



# 2024

MONTHLY PAGE CALENDAR

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## Soil Health Academy's Mission

The Soil Health Academy mission is to teach and assist farmers and ranchers in applying time-tested, ecological principles and biomimicry to regenerate our living and life-giving soil. In restoring the health of our soil's ecosystem, we will restore the health of our bodies, our farms, our communities, and our planet.





## A letter from SHA President Dawn Breitreutz

In my life I wear several “hats” including wife, mother, grandmother, farmer, gardener, partner, boss, finance officer, educator, SHA board president, and soil health mentor and advocate. Balancing those duties and responsibilities can be challenging, but the responsibility of writing this letter always stays on my mind.

The focus of my letter this year is inspired by a salesman who pulled into our farm one day to sell us a “safe” commercial cleaning product. He told us he was selling us “hope, not dope.” I haven’t forgotten that salesman nor that memorable phrase.

Years ago, when Grant and I found our operation at a financial cliff’s edge, we were desperate to find a different direction to go. Our other option was to quit farming. We were in trouble at the bank, our yields were falling, our input costs were climbing, and farming was stressful every day. We were working like dogs for less and less at the end of the year.

Then we attended a few classes about grazing management and how to grow better grass. When we adopted these new methods, the change was apparent within the first year. The beauty of this new grazing system was that we could reduce expenses while still improving our grass and grazing diversity. We didn’t need to spray weeds and we could stop fertilizing ground that was difficult to navigate. We were “sold” hope!

After a few years of working on the pastures we were managing, we realized that we were affecting soil health, not just grass and livestock health. With that realization, we then began focusing on all our row-crop acres and we have never looked back. (This is a very short synopsis of a rather long journey through hills and valleys of changes but understand that we found renewed hope in that journey.)

That hope is why I am so involved and passionate about soil health and why I am writing this note to you as the Soil Health Academy president. Grant and I realized very early in our journey that we were obligated to pass our knowledge on to others so that we could help others avoid all the pitfalls we encountered along the way. Education is the key and continued education is very, very important. I believe education is our hope—that education can save the planet, and that it can be the reason many choose to stay on the farm, or start their own farm, or return to their farm.

Soil health is as old as “dirt” and we can now return to many of the ways farming was done hundreds of years ago with the benefit of the technology and science to help us better understand how to improve soil ecosystem health and function. Thanks to what I’ve learned in the past several years, I now understand that the answers we were searching for are in the air above us and in the soil below us. Because we have improved our soil health on our farm, we no longer need much of the “dope,” the synthetic inputs we once needed to produce a crop.

As I review SHA scholarship applications, I read about so many others who are close to the edge like we were. I also read about people who have never farmed but who have hopes of finding small acreages to move their families to and start a small garden enterprise or livestock operation. We have some students who attend our schools who simply want to understand more about soil health and how they can support others in this space.

Also on the topic of hope, I would be remiss in not mentioning those involved in our Battlefields to Fertile Fields program. Every SHA school this year included veterans who separated from the military years ago, as well as those who are still part of the guard or reserves. The patriotism and sense of duty for these individuals didn’t end when their uniforms came off. Like me, they see farming as a continuation of service to our country—with regenerative agriculture offering a hopeful, enjoyable and sustainable way to do so.

As we wrap up our sixth year of existence, I am grateful for your continuing generosity and positive feedback. On behalf of our phenomenal board of directors, educators, staff, and students, thank you for your support of the Soil Health Academy.

Your kindness is yet another source of hope for the future.



Dawn Breitreutz, President  
Soil Health Academy







# JANUARY 2024

In last year's annual report, the Soil Health Academy outlined several organizational goals for 2022, including "Seeking funding to develop a new Soil Health Academy broadcast video documentary series to educate consumers, policy makers and others on the importance of healthy soils, healthy plants, healthy animals, healthy people and a healthy climate."

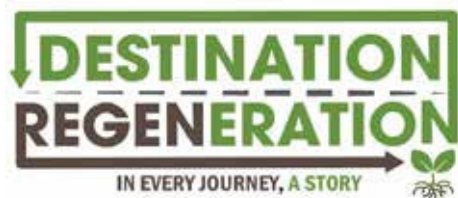
Thanks to a recent grant from Wells Fargo Foundation, SHA, working with the Emmy-nominated production team of Joe Dickie, Forrest Fox, Lynn Betts and Ron Nichols, produced a pilot episode/prototype for the proposed series titled Destination Regeneration.

SHA is now seeking funding to develop an entire 10-episode docuseries to feature even more compelling human-interest stories of producers and their families (many of whom are SHA graduates) on their respective journeys of regeneration. Along the way, viewers will be introduced to local communities, restaurateurs, health experts and others who are all interconnected with the soil health and the regenerative farming movement.

Nichols, who is serving as SHA's executive producer for the pilot episode, said a 10-episode series, rather than a one-and-done feature documentary, will provide the format to highlight the wide-ranging benefits and opportunities regenerative agriculture offers through the compelling stories of the farm families who are growing regeneratively.

"The docuseries, if funded, will also examine the real-life challenges producers face as they transition from conventional to regenerative farming practices," Nichols said.

Visit the SHA website to view the trailer.



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A photograph of a man, David Brandt, standing in a field of purple flowers. He is wearing a grey t-shirt, blue overalls, and a grey baseball cap. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a red tractor with a large red implement, possibly a harrow or plow, attached to it. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is peaceful and rural.

# David Brandt

## *In Memoriam 1947-2023*

02



# FEBRUARY 2024

**R**egenerative farming pioneer, SHA co-founder and first President, David Brandt, passed away in 2023 from complications resulting from an automobile accident. In honor and memory of David's service to the soil health community, the organization added his name to the Kendra Brandt scholarship fund.

In 2020, shortly after the death of David's wife, Kendra, SHA established a fund in her name that provides SHA school scholarships to women and beginning farmers who are committed to growing the regenerative agriculture movement by implementing regenerative principles in their own operations or through regenerative agriculture education, outreach or policy advocacy.

“

**As regenerative farming partners in life, we thought it fitting that David and Kendra be partners in the continuation of that legacy by having both of their names associated with this important and empowering scholarship fund,”**



**DAWN BREITKREUTZ**  
SOIL HEALTH ACADEMY PRESIDENT

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To learn more about the David and Kendra Scholarship Fund, to contribute, or to apply for a scholarship, visit:

**[soilhealthacademy.org/scholarships](https://soilhealthacademy.org/scholarships)**



03



# MARCH 2024

## 2023 Soil Health Academy Graduate Impact Survey Highlights



This year's graduate impact survey shows that attendees continue to implement soil health-focused, regenerative farming/ranching principles and practices that are having a positive impact on reducing synthetic input use. The application of those principles and practices are also having a positive impact on soil and water resources.

While attendees from the past six years were asked to participate, more than half of the respondents are graduates from 2022 and 2023. The distribution of total acres being managed using regenerative agriculture principles is fairly evenly distributed across the seven acreage categories, with the lowest percentage of respondents (4%) managing 1-10 acres and the highest percentage of respondents (23%) managing more than 1,000 acres.

It should also be noted that an increasing number of SHA school attendees operate organic farms/ranches and therefore do not use synthetic fertilizers or pesticides in their operations (likely depressing the aggregate impact in the input areas of inquiry). Nonetheless, the positive impact of regenerative practices on soil function and biodiversity reflected in this survey underscores the resulting improved resource benefits, irrespective of the type of agricultural operation reporting.

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OVER TWO-THIRDS REPORT LOWER  
SYNTHETIC FERTILIZER USE

**"SINCE I BEGAN IMPLEMENTING REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURAL PRINCIPLES IN MY OPERATION, MY USE OF SYNTHETIC (CHEMICAL) FERTILIZERS HAS:"**



**69%**

LOWERED USE OVERALL



**36%**

LOWERED USE BY 30+%





04



# APRIL 2024

“

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to attend this week's academy. The scholarship allowed my wife and me to make a much easier decision.

I knew covers worked, but I didn't know a lot about them or how to record progress. I used to be skeptical, to say the least. My turning point was the day Mike Plummer brought in 3 soil samples to the Marion, IL NRCS field office. He had a benchmark crop field sample, a current fence row sample, and a current crop field sample. He had transformed timber dirt into a soil that resembled that of a prairie. I still didn't think they were meant for good cropland.

It's taken less than a year of reviewing Sangamon County soil health assessments to change my mind again. One day after the academy, I'm already talking to folks more confidently about cover crops at the county fair.”



**ANDREW FULTON**

PROUD SOIL HEALTH ACADEMY GRADUATE

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**OVER A THIRD REPORT LOWER  
PESTICIDE USE BY 30%**

**SINCE I BEGAN IMPLEMENTING REGENERATIVE  
AGRICULTURAL PRINCIPLES IN MY OPERATION  
MY USE OF PESTICIDES AND HERBICIDES HAS:**



**65%**

LOWERED USE OVERALL



**39%**

LOWERED USE BY 30+%







05

# MAY 2024

“

It has been over one year since my son, Lance, and I attended the Soil Health Academy in Kenansville, NC. It has been an amazing year of many ups and downs but so worth the experience. This past Friday, I held my first farm tour. I never would have thought, a dream of mine, would be coming to fruition.

I share all this with you because receiving the Kendra Brandt scholarship afforded me the chance to educate myself and fulfill a long-term dream of mine. I shall forever be an “ag-vocate” of regenerative agriculture. I know the journey of highs and lows will continue but am confident now that I will learn to move forward and share with others.

With the practices we have implemented in the last three years, one of the many benefits we’ve seen is the return of the bluebird population to our farm. My husband’s uncle said that the bluebird population was plentiful when he was a kid here. He is now 81 years old. Well, the population has increased so much that Lance chose the name of Bluebird Farms for our family operation.

If you ever find yourself in NC in your many travels, please look us up. I’d love to show you what your “student” has done! So much more I want share with you! Maybe the next email will be when we turn our first sale! Thanks again for investing the time in SHA and for allowing my son to attend with me.”



**LISA WILLIAMS**

PROUD SOIL HEALTH ACADEMY GRADUATE

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## THREE-QUARTERS REPORT INCREASED WATER INFILTRATION

**SINCE I BEGAN IMPLEMENTING REGENERATIVE  
AGRICULTURAL PRINCIPLES IN MY OPERATION  
WATER INFILTRATION IN MY SOIL HAS:**

**75%**  
INCREASED OVERALL



**43%**  
INCREASED UP TO 10-25%







06

# JUNE 2024

## As diversity increases, SHA value remains sky high

In wrapping up our sixth year of operations, we continue to see an increase in diversity among our SHA school attendees and their respective farming and ranching operations. While offering tuition support to all farmers and ranchers in need, SHA has placed special emphasis on providing support to tribal members, women, military veterans and other historically underrepresented individuals and groups.

Geographic diversity was also on full display in 2023, with SHA school attendees coming from 43 states, six Canadian provinces, three European, and one Asian country. Thanks to the generous donations of SHA supporters, more than half of SHA graduates received tuition support to offset the cost of our on-farm school attendance.

SHA graduates' operations are increasingly diverse, with two-thirds of respondents reporting producing pasture-raised protein products, while 40 percent are involved in direct-to-consumer marketing. These enterprise-stacking ventures provide added value and profitability for many operations, as well as providing local jobs and generational succession opportunities—all while providing access to nutrient-dense food for residents in local communities.



### A Valuable Experience

All SHA graduates indicated that their SHA school experience provided some level of value, with 94 percent indicating that their experience was "Valuable" to "Highly valuable." As SHA begins its seventh year of operations, our goal is to continue to provide a highly valuable experience to all of our attendees and through all of our ancillary education venues.



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## SOIL HEALTH ACADEMY 2023 NUMBERS AT A GLANCE



11

NUMBER OF 2023  
SHA SCHOOLS  
AND WORKSHOPS



428

NUMBER OF  
ATTENDEES



367

TOTAL SOIL HEALTH  
ACADEMY  
SCHOLARSHIPS  
AWARDED





07



# JULY 2024

In 2023, SHA published 10 detailed case studies examining the operational, production and profitability details of five regenerative farming and ranching operations across the country. Funded by the Wells Fargo Foundation, the project is designed to provide strategic and tactical insights to help guide farming and ranching enterprises as they transition from high-input, chemically dependent conventional agriculture to lower-input, more profitable regenerative operations.

"Each farm and ranch featured in this series represents a unique business enterprise with unique production and operational challenges and opportunities but the common thread for each is their use of soil health-focused regenerative agricultural principles and practices to create profitable businesses, many of which are providing local employment and generational succession opportunities that otherwise would not exist."

While peer-reviewed studies provide useful data relative to the profitability of regenerative ag systems in aggregate, we believe the academic research process is protracted and frequently yields limited actionable information for agricultural producers and their businesses.



Our case studies provide useful information in detail, including what worked, what didn't work, and the lessons learned along the way by the farmers and ranchers featured in each case study. We're very grateful to these farm families for sharing their insights and experiences so other regenerative farmers and ranchers can benefit from their expertise.

Because farmers and ranchers face soaring input costs and shrinking profit margins today, they need practical business and operational information today.

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## SOIL HEALTH ACADEMY 2023 NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

 **\$265k**

FUNDED  
SCHOLARSHIPS

 **32k**

SOIL HEALTH  
ACADEMY  
WEBSITE USERS

 **12k**

NUMBER OF SOIL  
HEALTH ACADEMY  
YOUTUBE VIDEO  
VIEWS







# AUGUST 2024

## Battlefields to Fertile Fields Program Generates Interest, Success



Since launching its Battlefields to Fertile Fields (BF2FF) program for U.S. military veterans seeking regenerative agriculture education and training opportunities in 2022, SHA has seen increasing interest in the program from both active duty and honorably discharged veterans. In 2023, SHA provided scholarships to 30 military veterans to attend its three-day, on-farm schools.

Part of the BF2FF program includes an intensive training component for veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian professions. Working with the Department of Defense and multiple host sites, SHA continues to develop its BF2FF program to include a six-month internship experience, including attending two SHA schools and interning on multiple farms and ranches, as well as other regenerative agriculture venues.

SHA is currently working with two active duty veterans to finalize their education and training schedules beginning later in 2023 or 2024.



Ian McAlpine and Eric Czaja both in the Army and both graduate school research partners.

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“

The SHA and the Understanding Ag team has not only changed how I implement agriculture practices, but how I see my entire landscape.

Not only on our farm, but as I drive, it seems as if the entire countryside is shouting at me to work with it instead of against it. My eyes see endless opportunity to rebuild, revitalize and restore ecosystem function. BF2FF showed me how I can continue to serve my country and my family through regenerative agriculture. What I've learned has enabled the DoD to make considerable progress in land management practices. Equipped with the knowledge from the SHA, Ian and I have garnered overwhelming support from the highest levels within the DoD.”

**ERIC CZAJA**

VASS, NC, U.S. ARMY





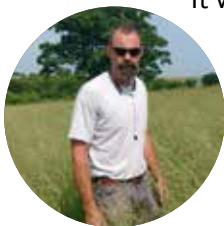
09



# SEPTEMBER 2024

“

I'm standing in a pasture that four years ago would have given me 3-4 days set stock grazing. It was primarily goldenrod and grass that wouldn't grow over 6-8 inches tall. Even experiencing the driest weather conditions I've seen in 18 years, this pasture should go seven days on daily moves—and that's leaving half behind. Multiple species of grass and legumes have shown up and all the work and strategy is paying off. I can't thank you and the SHA team enough.”



**LUKE BURGLES**

ATTENDEE, SOIL HEALTH ACADEMY

“

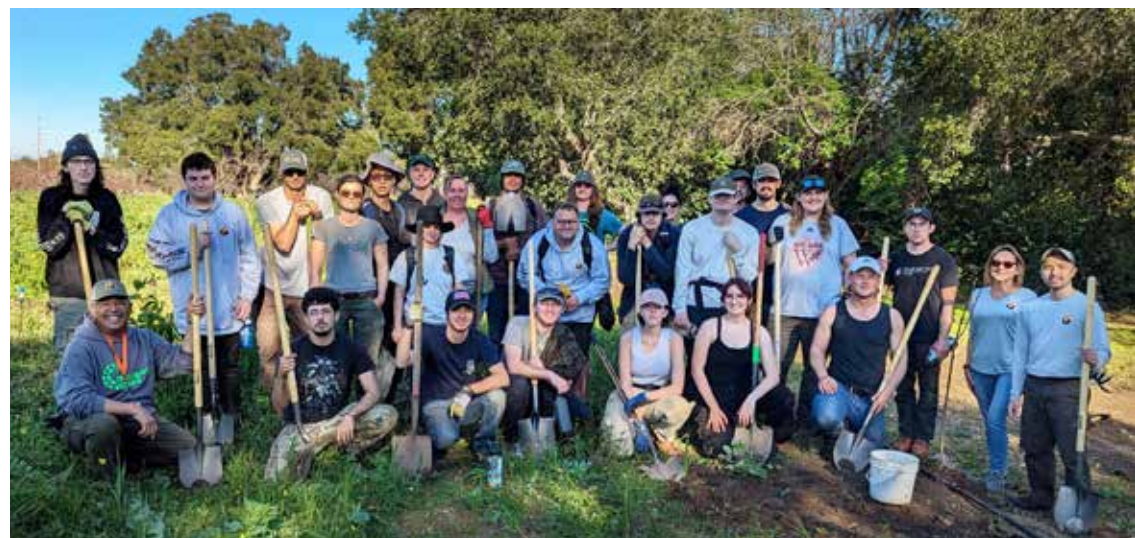
The Soil Health Academy has increased my knowledge so I can teach the concepts to my students at West Valley College in Saratoga, CA.

Being able to see what we are talking about on the CSU Chico Farm and hearing the experiences of the instructional team from Understanding Ag was extremely valuable!”

**CHRISTOPHER CRUZ**

EDUCATOR, WEST VALLEY COLLEGE (pictured at right, front row, far left)

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# OCTOBER 2024

## Thoughts From the Pasture

Every day I get to spend on the pasture is an education and therapy. Understanding and respecting the power and fragility of nature, the simplicity and chaos, the peace and the songs, the cycles of life, and the innumerable living creatures in the air, the grass, and the ground makes my life interesting, frustrating, challenging, and uplifting.

Each day I visit brings a new challenge and a new observation of the ways the land is changing and healing. The birds accompany my travels across the pasture and I'm not sure their songs are really happy as I invade their home. Training cows and calves to move daily takes patience and time and I never know what I will find each day.

With all the rain this year, the pasture is a stunningly diverse and healthy landscape to graze, which we are so very blessed to have. Each day when I leave, I thank God for the gift of this path I'm on.

So, if you need a place to breathe today, close your eyes and sit down in the grass with these flowers and take a deep cleansing breath and enjoy the sweet scent of the blooms and grasses there. Listen to all the birds sing and feel the breeze gently blow around you. I hope you find the peace that I find here.

**DAWN BREITKREUTZ**

SOIL HEALTH ACADEMY PRESIDENT

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# NOVEMBER 2024

## SHA's Goals for 2024

As we considered the needs, opportunities and organizational goals in the year ahead, we also looked back to see how effective we've been in reaching the goals established in previous years and we're delighted to say we achieved most of them. With that in mind, we approached this year's "A Look Ahead" with what we believe is a robust, but achievable goal-setting philosophy. Following are our primary goals and objectives for 2023 (and possibly beyond).



**2023 GOAL:** Refine and expand the "Battlefields to Fertile Fields" veterans' transition program.

**2023 GOAL ACHIEVED**

**2024 GOAL:** SHA has set a 2024 fundraising goal of \$100,000, the funding for which will provide support for approximately five veterans, as well as cover the associated program development, administrative and coordination costs.



**2023 GOAL:** Increase educational opportunities for historically disadvantaged and underserved tribes, groups and individuals.

**2023 GOAL ACHIEVED**

**2024 GOAL:** SHA has set a fundraising goal of \$300,000 for 2024.



**2023 GOAL:** Expand SHA's NextGen|Regen program and create Regenerative Ag Educators' and Regen Ag Leaders' programs.

**2023 GOAL ACHIEVED**

**2024 GOAL:** SHA has set a fundraising goal of \$250,000 for 2024.

*Goals continued in December.*

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# DECEMBER 2024

## SHA's Goals for 2024



**2023 GOAL:** Showcase "Destination Regeneration" docuseries pilot and secure funding for 10-episode season for streaming/broadcasting.

**2023 GOAL PARTIALLY ACHIEVED**

**2024 GOAL:** SHA continues to pursue funding of approximately \$1.3 million for the remaining nine episodes.



**2023 GOAL:** Publish 10 regenerative farming and ranching case studies

**2023 GOAL ACHIEVED**

**2024:** No equivalent goal will be pursued.



**2023 GOAL:** Develop and offer one-day workshops to increase awareness of and education for conventional ranchers considering transitioning to regenerative grazing practices

**2023 GOAL ACHIEVED**

**2024 GOAL:** Develop and deliver additional webinar training opportunities exploring a range of regenerative agriculture and production-related topics.

### BECAUSE OF YOU...

We're proud of and thankful for our generous donor community whose contributions have made our previous years' regenerative goals a reality. We look forward to our continued partnership and support as we endeavor to make our important 2024 goals a reality, too.

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## 2023 Class Photos from Our Schools in Canada, New Mexico and Minnesota.



*Thank you to the individuals, foundations, businesses, and corporations whose on-going support allows the Soil Health Academy to help farmers and ranchers grow healthier soil, farms, food and profits.*

### **A Special Thanks to SHA's Education Partners:**

- Agricultural Stewardship Association
- Assiniboine Watershed Stewardship Association
- Chico State University
- Farm Ops, Cornell Small Farms
- Hoosick Falls Central School District
- Michigan State University
- Regeneration Canada

### **SHA's Board of Directors**



**Dawn Breitreutz,**  
President



**Kim Barmann,**  
Vice President



**Chad Christianson,**  
Secretary/Treasurer

### **2023 Corporate Donors**





## This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# 2025

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## MARCH

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## AUGUST

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## SEPTEMBER

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## OCTOBER

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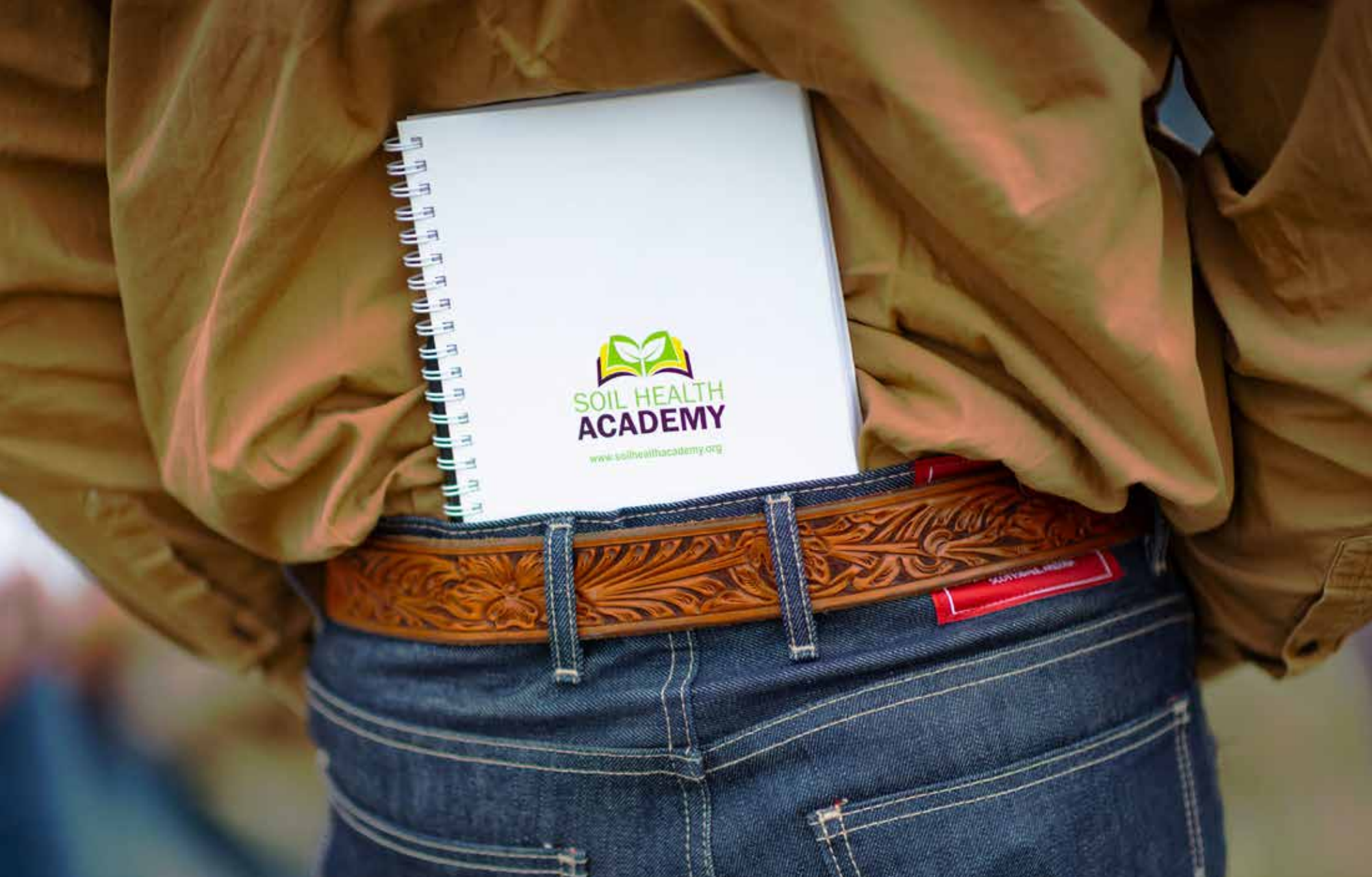
## NOVEMBER

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30	1	2	3	4	5	6

## DECEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
30	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10





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