

# Sustainable Options: **Wheat**

from Star of the West Milling Co. and The Nature Conservancy

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Star of the West, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, is piloting a new sustainably-grown wheat incentives program for farmers. This initiative is focused on improving resilience, biodiversity and soil health on wheat ground located within the Saginaw Bay Watershed. The program will enroll 5-15 wheat farmers annually that are interested in taking demonstrable strides toward sustainability improvement on their farms. This program, and its associated “nature-based bonus” incentives, will be available on a first come, first serve basis for the next three years (between 2022-2024). The program is structured as follows:

- First year: farmers must have 4-6 criteria adopted, including one new practice and we pay 8.5 cent/bu for that practice.
- Second year: farmers have 5-7 criteria adopted and we pay for the next “new” practice at 12.5 cent/bu.
- Third year: farmers must have all 7 criteria adopted and we pay for the “new” practice at 16.5 cent/bu.
- Bonuses will cease after completing one full year with all seven criteria, but is subject to funding availability.

**Fulfillment of all 7 criteria qualifies grower to receive NBS bonus payment at time of sale (rate TBD).**

Program Criteria <sup>1</sup>	Qualifications	Incentives
1. Tracking (REQUIRED)	Establishing Farm Sustainability Records: growers will work with Star of the West staff to self-report baseline operational information and update annually. <sup>1</sup>	Advantage to grower to track data.
2. Edge of Field Risk Evaluation (REQUIRED)	Evaluation of whole farm (all fields), discuss a plan for high-risk areas. <sup>2</sup>	Gain knowledge on soil erodibility and additional program eligibility.
3. Integrated Pest Management (IPM)	Growers will document current IPM activities. <sup>3</sup>	IPM practices can lead to reduced input costs and increased yields.
4. Diversity	Growers must plant a minimum 3-crop rotation.	Longer rotations can lead to increased pest resistance and better soil health.
5. Cover Crops	Utilize a minimum of 1 species of cover crop on all fields enrolled in program. Cover cropping must be maintained on these fields every year during the duration of program (2022-2024).	Grower earns between \$4-\$20/ac, IF NEW.
6. Nutrient Management (NM)	[Pre-req] A NMP/CNMP/Fertility plan that is based on current soil testing (every field within last 3-4 years based on rotation) and follows 4R and/or university recommendations are in place.  For incentives, participant MUST also adopt at least one additional incentivized NM activity from this list: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Variable rate application,</li><li>▪ Increased level of soil sampling,</li><li>▪ Nutrient placement or timing improvements,</li><li>▪ Portion of nutrient inputs come from manure/compost sources,</li><li>▪ Use of N stabilizers/slow release fertilizers.</li></ul>	Grower earns between \$4-\$20/ac, IF NEW.
7. Reducing Tillage	No till/strip till practice OR plan in place to reduce tillage annually with ultimate goal of no-till/strip till. Continual improvements will be assessed from prior year residue results. <sup>4</sup>	Grower earns between \$4-\$20/ac, IF NEW.

<sup>1</sup> Criteria based on TNC’s Sustainable Commodity Sourcing Principles. Criteria 1 & 2 will be required for “whole farm.” Criteria 3-7 will be required for wheat fields only.

<sup>2</sup> Farm will be screened using the Great Lakes Water Management System and fields at high risk for sediment loss will be identified. Project team will work with grower to discuss a plan for these high-risk field edges (setbacks, CREP, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> Grower can work with NRCS field staff or a third-party agronomist to establish a record keeping plan.

<sup>4</sup> In lieu of complete equipment changes, improvements to lessen tillage intensity, soil and carbon loss can be made on an incremental basis through operational changes. These changes will be detected by taking before-and-after surface residue measurements each planting season.

**For more information or to enroll, contact:**

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