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## **Third Annual SD Soil Health Coalition Conference Focuses on Management Decisions for The Future**

SOUTH DAKOTA SOIL HEALTH COALITION (SDSHC), Pierre, S.D. January 31, 2019- The South Dakota Soil Health Coalition hosted their third annual Soil Health Conference January 22-23, 2019 on the campus of South Dakota State University in Brookings. Attendees traveled from throughout the upper Midwest to learn about opportunities to improve soil health. Industry leaders including Keith Berns, Dr. Allen Williams, and Dr. Dwayne Beck shared powerful, engaging presentations that prompted reflection and discussion amongst the crowd. Educational topics centered around improving soil efficiency, resiliency, and profit in both cropping and livestock systems.

Keith Berns of Green Cover Seeds—Bladen, NE, kicked off the event the evening of January 22, by sharing a presentation centered around “Rebuilding Our Soils”. Throughout history, agricultural lands have been mis-managed by crop and livestock producers, which led and, in most places, continues to lead towards a point of severe soil degradation. Keith provided hope in his next session “Carbonomics”, the following day, sharing how all producers can help to reverse this process by promoting plant diversity and harnessing sunlight as much as possible. Sunlight, captured by plants, is the driver for biology above and below ground. Dr. Allen Williams of Soil Health Consultants LLC—Starkville, MS, then shared information about instances where severely degraded areas have been renewed back to prospering and productive range lands. Soil health practices including increasing diversity and the managed grazing of livestock, promote positive, compounding effects to the whole ecosystem when synchronized with nature. Dr. Dwayne Beck of Dakota Lakes Research Farm—Pierre, SD, followed with a powerful presentation encouraging decision making focused on that “big picture” or ecosystem. Analyzing management decisions based on long term thinking (250-600 years) and ecosystem effects will ultimately lead operations with sound management towards a flourishing future.

As the conference ended, a four-member producer panel composed of Craig Stehly, Gene Stehly, Jesse Hall and Kurt Stiefvater, shared information about their operations and implementing practices that promote soil health. Questions from the audience generated discussion focused on transitioning to no-till, increasing diversity through various row-crop options, implementing cover crops, and grazing livestock. Attendees took away valuable information that will positively impact their operations and our natural resources when implemented.

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