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Three Day Soil Health School Held at Stiefvater Farm Near Salem, SD

SOUTH DAKOTA SOIL HEALTH COALITION (SDSHC), Pierre, S.D. September 21, 2018- The 2018 Soil Health School, held near Salem, SD, with hosts Kurt and Kathy Stiefvater drew a record number of students and included soil health and agricultural experts from across the state. This annual event is designed to give participants a comprehensive understanding of the five basic principles of soil health as well as practical ways they can apply them on their farm or ranch. The school includes both classroom style presentations as well as hands on demonstrations out in the field where they can begin applying the knowledge presented during informational sessions.

“We are glad to have hosted the Soil Health School in sharing our incorporation of soil health principles and engaging the participants in hands on demonstrations for application to their own farming situations.” Said Kurt and Kathy when reflecting on the event. As hosts for this year’s group of 40 students, September 5-7, 2018, the Stiefvater family provided both an interactive classroom setting as well as many invaluable resources to the students. Their farm includes both a cow-calf livestock operation as well as a diverse rotation of corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and oats. Additionally, they utilize no-till as well as plant cover crops with the goal of increasing plant, animal, and soil health as well as conserving and retaining moisture. With all these practices present on one single operation students were able to experience firsthand how these practices work together across the landscape.

The school began on Wednesday with several sessions centered around the basics of how soils function, soil health concepts, as well as information on agronomics, cover crops, no-till, and a producer panel. Outdoor activities the first day included a grazing exercise where students learn how to determine the correct stocking rate for a cover crop plot as well as a tour of cover crop plots seeded earlier in the year. Livestock were subsequently turned out into the paddocks created by the students and their grazing was observed and paddocks adjusted throughout the remainder of the school.

Thursday and Friday included informational sessions on crop rotational diversity, Precision Ag utilizing soils, temporary fencing options, soil biology, beneficial insects, soil salinity, soil carbon, the economics of soil health, no-till equipment options and additional presentations on cover crops. Students witnessed a rainfall simulator, slake test, soil structure demonstration utilizing latex, participated in

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soil pit exercises, as well as assisted in retrieving several pairs of men's cotton underwear which had been buried in different areas of the farm. This "Tighty Whitey" demonstration shows visually, the affect that different management has on soil biological activity.

When asked about his impression of the School, participant Austin Carlson expressed that for him attending "was almost life changing, I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and fully believe that the concepts that are being brought forth by the Coalition are the way forward for production agriculture." Roughly twenty speakers and staff helped to make the 2018 Soil Health School a success and planning for the 2019 school has begun. Visit www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org for additional information on the Five Principles of Soil Health, next year's Soil Health School as well as to view a "Profiles In Soil Health" video featuring the Stiefvater family.

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