Survey provides direction, informs future decisions

Informed by the survey's quantitative data, along with a total of nearly 200 individual comments, SHA's board of directors, staff and faculty will develop a strategic plan to create and/or modify needed SHA curricula, programs or school topic offerings to address the needs of its graduates and to further assist them in successfully and profitably implementing regenerative agricultural principles in their operations.

To ensure SHA's offerings continue to meet the needs of the regenerative farming community into the future, it will regularly seek input from its growing list of graduates and will frequently assess the impact and value of its programs and offerings.

Thank you, SHA graduates

The entire SHA team is grateful to all of the graduates who participated in this survey. We look forward to providing further support and educational programs and services for new students, as well as our regenerative agricultural alumni in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,

David Brandt, SHA President

SOIL HEALTH ACADEMY

Learn more about the Soil Health Academy, its graduates and their success at: **www.soilhealthacademy.org | 256-996-3142**

SHA Graduate Survey reveals on-the-ground impact of regenerative ag education, practice implementation

Executive Summary

Background

A comprehensive survey of Soil Health Academy (SHA) graduates was conducted in December of 2020 to help the SHA board of directors and faculty further assess how transitioning from tillage- and chemical-dependent conventional agricultural practices to soil health-focused regenerative agricultural practices have affected their respective operations. In short, SHA's board of directors wanted to hear directly from its graduates regarding the tangible financial and resource impacts regenerative agricultural principles have had in their operations. In addition, the survey provided a vehicle to hear from SHA's graduates regarding areas of curriculum improvement and to pinpoint topics and potential program offerings that may help its current and future graduates more successfully implement regenerative agricultural practices in their respective operations.

The responses of these graduates, as well as their suggestions for topics and future curricula will continue to provide important guidance to SHA's board, faculty and staff in the months and years ahead.

Participation overview

More than **125 graduates** completed the survey, resulting in a margin of error of 7.3% for the poll. Of the respondents, **45% attended** an SHA school **less than a year ago**, while **55% attended** an SHA school **more than a year ago**.

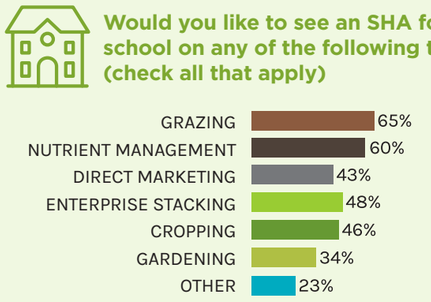
Roughly half of the respondents (49%) reported direct-to-consumer marketing as part of their operations.

Respondents were fairly evenly distributed among the regeneratively farmed, by-acre grouping (1-10; 11-50; 51-100; 101-250; 251-500; 500-1000; 1001+) with the largest respondent group representing farmers using regenerative ag practices on more than 1001 acres (23%).

What we learned

To the open-ended questions regarding potential programs and services SHA should offer to further advance the regenerative agriculture journey of our attendees, more than 100 responses were received, representing a range of suggestions and topics for future webinars, field days, on-farm schools and printed resource guides.

Would you like to see an SHA focused school on any of the following topics? (check all that apply)



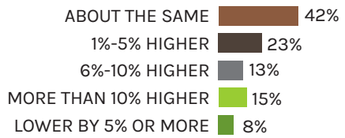
The Questions

On-the-ground impacts experienced

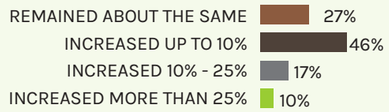
Regarding the tangible impacts regenerative agricultural principles had in their respective operations, more than half of the respondents reported experiencing positive resource and economic gains while transitioning from conventional agricultural practices to regenerative agricultural practices.

The following are the aggregate responses to the survey questions.

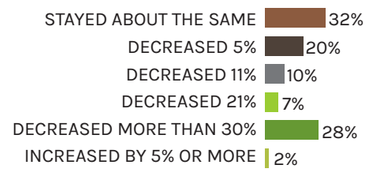
Compared to my operation before implementing regenerative agricultural principles in my operation, my per-acre net profits in 2020 were:



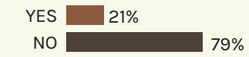
Since I began implementing regenerative agricultural principles in my operation, water infiltration in my soil has:



Since I began implementing regenerative agricultural principles in my operation, my use of synthetic (chemical) fertilizers has:

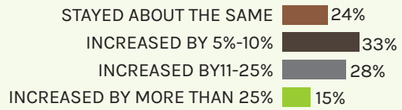


Since attending the SHA school I have experienced one or more agronomic problems that I was not able to overcome and/or had a detrimental impact on my operation.



Since I began implementing regenerative agricultural principles in my operation, my use of pesticides and herbicides has:

If you have grazing livestock, to what extent has forage diversity and biomass increased as you adopted adaptive grazing principles?

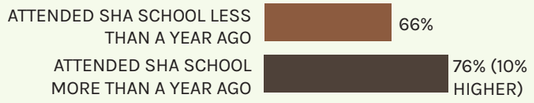


An important crosstab finding

While there were no significant statistical differences among respondents and their associated operation types, involvement in direct-to-consumer marketing status or number of acres farmed, one crosstab examination in the survey revealed significant statistical differences when comparing responses from those who had attended an SHA school less than a year ago to those who attended an SHA school more than a year ago. These differences were evident in responses to both financial and resource benefit questions including:

Compared to my operation before implementing regenerative agricultural principles in my operation, my per-acre net profits in 2020 were higher.

Since I began implementing regenerative agricultural principles in my operation, water infiltration in my soil has improved.



Since I began implementing regenerative agricultural principles in my operation, my use of synthetic (chemical) fertilizers has decreased.

If you have grazing livestock, has forage diversity and biomass increased as you adopted adaptive grazing principles?

Since I began implementing regenerative agricultural principles in my operation, my use of pesticides and herbicides has decreased.

SHA's survey findings regarding the correlation between the time of practice implementation and resulting benefits are consistent with a number of previous studies, which suggest that while many producers experience financial, input and resource improvements early in their respective regenerative journeys, those benefits are more pronounced the longer producers apply regenerative agricultural principles in their operations.