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Reclaiming Profitability: Farming Smarter in

Albert Lea, MN

ProfitPro[®]AG

Speaker Profile: Russell Hedrick

With more farmers losing \$200 or more an acre, Russell Hedrick has one question: "Do you want to eat bologna or actually make money in farming?"

This Hickory, North Carolina, farmer knows a thing or two about profitable farming. He raised a record-shattering 459.91 bushels per acre for dry-land corn in 2022 using regenerative, no-till methods and a cover crop mix.

Hedrick is one of our featured speakers at the 2026 ProfitProAG Winter Conference in Albert Lea, Minnesota. You'll have the chance to meet him on Feb. 24 and ask him questions. His open-book approach is a testament to his passion for helping other farmers achieve higher yields, while promoting soil health principles and conservation.

Not limited by constraints of conventional dogma, Hedrick isn't afraid to challenge the status quo. "Farmers are tired of all the B.S.. and lies," said Hedrick, 40, a Leopold Conservation Award winner.

That includes some of the information coming out of the ag colleges at land-grant universities, he added. "When 70% of land-grant ag research funding comes from the chemical and fertilizer companies, it's the best data money can buy."

From Calling Out the System to Changing It

Hedrick, who has spoken to ag audiences in 46 states and eight countries, tells it as he sees it. He brings a fresh perspective as a first-generation farmer who started farming full-time in 2015.

As a boy, Hedrick spent time with his grandfather, Robert Richard, who worked a factory job and also tended 15 cows and a hay field. That glimpse into agriculture was enough to spark something in Hedrick, although it wouldn't take root for years.

Hedrick began his career paving highways and working as a diesel mechanic. Then he served as a firefighter for a decade before saving enough money to buy some used farm machinery and lease his first 30 acres. He had a problem, though. "That field had channels of soil erosion and tons of winter annual weeds," said Hedrick, who headed to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office to try to find answers.

While he was there, a staff member showed him a video of Ray "The Soil Guy" Archuleta discussing soil health practices, including the use of cover crops. Hedrick decided to give cover crops a try. "I could see how they would help keep my soil in place."

It wasn't long before Hedrick discovered that cover crops also help with weed control. "That meant fewer herbicides right off the bat."

Next, Hedrick began focusing on yield. He devoured everything he could learn on the topic. While the county average corn yield in Catawba County was 100 bushels, Hedrick's average that first year was 195 to 200 bushels per acre.



"I still had a lot to learn, but that gave me the confidence I was on the right track," said Hedrick, who attributes much of his success to meeting the right mentors at the right time.

Hedrick stopped tilling the soil. He added compost to his fields and integrated grazing livestock to build the soil's organic matter. The cornfield that produced the record-breaking yield experienced a notable increase in organic matter levels, rising from 1.7% to 8.2% over 10 years. "The only way to get organic matter growing is to get the beneficial soil microbes' activity to increase," Hedrick said. "Livestock and composted manure are great for this."

Hedrick now grows 650 acres of non-GMO corn and soybeans, as well as barley, oats, triticale, and wheat. Even during times of drought, Hedrick's crops perform well, thanks to the soil's improved capacity to infiltrate and hold moisture while cycling biological nutrients.

"Is it easy to push the system? Absolutely not. But do you want it to be easy, or do you want it to make money?"

Top 5 keys to success

Hedrick offers five tips to jump-start your own path to higher profit potential:

1. Use the tools. Previous generations worked hard and used the tools available to the best of their ability to build wealth. "Today we have more technology in the palm of our hand than previous generations ever had," Hedrick said. "Use it! You're failing previous generations if you don't take advantage of the tools we have today."
2. Try the Haney test. Early in his farming career, Hedrick reached out to Rick Haney, the developer of the Haney Test. This comprehensive soil test measures chemical and biological factors to assess soil fertility and microbial activity. "To this day, we compare conventional soil test results with Haney test results on my acres," Hedrick said. There's a huge misconception that the Haney test always calls for less fertilizer on every acre. "For my fields, the Haney test has always called for more phosphorus," Hedrick noted.
3. Fine-tune your fertilizer. There are ways to cut back on fertilizer without sacrificing yield potential. Hendrick pays close attention to the Haney test's water-extractable organic carbon (WEOC), which measures the microbes' food source—specifically, organic carbon. "Split-applying nitrogen keeps the nitrogen from burning up the organic matter in the soil," he said. "The biggest thing about proper nutrient management is timing." This has helped Hedrick reduce his input costs, specifically nitrogen (sometimes up to 70% or 80%), while growing yields.
4. Be willing to try new things. Live-cell green algae is one of the hottest new technologies helping top growers get more from their acres. Hedrick has used EnSoil Algae™ for the past several years to boost his crop's yield potential. He first heard about the product during a barbecue in South Carolina. "I was willing to try it, because the universities weren't talking about it," Hedrick said. EnSoil Algae™ (available through ProfitProAG) enhances rapid growth and replication of beneficial microbes in the soil. "It helps improve the biological function of your soil without breaking the bank," Hedrick said.
5. Keep the big picture in perspective. It's important to keep learning, be willing to think outside the box, and take action. "There are only two reasons most farmers change—economic pressure, or social pressure," Hedrick said. "I want to show farmers there's a better way forward and help them maximize successes and minimize failures. I would love to leave a legacy that we help produce good, healthy food."

Sign up to "Reclaiming Profitability: Farming Smarter in 2026"

Want to hear more, directly from Russell Hedrick? You're invited to attend the ProfitProAG Winter Conference on Feb. 24, 2026, at ProfitProAG in Albert Lea, Minnesota.

Join us for a full day of practical insights and hands-on learning designed to help farmers reclaim profitability in today's challenging ag economy. Hear directly from growers and experts who are putting regenerative practices to work, and discover how soil health, crop diversity, and biological solutions can boost ROI while protecting your land for the future.