

ANNUAL REPORT

Climate-Smart and Soil Health Project



YEAR 1

This material is based on work supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, under agreement number NR233A750004G092.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Centering organic practices, small farms and customers as climate solutions



OAK's five-year Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities project will help participating farms:



BUILD soil health

INCREASE

farm resilience

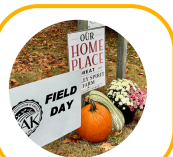


BENEFIT

from choosing climate-smart practices

EARN

premiums in durable markets



MEASURING WHOLE-FARM SUSTAINABILITY

Each year, participating farmers will complete a personalized Global Farm Metric-Farm Sustainability Assessment Tool (GFM-FSAT). The tool measures social, economic and environmental indicators on farms to assess sustainability across 12 categories.

The data from the GFM-FSAT helps inform each farm's management plan and allows farmers to make informed decisions about climate-smart practices that they can implement on their farms to improve whole-farm sustainability.

IMPACTS BY THE NUMBER

October 2023–September 2024

FARM-CENTERED



50

FARMS
PARTICIPATING

31

COUNTIES
REPRESENTED



92%

HISTORICALLY
UNDERSERVED
PRODUCERS

132

ACRES,
AVERAGE FARM
SIZE



48

PERSONALIZED
FARM
ASSESSMENTS
DISTRIBUTED

\$13,500

INCENTIVES PAID
FOR GFM-FSAT
COMPLETION

IMPACTS BY THE NUMBER

October 2023–September 2024



PRACTICE-CENTERED

25

FARMS VISITS CONDUCTED

8

CLIMATE-SMART PRACTICES INCLUDED



8

COMMODITIES PRODUCED ON ENROLLED ACRES

\$150,000

ANTICIPATED INCENTIVES PAID FOR PRACTICE IMPLEMENTATION



3

FARMER FIELD DAYS FEATURING CLIMATE-SMART PRACTICES

20

CLIMATE-SMART PRACTICES AVAILABLE

FARM VISITS

and technical assistance



PARTICIPATING FARMERS HAVE TOLD OAK'S TEAM AGAIN AND AGAIN THAT THE ONE-ON-ONE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED THROUGH THIS PROGRAM IS INVALUABLE.

OAK's technical assistance field staff visit each farm to collect soil samples, conduct dissolved oxygen tests on surface water, collect samples for Brix testing, as well as to connect with the producers about goals and plans for the project (and beyond).

During the farm visits, OAK's staff work with the producers to verify farm maps and determine which tracts to enroll in the project for the current year.

The project staff also help troubleshoot any ongoing production concerns and support production efficiencies.



15 soil sample results received



15 water quality tests performed

15 Brix tests performed



21 farm management plans drafted

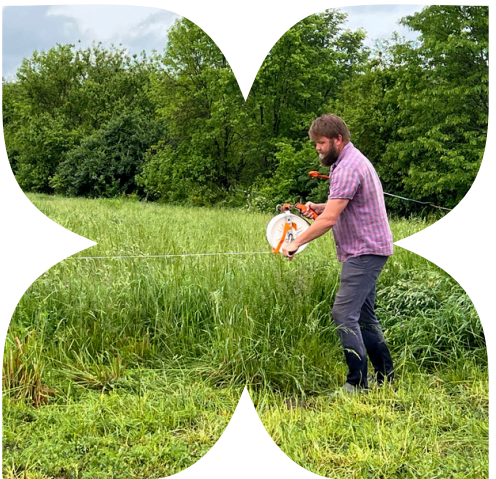


CLIMATE-SMART PRACTICES

SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT



ALLEY CROPPING
CONSERVATION COVER
CONSERVATION CROP ROTATION
COVER CROP
FILED BORDER
HEDGEROW PLANTING
HERBACEOUS WIND BARRIERS
FOREST FARMING
MULCHING
NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT
PASTURE AND HAY PLANTING
PRESCRIBED GRAZING
RANGE PLANTING
REDUCED TILL
SILVOPASTURE
STRIP CROPPING
TREE/SHRUB ESTABLISHMENT
VEGETATIVE BARRIERS
WILDLIFE HABITAT PLANTING
WINDBREAK AND SHELTERBELT



GLOBAL FARM METRIC FARM SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT TOOL

Measuring Whole Farm Resilience

OAK adapted the Global Farm Metric (GFM) framework to create a Farm Sustainability Assessment Tool (FSAT) for Kentucky farms. The framework measures social, economic, and environmental indicators on farms to assess resilience across 12 categories and has grown out of the work of the Sustainable Food Trust.

The categories include climate, community, nature, soil and water, governance, resources, inputs, farmers and workers, crops and pasture, livestock, products and economics. Based on globally recognized research, the tool collects 1,200 datapoints and is embedded with measures, benchmark scoring and practices from USDA NRCS, including alignment with COMET-Planner, Environmental Impact Quotient and NRCS Practice Standards for Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction and Carbon Sequestration.

The GFM-FSAT establishes a common language, supported by quantitative measures, that enables all stakeholders in food and farming to drive positive change. The data support on-farm decision making, informs technical assistance, and offers compelling evidence to buyers in the marketplace.

“

I have so many new ideas for my farm after completing the tool! We'll reduce inputs and increase renewables; we've learned to ID more birds and test water quality in our creeks; and we are planning for pollinator habitat and riparian buffer practices.

”



Enrolled farms complete the farm assessment once each year. Farmers typically take six hours to complete the assessment and receive \$500 upon completion. The scored results create a dashboard of information the farmer and the project's soil health specialist can use to inform management plans and practice implementation to improve on-farm resilience.

FARMER FEATURE

Joseph Monroe, Valley Spirit Farm

Joseph Monroe lives and farms on 118 acres in Henry County in partnership with wife Abbie Scott-Monroe. Farming roots run deep for both of their families, and it's evident in the life they share with their children, farm crew and neighboring community.

Valley Spirit Farm began with the merging of two farm families who worked together to develop the systems that Joseph and Abbie still manage: 100 acres of grass-fed cattle and seven acres of diverse vegetable production.

While completing the GFM-FSAT for OAK's project, Joseph learned that dozens of bird species make Valley Spirit their home at various times of the year. With this new knowledge, he plans to adjust his mowing schedule in the spring to account for the birds that he discovered nest there early each year.

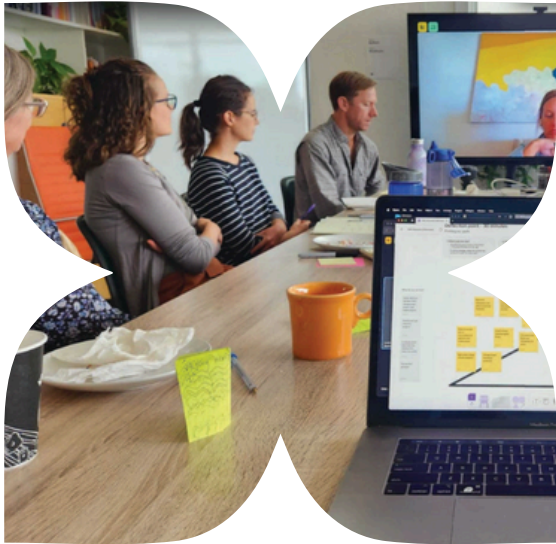
With an eye towards stewarding the land for their children and protecting the natural resources, Joseph and Abbie have worked to build and maintain healthy soil and incorporate conservation practices throughout their farm. They protect riparian areas around waterways with native vegetation, establish native pollinator habitat and grasslands and use organic practices in their vegetable production. Their cattle pastures are actively managed with adaptive grazing techniques including rotational grazing, improved forages and periods of rest or disturbance based on continual experimentation and observation of the animals and their pastures.

For Year 1 of OAK's Climate-Smart Project, Valley Spirit Farm enrolled 105 acres and implemented five climate-smart practices, including rotational grazing on over 100 acres.



PARTNER PROFILE

Bullhorn Creative



Bullhorn Creative is a Kentucky-based marketing and advertising agency. Their participation in OAK's Climate-Smart Project is central to its marketing and branding component. With 11 years of naming, branding and full asset marketing experience, the firm is a Certified B Corp with committed values in sustainability and community.

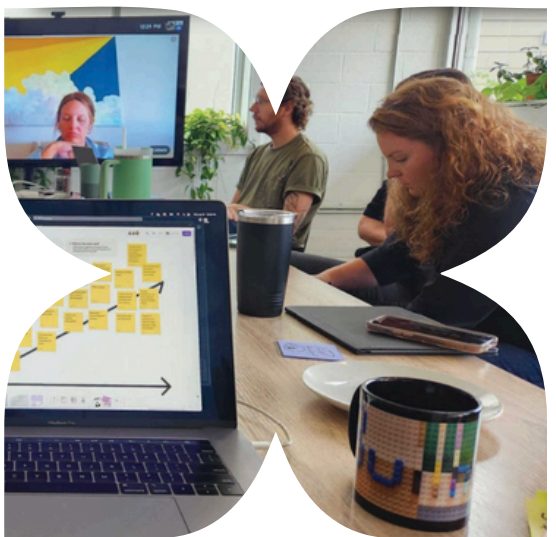
During Year 1, Bullhorn's creative team has worked with the project's core team, the Value Chain Advisory Committee, partners and focus groups to develop a public facing brand for the project's climate-smart commodities.



“Storytelling really moves the needle for consumers and most of us could do a better job, but it's hard to make time for that kind of marketing.

-Focus group participant”

Bullhorn joined OAK and more than 30 farmers at the Climate-Smart Field Day at Valley Spirit Farm, where they captured video footage, photos, and stories. They will use this footage and their learnings as they finalize the project's marketing campaign, which will be launched in 2025.



PROJECT PARTNERS

Bullhorn Creative
Four Hills Farm
Kentucky Center for Rural and Agricultural Development
Kentucky State University
Sustainable Food Alliance
The Berry Center
The Food Connection at the University of Kentucky

WHAT'S NEXT

Year 2 and beyond

BEGINNING IN 2025, OAK'S PROJECT WILL INCORPORATE 12 ADDITIONAL CLIMATE-SMART PRACTICES, INCLUDING FOREST FARMING, TREE AND SHRUB ESTABLISHMENT, SILVOPASTURE, AND MORE.

In Year 2, OAK and project partners will also focus on building and expanding durable markets for climate-smart commodities, dedicating time and resources to helping farmers earn premiums on enrolled commodities.



20 incentivized climate-smart practices

10+ commodities produced on enrolled acres



\$2 MILLION incentives paid to participating farmers

LEARN MORE
oak-ky.org/climate-smart-project