

Introduction

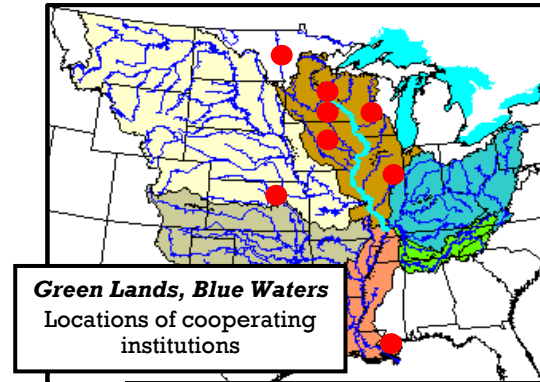
Over the past two centuries, significant land use changes have occurred throughout the landscape of the Mississippi River Basin (MRB). Prior to settlement by people of European descent, the landscape was dominated by native perennial plants and woodlands. Since that time, much of the land suitable for farming has been converted for agricultural purposes. And in the more recent past, diversified farming systems have largely been replaced with annual monocultures, such as corn and soybeans, and an increased use of intensive management practices, such as tiling, pesticides and fertilizers. These changes in the landscape have resulted in degradation of our soil, water, and air, and the loss of wildlife habitat and community resources.



A solution is to increase living cover on the landscape. Perennial plants and cover crops provide important ecosystem services – they keep active roots in the soil which hold and utilize water throughout the growing season, reducing runoff, drainage losses, and flooding. Land with continuous living cover has significantly lower nutrient and sediment losses and more biodiversity than land with row crops. As importantly, perennial crops offer opportunities for new profitable enterprises in rural areas and for new healthful foods.

Unique Partnership

Members of the Green Lands, Blue Waters (GLBW) initiative, representing private and public institutions from throughout the MRB, share the common vision of developing and promoting perennial and cover crop-based farming systems that will conserve resources and provide wildlife habitat while sustaining healthy and vibrant farm communities.



This partnership works to develop new cropping systems and expand the use of existing systems that provide the widest range of **perennial-based rotation, perennial biofuel and biomass crop, permanent pasture, perennial grain, tree and cover crop** options possible.

The GLBW initiative is organized on three interdependent levels, with work at each level informing work at the other levels. At the watershed level, learning groups comprised of farmers, scientists, processors, and others provide a forum for learning, innovation, and integration of different types of knowledge. At the state level, coordinating committees comprised of farmers, NGOs, government agencies, and others are responsible for planning, implementing, and monitoring project activities. At the basin level, a Consortium has been developed to support and advance the Green Lands, Blue Waters initiative.

Green Lands, Blue Waters



1) Develop new crops along with supporting infrastructure and expand the uses of existing perennial and cover crop farming systems.



2) Develop new and expand existing market opportunities for perennial production systems.



3) Develop and promote agricultural policies that support diversified, perennial and cover crop production systems over the long-term.



Mission

To support development of and transition to a new generation of agricultural systems in the Mississippi River Basin that integrate more perennial plants and other continuous living cover into the agricultural landscape. Such farm systems include those based on perennial plants such as trees, shrubs, grasses and legumes, as well as annual plants grown in combination, such as the use of cover crops in row crops.

Strategies

The primary objective is *to develop and promote profitable farm enterprises* based on perennial crops and products of continuous living cover systems. To achieve this GLBW members will:

- **Build capacity of stakeholders**, including scientists and farmers, farm advisors, extension educators, input suppliers, bankers, processors, NGO personnel, civic and faith leaders, and others regarding continuous living cover farming systems.
- **Significantly expand the knowledge base** regarding perennial crops and the use of cover crops in annual systems and their environmental, economic, and health impacts and potential of these farm systems.
- **Heighten visibility** of and focus on perennial farming systems and the use of cover crops.
- **Identify and promote policy changes** needed to encourage and support adoption of perennial crops and increase the use of cover crops.