

2025 WINTER CONFERENCE SPEAKER PROFILE TOM COTTER

Meet Tom Cotter, Minnesota Regenerative Farmer. Tom is a fourth-generation farmer from Austin, Minnesota, who has embraced cover crops and many other regenerative Ag practices in the past 25 years. His practical message of how to farm smarter (and more profitably) was a huge hit at last year's ProfitProAG Winter Conference.

Tillage was part of the Cotter family's farming heritage from 1874 through the next 140 years. Tom grew up doing full tillage on all his family's acres. Things started changing in the late 1990s, however, when Tom's father bought tiling equipment and also started trying cover crops.

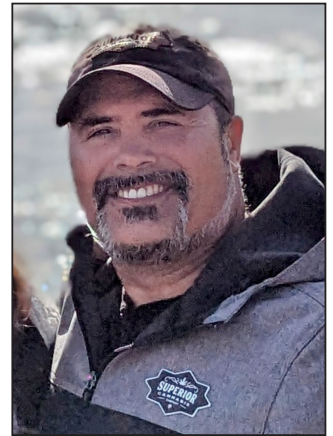
Tom was neck-deep in the soil, working on drainage tile line, when his journey as a regenerative farmer began. "I would spend weeks in trenches that were 4 or 5 feet down," Tom says. "The soil always smelled dead and stale. When we started doing cover crops, I realized, 'Wow, this soil smells good.'"

During the early 2000s, Tom and his father experienced some success with cover crops, including more earthworms in the soil. They also had their share of failures, but there were few resources available to help them. Tom spoke with several agronomists who all said that cover crops wouldn't work.

Despite the naysayers, the Cotters continued on his soil health journey. He bought a used strip-till bar to reduce his tillage practices. When he combined reduced tillage, cover crops and livestock grazing, the health of his soil improved dramatically. "The more species you have, the more microbe colonies you'll get to work within the soil, and the more nutrients will be available to your crop," Tom says.

Along the way, Tom has transitioned some of his acres to organic cash crops and grass-fed beef. When he's not raising corn, soybeans, sweet corn, peas, alfalfa, oats and livestock, Tom is passionate about promoting soil health. He has spoken at many events in Minnesota and Iowa, as well as the national no-till and strip-till conference.

"Set goals, follow soil health principles, minimize soil disturbance, focus on biodiversity, support continuous living roots in the soil as long as possible each year, grade your crop's success and keep learning," Tom says.



"Tiny differences in management can lead to overwhelming differences in output and profitability."

- Dr. Jim Ladlie