

Reclaiming Profitability: Farming Smarter in

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Albert Lea, MN

ProfitProAG

Speaker Profile: Mark Gutierrez

When you talk with Mark Gutierrez, Executive Director of the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition, one theme becomes clear fast: improving soil health isn't a "nice idea" — it's the most reliable path to improving nutrient efficiency, reducing losses, and boosting farm profitability.

Gutierrez's passion for practical, farmer-led soil health solutions comes from years of seeing what works in the field. One moment stands out. While visiting the farm of Mark Ditlevson, an award-winning conservation farmer from Owatonna, Gutierrez watched water infiltrate seamlessly into Ditlevson's soil — even as water from neighboring fields rushed toward it.

"That was one of the most powerful examples of the benefits of cover crops and conservation practices I'd ever seen," Gutierrez said. "Experiences like that convinced me that soil health is essential to improving farmers' profitability."

A Career Built on Understanding What Farmers Need

Gutierrez grew up on a hay and poultry farm in southern New Mexico and earned degrees in Ag business and Ag economics from New Mexico State University. His early career with USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service exposed him to a wide range of cropping systems — from irrigated desert agriculture to high-rainfall regions producing lentils, peas, and even oysters.

Later, as a regional manager with USDA's Risk Management Agency, he worked directly with farmers in Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin. That's where he first heard concerns about crop insurance barriers to cover crops — and helped streamline the system to support soil-building practices.

By 2021, he stepped into his current role leading the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition, where he works with farmers, mentors, educators, and food companies to accelerate soil health adoption across the region.

What Mark Will Bring to the 2026 Soil Health & Nutrient Management School

This year, Gutierrez joins ProfitProAG's Soil Health & Nutrient Management School to help growers connect soil health principles directly to nutrient planning and fertility decisions.

His session will focus on:

- **How soil structure and biology influence nutrient availability.** Why infiltration, aggregation, and microbial activity determine how efficiently crops use applied nutrients.
- **Reducing nutrient losses through soil-building practices.** Real-world examples of how cover crops, reduced tillage, and residue management improve nitrogen retention and reduce runoff.
- **Using soil health to improve fertilizer ROI.** How healthier soils change the economics of nutrient management — and where farmers see the biggest gains.



- ***Lessons from Minnesota Soil Health Coalition farmers.*** Practical, farmer-tested strategies from a 1,000-member network focused on profitability, resilience, and nutrient-dense food production.
- ***Building rural prosperity through better nutrient management.*** How improved soil function leads to stronger farm businesses, more local economic activity, and healthier rural communities.

Why You'll Want to Hear Him

Gutierrez brings a rare combination of data-driven insight, field-tested experience, and farmer-to-farmer perspective. His message is simple:

When you improve soil function, nutrient management becomes easier, more predictable, and more profitable.

Growers and agronomists attending the Soil Health & Nutrient Management School will walk away with practical tools they can apply immediately — not theory, but real strategies that work in today's conditions.