

SUMMER 2025

WHAT'S NEW AT NC-FEW

Official Newsletter of the National Collaborative for Research on Food, Energy and Water Education

Kick-Starting the Next Steps of NC-FEW

by Hannah Scherer, Director of NC-FEW

The theme of this final NC-FEW newsletter is “Kick-Starting the Next Steps of NC-FEW” because that is where we stand, at the beginning of the next phase.

We are at a transition point for the community as we approach the end of the current externally funded stage of the collaborative. What began back in 2016 as a concept and initial networking efforts by Dr. Cory Forbes has grown to a community of hundreds of people invested in advancing education in the FEW Nexus in their spheres of influence.

Through various funding sources over the years, most recently from the National Science Foundation, we have been able to bring together people in many disciplines and all sectors of education to find common ground and shared purpose in their efforts. According to the evaluation report produced by our external evaluators at SERC, “At the end of the 2024-2025 project year, the NC-FEW community list included 432 members from 92 different institutions and organizations.”

The FEW Nexus is a truly transdisciplinary space and NC-FEW has emerged as a unique community that reflects this. The leadership team is honored to have been given the opportunity to help make this happen.

So, where do we go from here? Well, that answer is up to you. None of us “own” NC-FEW. It is a collaborative, a network where every individual has agency to create a new node. I personally am looking forward to focusing my efforts on the possibilities of using the FEW Nexus in concert with literacy strategies to support learners in rural spaces (shameless plug for my new paper linked in the sidebar!).

As this work progresses, I know that I will be reaching out to you all via the listserv (anyone on it can email nc-few@serc.carleton.edu) to share emerging opportunities to collaborate.

In this final newsletter, instead of focusing on recent efforts, I will share some ideas about how you can continue to move forward as a member of NC-FEW.

PUBLICATIONS

[Storying the FEW Nexus: A Framework for Cultivating Place-Based Integrated STEM Education in Rural Schools](#)

Education Sciences, 15(6), 744

Scherer, H. H., and Azano, A. P. (2025)

Developed for K-12 learners in rural places, Storying the FEW Nexus positions STEM knowledge and skills as resources that, alongside local narratives, are vital to the sustainability and viability of communities with unique and intertwined environmental justice histories and current realities. The FEW Nexus is leveraged to support rural learners in developing sustainable solutions to local socio-ecological systems issues.



Professional Society/Associations

Continue to spread the word!

NC-FEW has made connections with and inroads into so many different disciplinary spaces it is hard to keep track! Let's keep that momentum going. Here are some ideas:

1. If you come across sessions or conferences that you think would be of interest to NC-FEW members, share them on the listserv (I just did that this week!).
2. If you meet people at conferences who are interested in FEW Nexus education, or might be, invite them to join the listserv. Share this direct link to [JOIN OUR LISTSERV](#).
3. Acknowledge NC-FEW in presentations if your work has been informed by things you have gained from the community; the resources on our website will remain accessible so you can point people there in your presentation.

Director's Corner

Updates from Hannah Scherer (director), Nicole Sintov (co-director) and Hui-Hui Wang (co-director).

The NC-FEW directors are focusing on completing a document that synthesizes what we have learned and accomplished since receiving the National Science Foundation funding in 2019. This has been a collaborative effort with contributions from the working group chairs and the 2025 conference contributed program chairs. We are also relying heavily on the valuable information in the SERC evaluation reports that have been developed over the years.

We will post this as a PDF on the website and announce the publication over the listserv in late August. The aim is for it to be a durable record of the work of NC-FEW during this time, with recommendations for the future of FEW Nexus-based educational research and practice that the whole community can draw on in future efforts and proposals.

NC-FEW Virtual Workshop Series

In July, we hosted our final virtual workshop on the same theme as this newsletter, Kick-Starting Collaborations for the Next Steps of NC-FEW. Our goal with this session was to provide space for participants to think collaboratively about next steps, including finding people with shared common interests and discovering how they can contribute to future education research and practice using the FEW Nexus.

In the workshop, I also shared preliminary findings from the study that Doug Lombardi and I are conducting, entitled "An Integrated Framework for Food-Energy-Water Nexus Education and Educational Research." This is an analysis of the artifacts from the series of workshops held by NC-FEW members last year and we hope the resulting framework will be a valuable resource for the community moving forward. If you are interested in learning more about this work and seeing what topics were discussed in breakout rooms, you can view the recording [HERE](#).

PUBLICATIONS

Soils: At the Center of the Food-Energy-Water (FEW) Nexus

Soils for Our Future 2025 Conference: A Gathering of Global to Local Perspectives

July 20-25, 2025

Winnipeg, Manitoba

A poster authored by Katherine McCarville of Minot State University has been accepted for presentation to the Innovative Approaches to Soil Science Education Session of the 2025 CSSS meetings at this event. The conference brings together three conference events: the 5th Global Soil Security Conference, the Canadian Society of Soil Science Annual Meeting, and International Union of Soil Sciences Division-Soils In Space and Time Meeting. Hosted by the Soil Conservation Council of Canada and the Manitoba Soil Science Society, more than 700 researchers, industry members, leaders of farmer organizations, graduate students and others are expected to attend, providing global perspective to today's research to sustain our future.



Virtual Workshop Continued:

If you are interested in connecting with folks on any of the topics, we can help you connect with the groups that met during the virtual workshop. The slides posted on the virtual workshop page also contain a roundup of durable resources that will remain available on the [NC-FEW WEBSITE](#).

Working Group Updates

Let's envision new ones!

Each current working group will be figuring out for themselves what their next steps are. We have seen the working groups function as nodes in the NC-FEW network, but other efforts have also emerged in response to an identified need or interest. NC-FEW members have also brought ideas about FEW Nexus education to other communities. We have seen these efforts highlighted in newsletters over the years and this is exactly how a distributed network should function.

So, ask yourself, what are my goals or ideas for next steps in FEW Nexus based education? It can be an early idea, such as “exploring using the FEW Nexus in outdoor educational spaces,” a specific task, such as “help with piloting and improving a new FEW Nexus assessment tool that I developed for high school science courses,” or a concept for a next step for the community, such as “seeking funding to host a conference to help the NC-FEW community reconnect.”

If you have an idea, ask yourself what folks do I need or want to help me reach those goals? Could this be the start of a new working group?

If the answer to the last question might be yes, here are some suggested next steps based on what we have learned:

1. Formulate an articulation of the topic or goal that would be understandable to others.
2. Find some buddies! Utilize your networks, including the NC-FEW listserv, to broadcast your idea and find people interested in this work. Leadership team members are here to support you in making connections as well, so please don't hesitate to reach out.
3. Build trust and shared understanding. This can take some time, especially if you are meeting via email or on a videoconference for the first time. Get to know each other, what drives your interest in this work, and how you like to work in collaborative teams.
4. Set concrete, time-bound objectives that align with expectations for the roles team members are in. We've found that focusing on things like writing a paper or planning a workshop help provide some external structure that keeps people motivated to stay engaged.
5. Expect people to come and go...that's the natural ebb and flow of this work. There may be a point where your group decides to dissolve and that's ok. Encouraging honest and timely communication can help maintain good working relationships as group membership evolves over time.

Poster Continued:

McCarville's poster features a place-based project for college students in an introductory earth science class. The project focused around soil health at an urban mixed-grass prairie restoration in north-central North Dakota. Students performed infiltration tests and collected leaf litter and thatch samples for analysis for soil organisms at the restoration site and at additional nearby locations for comparison. Student reflections and self-reports showed that their initial knowledge about soil and soil health was sparse or lacking, a high level of engagement ("I want to do more of this!"), and that they had learned a lot during the activities.



Stay Connected . . .

- Visit the [NC-FEW website](#).
- Join our [listserv](#) to get updates and opportunities to further engage with this network.
- Member Profiles: Learn about [colleagues in the NC-FEW community](#) and make your own [Member Profile](#) page.