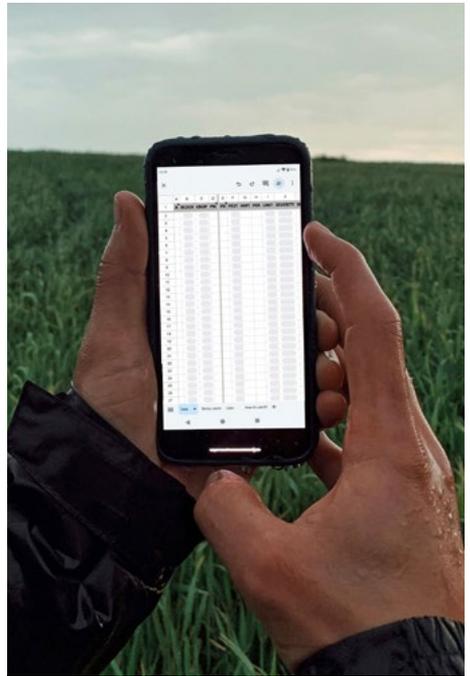
Soil condition data can highlight areas where cover crops are improving infiltration or where erosion control is needed.

● *Example Use Case:*

A scout detected an early aphid outbreak in lettuce near an old hedgerow with many missing plants and few beneficial insects. After linking pest and habitat data, the farmer recognized the need to boost natural enemies and filled in the hedgerow that fall with more native shrubs offering staggered flowering periods.

The following season, the farmer also established alyssum strips between newly planted lettuce, leading to a rebound in beneficial insect populations and a decline in aphid pressure.

This type of insight—understanding how pest and beneficial management shapes field outcomes—captures the essence of whole-farm scouting.



*Turn your phone or tablet into a powerful crop-scouting tool. Download the free **Whole-Farm Scouting Template/Tool** to record what you see in the field and get practical information to guide your next steps.*

Photo credit: Dastan Khdir

For Further Information

Scouting for Resilient Farms Resources and Videos

<https://www.wildfarmalliance.org/scouting>

- Free [Whole-Farm Scouting Template/Tool](#) in Google Sheets
- How to Use This Whole-Farm Scouting Template
- Watch Webinar: A Day in the Life of Scouts
- Listen: EcoFarm PreConference 2025 Recording
Organic Thresholds and Scouting

Managing Pests with Predator & Parasitoid Habitat Publication

<https://www.wildfarmalliance.org/managing-pests>

For Support, Contact

Directory of Sustainable Pest Management Experts

<https://www.wildfarmalliance.org/spm-directory>

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Photo credit: Sarah ARM