

2022 UPDATES - FROM SILT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SUZAN EREM:

In its seventh year, the Sustainable Iowa Land Trust (SILT) has permanently protected nearly 1,200 acres across Iowa for eco-friendly table food farming. Dozens of new farmers have gained or maintained access to affordable land in Iowa thanks to the power of a land trust to reduce the cost of land by limiting its use to food farming.

This year, SILT is slated to protect at least two more farms. Kent Walker is donating the deed to his 60 acres near Ottumwa that include a luxurious tiny home, a large heated barn and other sheds. Five acres are already in paw paw and chestnut production, and the farm hosts many acres of pollinator habitat, a stream, windbreaks made of fast-growing trees as well as hazelnuts and much more.

Gary Hart and his wife Derith Vogt are donating the deed to their 10-acre horse farm and pollinator planting about 30 miles east of Cedar Rapids. This donation includes a century-old home they've renovated meticulously over the last 40 years, as well as multiple well-kept barns and sheds. Due to the small size and surrounding industrial farming, the couple is giving Future SILT permission to sell the land unprotected if necessary. This would be a last resort for SILT to consider many decades from now, but a generous and practical gift to SILT's future financial security.



SUZAN EREM, SILT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Both land-protecting families have retained the right to use their property for now, but in entering into a partnership with SILT, consider opening up their land for new farmers to experiment and learn, to host SILT events and more.

SILT successfully launched its innovative Circle Our Cities campaign in two cities in 2022 - Dubuque and Des Moines. Daryl Parker, a 28-year veteran of county conservation, is SILT's new land scout in Dubuque. He is working closely with the Dubuque Watershed Management team to protect 14 perennial food farms in the watershed in the next four years. Such "working buffers" hold soil, produce food without relying on synthetic chemicals and, when protected, are affordable for future farmers.

In Des Moines, SILT has brought on Alexis Huddleston-Monroy as SILT's farm coordinator. A recent Drake University graduate and Storm Lake native, Alexis will perform SILT's due diligence on farm protection projects and then begin the complicated process of matching the best farmer applicants with SILT farms. (Beginning farmers can fill out a SILT Farm Seeker Survey at silt.org). Alexis will be assisted by Kya Farag, a current Cornell College student and part-time SILT employee who developed SILT's extensive interactive map of farms and land consultations across Iowa. Kya has been studying the nearly 200 people who've filled out the SILT Farm Seeker Survey to prepare for outreach to those farmers best suited to SILT farms. SILT plans to hire a land scout in Polk County in the coming months.

The Dubuque County Board of Supervisors committed \$570,000 of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to the SILT project there and Polk County has committed \$250,000 of ARPA funds for landowner outreach. SILT is in conversations with the City of Des Moines regarding its potential role within the city limits as well. SILT was able to generate successful proposals in these communities thanks to support from the Donald C. Brace Foundation and the 11th Hour Project of the Schmidt Family Foundation, as well as individual donations from Iowans who care about clean, healthy food farming.



LYLE LUZUM

In 2022, SILT enjoyed two other major accomplishments. First, SILT became a nationally-accredited land trust, in large part due to local resident Lyle Luzum who chairs the policy committee. This puts SILT in the same standing of reliability and professionalism as other land trusts across the state and nation including the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and The Nature Conservancy. Second, SILT was chosen among just a handful of farmland trusts in the nation to participate in a poetry and photography anthology due out in November. Sign up at silt.org for updates, details, video and audio of poets reading their poems as well as the virtual book launch this fall. The Luzum Heritage Farm is one of five that will be featured in this collection of poems!

SILT's board includes community leaders like Lyle across the state. John Norris, former chief of staff to Tom Vilsack as governor as well as head of the USDA, serves on SILT's board as well as Joe Henry, the Iowa spokesperson for the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and a successful real estate agent. Matt Gilbert, an attorney from Waterloo and chair of the Iowa Branch of the NAACP's Business Development committee, serves on the board and SILT's finance committee. SILT is currently seeking experienced governing board members as it transitions to its next stage of growth. See details at silt.org.

We bid a fond farewell to Andy and Betsy Boone as they move to a home in Viroqua, Wis. They were invaluable farm partners who honored the legacy of the Luzum Heritage Farm and grew fantastic food.