



St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District

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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

2903 Gary Drive, Plymouth, IN 46563

www.stjosephswcd.org

(574) 936-2024 Ext. 4

info@stjosephswcd.org

Celebrating 60 Years of Conservation

"Black blizzards" had become a common symbol of the Dust Bowl (1930-1936), brought on by decades of unsustainable farming practices that left the soils dry and exposed to the elements. In 1937, the organization of districts followed after state legislatures passed a law. If the local people then voted for the district in a referendum, they elected directors and supervisors of the district. On Thursday, April 9, 1959 the St Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District was organized as a governmental subdivision of the state of Indiana by John R Walsh, Secretary of State of the State of Indiana. The newly organized districts then signed an agreement with USDA. The working relationship that has developed over the years is for the districts to sign agreements with individual farmers and ranchers. Then trained soil conservationists from the Natural Resources Conservation Service field offices work individually with them on conservation problems. The SWCD works closely with other forms of local, regional, and state government, private nonprofits, and educational institutions to provide a high level of conservation service to

private landowners.

For the last 60 years you have heard us talk about topics like green manure, conservation tillage, and most recently soil health. In our current time where weather extremes are becoming the norm and production challenges are plentiful, we continue to work with individuals to address resource concerns like soil erosion and compaction that can affect soil health and water quality. Over the years as research has progressed, we've learned that many of the practices that we promote have other positive impacts on our environment like sequestering carbon and other greenhouse gasses, mitigating floodwater, and reclaiming excess nutrients that could otherwise contribute to algal blooms in surface waters or create other water quality problems. Every practice that goes into place, large or small, is beneficial to our environment! We will continue to strive to provide up to date information, valuable education, and quality technical assistance.

To read more on our history,
visit our webpage,
www.stjosephswcd.org/our-history

Timeline

ST JOSEPH COUNTY SWCD

APRIL 27, 1935

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE WAS
ESTABLISHED IN THE U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

*Hugh Hammond Bennett was the first leader
of the SCS, now known as the Natural
Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).*

1930-1936

THE DUST BOWL ERA

*The Dust Bowl was a period of severe dust
storms that greatly damaged the ecology
and agriculture of the American and
Canadian prairies.*

THURSDAY APRIL 9, 1959

*St Joseph County Soil &
Water Conservation
District was organized.*

- \$503,070 in federal dollars for conservation practices
- \$8,921.50 in State & District funds for conservation practices
- 3,195 total acres applied.

2019

CELEBRATING
60 YEARS

WWW.STJOSEPHSWCD.ORG/OUR-HISTORY

AGRONOMIC SOLUTIONS, LLC



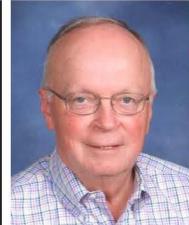
Melissa Lehman CCA, NRCS TSP

MANURE MANAGEMENT
IDEM PERMITS / COMPLIANCE
MI SITING REQUESTS
MI EGLE CAFO PERMITS
CNMP'S
COUNTY SITE PLANS / PERMITS
SOIL TESTING / PSNT TESTING

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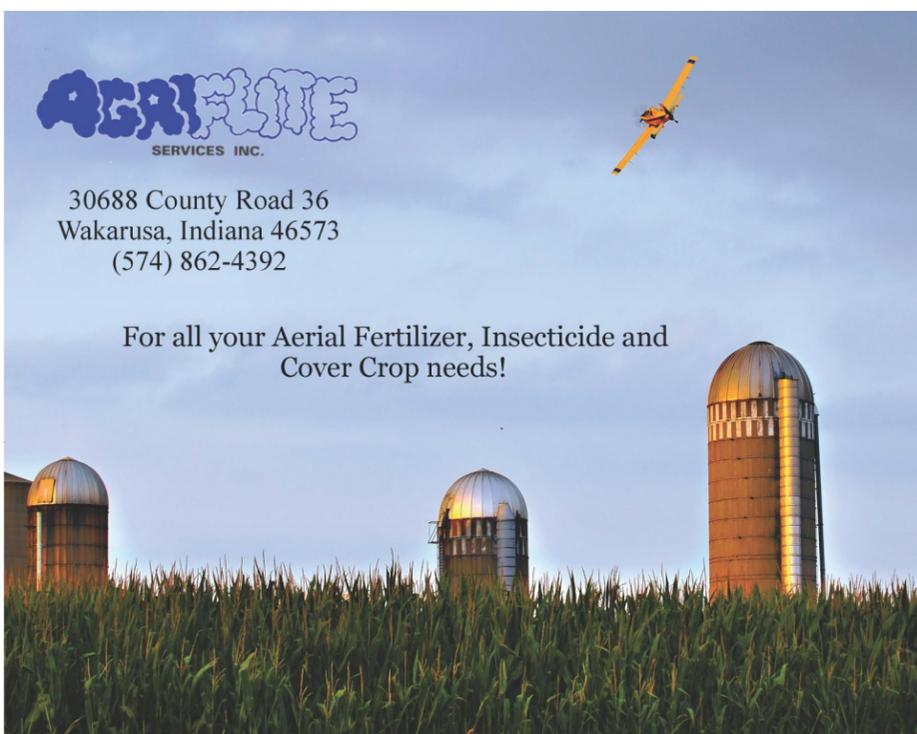


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Why Are Conservation Practices Important?

Listed below are the acres and/or number of conservation practices installed in St Joseph County during the 2019 fiscal year and why they are important for conservation.

<p>Crop Production</p> <p>1,954 Acres of Cover Crops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Reduce erosion from wind and water. ◆ Maintain or increase soil health and organic matter content. ◆ Reduce water quality degradation by utilizing excessive soil nutrients. ◆ Suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles. ◆ Improve soil moisture use efficiency. ◆ Minimize soil compaction. ◆ Provide food and escape cover for wildlife. <p>635 Acres of No-Till</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Reduce sheet, rill and wind erosion. ◆ Maintain or increase soil health and organic matter content. ◆ Reduce greenhouse gas emissions. ◆ Reduce energy use. ◆ Increase plant available moisture. ◆ Provide food and escape cover for wildlife. <p>563 Acres of Irrigation Water Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Improve irrigation water use efficiency. ◆ Minimize irrigation induced soil erosion. ◆ Reduce energy use. <p>2,178 Ft. Filter Strip</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Reduce suspended solids and associated contaminants in runoff and excessive sediment in surface waters. ◆ Reduce dissolved contaminant loadings in runoff. 	  	<p>Wildlife Habitat</p> <p>54 Acres Conservation Cover (pollinator/monarch habitat)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Reduce sheet, rill and wind erosion and sedimentation. ◆ Reduce ground and surface water quality degradation by nutrients and surface water quality degradation by sediment. ◆ Reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. ◆ Improve soil health. ◆ Enhance wildlife, pollinator and beneficial organism habitat. <p>25 Acres Upland Wildlife Habitat Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Enables movement of wildlife. ◆ Provides shelter, cover, and food in proper amounts, locations and times to sustain wild animals that inhabit uplands during a portion of their life cycle. <p>4.6 Acres Leave Standing Crop Over Winter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provides food for wildlife over the winter months when options are scarce.  
 <p>Other</p> <p>1 Seasonal High Tunnels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Improve plant health and vigor. ◆ Extend growing season. <p>4 Acres Wetland Enhancement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Increases the capacity of specific wetland functions by enhancing hydric soil functions, hydrology and vegetation. ◆ Enhances plant and animal habitats. 	<p>Forestry</p> <p>4 Acres of Tree Establishment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provides forest products such as timber, pulpwood, etc. ◆ Provides wildlife habitat. ◆ Provides long term erosion control and improvement of water quality. ◆ Stores carbon in biomass. ◆ Reduce energy usage. ◆ Improving or restoring natural diversity. ◆ Enhancing aesthetics. <p>100 Acres Brush Management Invasive Species Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Restore or release desired vegetative cover to protect soils, control erosion, reduce sediment, improve water quality, or enhance hydrology. ◆ Maintain or enhance fish and wildlife habitat ◆ Pervasive plant species are controlled to a desired level of treatment that will ultimately contribute to the maintenance of the natural area. ◆ Create the desired plant community consistent with the ecology of the site. 	



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2,827 Acres Planned

Area farmers & landowners in St Joseph County received \$503,070 through federal programs in 2019.

3,195 Acres Applied



St Joseph County SWCD Hosts 59th Annual Meeting

On Friday February 8, 2019, the St Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) held their 59th Annual Meeting at St Hedwig Memorial Center in South Bend, IN. The SWCD was joined by 111 community members which included rural and urban producers and landowners. We were privileged to have Misty Cosgrove Field Representative for Senator Mike Braun, Chris Lee Field Director for Congresswoman Jackie Walorski, Indiana State Representative Ross Deal, and St Joseph County Commissioners Deborah Fleming and Dave Thomas as honored guests.

Our supervisor election was held with candidate Mike Burkholder being re-elected to the board for another 3-year term. Dave Vandewalle was sworn in as an appointed supervisor for another 3-year term as well. We want to thank both Mike & Dave for their service and dedication to our district.

Our Conservation Awards Program is designed to recognize cooperating landowners for their outstanding accomplishments in the field of natural resource conservation. The selection process becomes increasingly difficult each year because of the number of dedicated individuals, installing a multitude of resource conservation practices within the community. For all their hard work, we recognized Lichtenbarger Farms and Gamble Dairy Farm, LLC as our 2018 River Friendly Farmers of the Year; Eugene & Linda Matzat as our Friend of Forestry; Wykoff Brothers Farms, Inc. as our Conservation Farmers of the Year; and Theri Niemier as our Educator of the Year. We also honored the memory of two board members who passed away in 2018; Stacey Silvers served on the board for 10 years and Dale Stoner who served on our board for 49 years. They were both a great asset for the district and will be remembered fondly.



We would like to thank all our donors for our silent auction items. Our night highlighted the 2018 accomplishments of our district with the help of our partners, from conservation practices installed throughout our county to education and outreach events. The key note speaker was Stephanie McLain, Indiana USDA NRCS State Soil Health Specialist. She brought to light the importance of soil health on acres of farmland or in your home garden.

Save The Date: January 31, 2020 60th Annual Meeting

Where: St. Hedwig Memorial Center, 331 S Scott St., South Bend, IN 46601

Time: Doors open at 5:45 pm, call to order is at 6:30 pm.

Cost: Tickets are \$15 each. Includes Dinner

Key Note Speaker: Chad Pregracke

Chad Pregracke is the internationally named 2013 CNN Hero of the Year, founder and president of Living Lands & Waters; a nonprofit river cleanup organization, author and professional public speaker. He is proof one person can make a difference.

Best known for starting out as a young man in East Moline, Illinois wanting a cleaner waterway, Chad has become the champion for the Mississippi River. Growing up on its banks, he worked as a commercial shell diver during his early years, experiencing the river from the bottom up. Sometimes spending 10 hours a day in the depths and current of the pitch black waters, he crawled nearly 150 miles of the river bottom over six years. Chad saw its beauty and was frustrated by the neglect. At the age of 17, he decided to clean it up. Twenty two years later, Chad and his Living Lands & Waters crew have organized and led over 1000 community cleanups on 23 rivers in 20 states and removed over 10 million pounds of garbage. Chad had an idea that evolved into a movement that has helped to restore one of America's greatest icons, the Mississippi River.

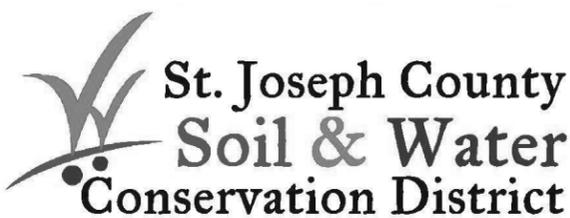
Chad has been recognized by former President, George W. Bush as a national "Point of Light." He received a standing ovation at the Kennedy Center from all four living former U.S. Presidents for his inspirational message on dreaming big, taking action, persevering, leading and collaborating. He has been the keynote speaker for college graduations, business conferences and events, classrooms, nonprofit organizations and more. Named "America's Hardest Working Person" by Mitchum, Chad's enthusiasm, sense of humor and passion amplifies his story and entertains audiences. Ultimately, his message inspires people to believe they can make a difference.



SWCD/NRCS Partnership Staff

	Sarah Longenecker, SWCD County Conservationist 6 Years of Service		Sandra Hoffarth, SWCD Administrative Assistant 5 Years of Service		Jane Sablich, SWCD Environmental Education Coordinator 2 years of Service		Debbie Knepp, USDA NRCS District Conservationist 36 Years of Service
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St. Joseph County Soil And Water Conservation Partnership



Helping St. Joseph County residents improve their natural resources through conservation and education.



Mission: Helping People help the Land

Vision: Productive Lands Healthy Environment



To facilitate the protection and enhancement of Indiana's land and water.

St. Joseph & Marshall County SWCD's Host 4th Annual Producer's Workshop

The last several years we have partnered with Marshall County SWCD, NRCS, and Purdue Extension to provide a day of soil health and agriculture education for our local producers and ag professionals. In February we gathered at Christo's Banquet Center for our spring Producer's Meeting. These meetings provide the opportunity to earn Private Applicator Recertification Program (PARP) credits through Purdue Extension as well as deliver pertinent, up to date production and soil health information. The day started with a talk on climate change and how it is projected to effect agriculture in the future. Melissa Widhalm, Operations Manager with Purdue Climate Change Research Center showed the group past and projected future climate trends, how it may change the timing of crop planting and harvest and practices that producers can utilize to build resiliency in their fields (no-till, cover crops, drainage water management, etc.). Dan Childs, Weed Management Tech Dev. Rep for Bayer, US discussed the causes of weeds becoming herbicide resistant and how we can manage them. It was enlightening to many that even herbicides with different ingredients can have the same mode of action on



plants and be ineffective in killing them. Dr. Shaun Casteel, Agronomy Professor, Purdue University, talked about intentional soybean management,

optimal planting conditions, and the effects of sulfur/lack of sulfur on soybeans. We wrapped things up with Bob Yoder, Purdue Extension ANR Educator, reviewing nutrient storage and application. The topics covered vary from year to year but are applicable to all sizes of production operation with the intent to increase production efficiency and address environmental resource concerns.

Women Farmland Owners and Operators Attended Women's Learning Circle

The St Joseph & Elkhart County NRCS & SWCD's hosted a Women's Learning Circle (WLC) on September 19, 2019 at the Mishawaka Res. Jennifer Selbecki, InDNR Division of Forestry, was on hand as a resource specialist during the WLC to discuss forestry related topics such as tree ID, forest management and invasive species.

According to USDA's Economic Research Service, Characteristics of Women Farm Operators and Their Farms found that the number of women-operated farms more than doubled between 1982 and 2007. Nearly a third of the nation's land in farms are now farmed or co-farmed by women. Many have inherited family land, some are just starting out, some are returning to the farm, and many are "non-operating" landowners who lease their land to neighboring farmers. The study also found that the number of women-operated farms increased in all sales classes, so that means size does not matter when it comes to agricultural opportunity for women.

American Farmland Trust has stated that in the next two decades, about 240 million acres of farmland are expected to change owners as aging farmers retire or leave their land to the next generation. One report predicts that women may own 75 percent of this transferred farmland. This puts real numbers to a trend that many of us have seen firsthand: there is serious momentum behind women in agriculture. And it is a sign of the growing importance to reach women farmers and landowners.

Women fill many roles in agriculture. They are farmers and farm workers, farm owners and tenants, ranchers, agricultural researchers, educators and agri-

business people.

An Iowa study found that women landowners and farmers have a strong connection to conservation and land stewardship. They are deeply committed to healthy farmland, farm families and rural communities. However, they may not be aware of existing resources that can help them.

Women4theLand (W4L) is a partnership of agricultural and natural resource conservation agencies and organizations working together to provide information, networking, education and resources to Indiana women landowners and farmers.

Our objective is to empower women to make good science-based land use and land management decisions that lead to more viable communities and stronger farm enterprises while improving and sustaining the quality of our natural resources.

W4L uses the learning circle model to provide information in a comfortable, informal setting where women learn from professional conservationists as well as from each other. The meetings are facilitated in a way that builds knowledge and confidence. Participants are considered the "experts" on their own production, farmland and conservation needs, and are encouraged to speak about their own experiences and goals rather than simply listen to a presentation.

W4L provides education and information about conservation management practices, new technology, communicating effectively with tenants, financial assistance programs, where to find assistance and more. Our participants include beginning or established farmers, experienced landowners with several tenant

farmers or new to management. They represent all types of farming from traditional crops to organic to livestock to truck crops to forestland. Everyone is welcome.

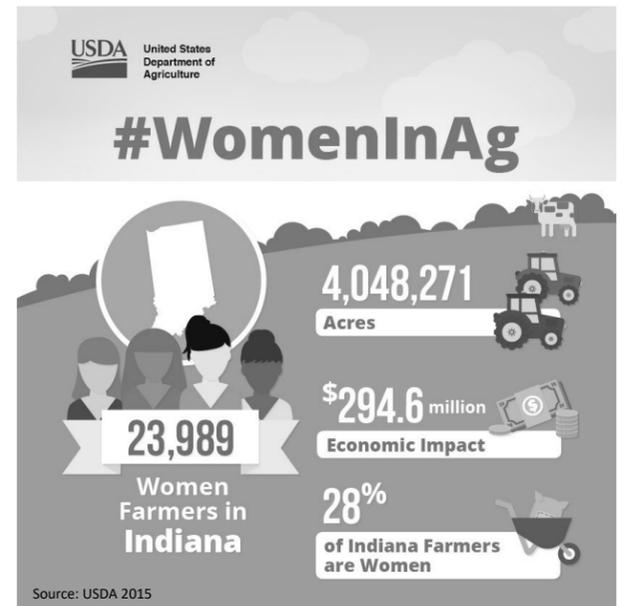
Regardless of their background, these women all share a commitment to environmental, economic, and social sustainability and conservation learning circles help them translate their values into action.

For more information on WFL visit

www.women4theland.iaswcd.org

For more information on women in agriculture, visit

www.usda.gov/our-agency/initiatives/women-agriculture



SWCD Board of Supervisors

John Dooms
Chairman
38 Years of Service

Jeremy Cooper
Vice - Chairman
9 Years of Service

Mike Burkholder
Supervisor
7 Years of Service

Dave Craft
Supervisor
19 Years of Service

Dave Vandewalle
Supervisor
10 Years of Service



ASSOCIATE SUPERVISORS

- Chuck Lehman *39 years*
- Randy Matthys *32 years*
- Jim LaFree *29 years*
- Richard Schmidt *34 years*
- Dru Wrasse *12 years*
- Dave Straughn *2 years*

HONORARY BOARD

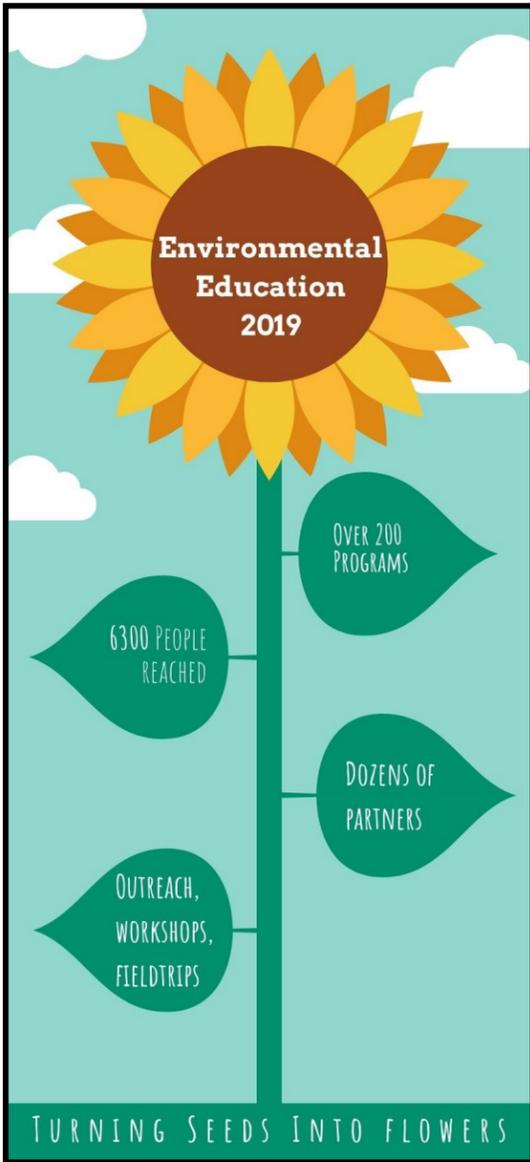
MEMBERS

- Jerry Knepp
- Keith Lineback
- William Millar



A big heartfelt thank you to all of our Supervisors & Associate Supervisors, as well as our partnership staff. Without all of you we would not be able to accomplish all that we have this year and in the years to come!

Turning Seeds Into Flowers: Educating the Next Generation Through Conservation Education



The St. Joseph County Soil and Water Conservation District has provided environmental education to our community for decades. Students of all ages learn about their natural resources and how to conserve them. Through the variety of always changing and rotating programs, we are able to reach thousands of people every year! But why does it matter? Why is environmental education important? People who have a better understanding of their surrounding and natural world are more likely to take care of it. We hope that when we are teaching future members of

learning. Many schools and organizations in our county have been taking advantage of the opportunity to partner with the SWCD. Utilizing the shared curriculum and knowledge to help guide them from lesson to lesson. Students become familiar with going outside their homes and classroom, get comfortable being dirty, and are often very excited for the next time they are learning about nature! One teacher shared, “Our students shout with enthusiasm every time they know that our environment guest teacher is on her way!”. In fact, it’s so much fun that students don’t even realize that they are being physically active. Many of the lessons include a movement activity, task, or game. Being outside in nature has also been shown to reduce stress levels. Overall, these programs encourage a healthy lifestyle. The last benefit to highlight is the way that environmental education empowers students and teachers to take action in their own lives. Rarely does this type of learning stop at the classroom door. Students want to utilize their knowledge and share it, teaching their friends and family about what they learned. They are also more likely to build off of that foundation by helping to conserve the natural resources in their own backyards. Maybe some will even make a career out of it.



our community, they feel inspired to go and incorporate conservation in their lives.

While visiting schools, we want teachers and school staff to understand that environmental education can be incorporated into many different subjects and standards. Developing an overarching theme that the teacher is interested in and that can be revisited, gives students the opportunity to connect with the material. They are able recall what they have already learned, get a deeper understanding of real-world application, and it allows them to utilize their imaginations for problem solving and project

Through topics like soils, watersheds, composting, and more, the St. Joseph County SWCD has directly reached 6,303 people in the year 2019. It is the hope that those people reap the benefits of our environmental education and help to conserve our natural resources for the next generation to come.

“Miss Jane helped me to cover the science standards by coming in to teach highly engaging lessons about the environment. She also was wonderful in adapting her lessons to meet the needs of our school by teaching us how to incorporate our urban garden into the curriculum. Our students now work to maintain the garden for the surrounding community by weeding, watering, and planting. They also observe how the garden changes throughout the seasons. Here they observe herbs, vegetables, and fruit grow as well as observe the many animals that are attracted to the garden. We even have milk weed that attracts monarch butterflies as we learn about their journey to Mexico every year. “

- Marcy Balderas, Teacher at St. Matthew Cathedral School

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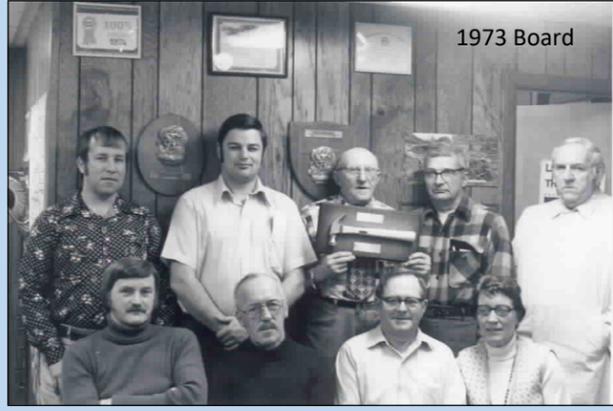
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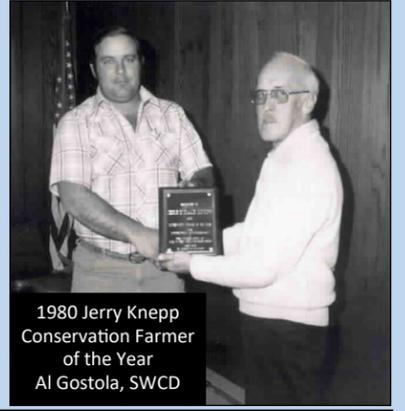
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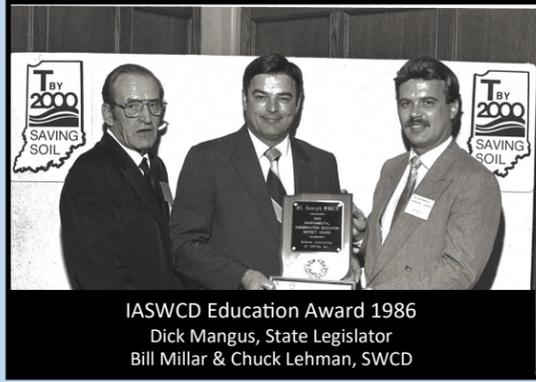
1973 Board



1999 Goodyear Tire Conservation Award (IASWCD)



1980 Jerry Knepp Conservation Farmer of the Year Al Gostola, SWCD



IASWCD Education Award 1986 Dick Mangus, State Legislator Bill Millar & Chuck Lehman, SWCD



Very early 1960's Board

Phil Ross, Good Year sales rep, John Durkson, Chairman, Luis Lineback, Outstanding Conservation Farmer, getting on a plane to go to Arizona



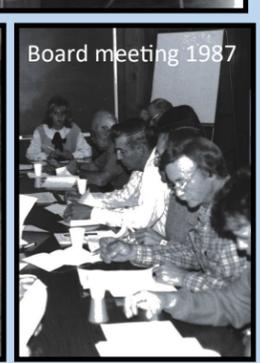
1960's National Soil Conservation Award Winners



Board Meeting 1976



6/3/1997 Storm Drain Stenciling



Board meeting 1987



1960's secretary



2000 Board



Late 1980's Board of Supervisors



September 1994 Penn HS Ag Class Survey Demo



2018 Staff



John Dooms, conservation field day, 1983



Early 1970's Board Meeting



2006 Staff



2018 Legislator Conservation Tour



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Urban Stormwater Education

On March 20th the St. Joseph County Soil and Water Conservation District welcomed around 35 contractors, engineers, and other stormwater professionals to Isaac Walton League in South Bend for a Contractor’s Breakfast. Some may wonder why the SWCD was holding a breakfast meeting for contractors. Considering that sediment is the #1 pollutant in our waterways and construction sites are a high potential source for large amounts of sediment leaving a relatively small area, this is in accord with the SWCD mission.

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) requires all instances of “land disturbing activities” over one acre to have a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) developed and submitted for review. These plans are designed to identify potential areas at risk where sediment could leave the site and enter the stormwater systems or waterways. It further identifies what practices need to be implemented in order to negate these risks. Some of these practices include silt fence or silt sock, inlet protection, gravel construction entrances, and concrete washout structures. The more we can educate and raise awareness in those who are working on these sites as well as those who are preparing the SWPPPs the more sediment and pollutants we can keep out of our water!



Contractors and stormwater professionals attend 2019 Contractors Breakfast.



Curb inlet protection



Stable construction entrance



Updates to IDEM stormwater rules and proposed changes in legislation – Mary Atkins, Wessler Engineering; Reggie Korthals, BF&S Civil Engineering

Construction BMP Technology - Al McAuliffe, D2 Land & Water Resource, Inc.

Implementing the SWPPP as a Living Document – Charles Farrell, PE, Senior Environmental and Safety Specialist, University of Notre Dame

Visit our Demonstration Raingardens



Good Shepherd Montessori
1101 E Jefferson Blvd



Most of our demonstration raingardens in the area are just a short walk from each other and are easy for our community members to visit. These gardens were funded through a Clean Water Indiana grant and help to display what a rain garden is to the residents of our county. Rain gardens are a great way for any land owner to mitigate stormwater runoff and provide an aesthetically pleasing garden to their yard. When using native plants, they are also great for our wildlife and pollinators! The St. Joseph County Soil and Water Conservation District is still providing cost share for these gardens in hopes to get more of them established in our region. Contact the office today for more information, technical assistance, and funding opportunities.

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EQUIPMENT

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Mishawaka Location: 60001 Elm Road, Mishawaka, IN 46544, Phone: (574) 255-3337

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Clean Water Indiana Grant Conservation Cropping Systems to Improve Soil Health

In the past several years St. Joseph County SWCD has partnered with Marshall County SWCD in implementing our Clean Water Indiana (CWI) grants. These grants have been focused on conservation cropping systems to improve soil health. We have cost share

money available to help pay for cover crops, no-till, nutrient management, filter strips and pollinator habitat.

If you are interested in trying one of these practices, but you are not quite ready to take on a federal contract, our CWI cost share is for you. Contact our

office for an application and to speak to our County Conservationist, Sarah Longenecker about your land needs.

Practices Installed in St. Joseph County	
Cover Crops	1,225.85 Acres
No-Till	367.2 Acres
Pollinator Habitat	3.4 Acres
2016-2019 Total	\$31,015.12



Landfill Designed to Protect the Environment from Contaminants

When most of us think about landfills, we imagine just dumping garbage into a hole in the ground. While this is somewhat correct, there is so much more going on that most don't know or see. Each cell (the "hole" that receives the trash) is built to detailed engineering specifications. After the cell is constructed it is lined with composite liners. Every seam is tested and inspected to assure that it will not leak any leachate (liquids that have percolated through the refuse). The leachate also requires collection and removal systems. If it were to leak it could be harmful to our ground waters. These systems sit on top of the liner and remove leachate from the landfill for treatment and disposal. Once all of the required items are in place the use of the cell can begin. Regular functions entail almost constant compacting and daily covering of waste with several inches of soil, solidifying liquid waste, keeping roadways within the landfill managed and non-active cells maintained among other

required testing and monitoring tasks. While the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) does testing to keep an eye on water quality, the SWCD is also charged with conducting an inspection of the county landfill twice a year. Why you might ask? The purpose of these inspections is to make sure sediment is not moving offsite and getting into our waterways. While this may seem like a simple enough task, keeping the soil in place can be a serious challenge due to the constantly changing landscape and steep slopes. Over the last few years there have been numerous practices added at our local landfill to aid in slowing stormwater down and keeping the soil in place. Through the use of berms, sediment traps and ponds, vegetation, and armored diversion channels, the flow of water slows and is directed where they want in order to let sediment drop out prior to the water leaving the site.

These pictures highlight a few of the practices!



Newly constructed sediment pond.



Methane gas is captured and used to generate power.



Berms slow water flow on slopes.

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The Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi Indians is a federally recognized tribe with a long history on the land of southwest Michigan and Northern Indiana. The Grand Kankakee Marsh area of northwestern Indiana was once the largest inland wetland in the United States. The Natural Resources Conservation Service has partnered with the Pokagon Band to restore 1,147 acres of this area to functioning wetland.

<http://bit.ly/NRCSwetlandVideo>

Soil Health, More Than Meets the Eye



By Stephanie McLain, State Soil Health Specialist, Indiana NRCS

The soil is much more than a physical medium for growing crops; it is a living biological ecosystem. We rely on the billions of tiny microorganisms to do their jobs and create a favorable environment for plants to grow. When your soil is healthy, it has the capacity to sustain plants, animal and humans. Here are 4 key soil health principles to help get you started:

- 1. Decrease Disturbance** – Extensive tillage is detrimental to soil health. When soil is tilled, the biological community is flipped upside down, pore channels are broken, and organic matter is lost. A cropping system with as little disturbance as possible is the best way to build soil health.
- 2. Maintain Soil Cover** – Keep soil cover, such as residue, mulch or plant stalks on the surface. The purpose for soil cover is not just erosion protection. Residue maintains stable conditions for the microorganisms. Soil microbes live in that residue at the soil surface and convert it into organic matter and nutrients. Soil microorganisms are more active at constant moisture and temperature conditions, and the residue on the surface goes a long way in maintaining that consistency!
- 3. Increase Diversity** – There are no monocultures in nature. The plant community on the soil surface directly impacts the soil biological community below the surface. The plant community and their roots are a food source for the soil biology. Different kinds of crops and cover crops help feed and support the biology in the soil.
- 4. Continuous Living Roots** – The sun is the ultimate source of energy, free energy.

Lengthen the growing season, capture more sun and put that energy into your soil. One way to do this is to plant a cover crop that will continue capturing sunlight well after your cash crop has shut down. Roots growing all year long help keep the microbiology in the soil healthy and productive!

These 4 principles play a key role in helping your soil function to its greatest potential. These functions include infiltrating and storing water, cycling nutrients, maintaining physical stability and creating a habitat for soil life. When we fail to implement the soil health principles outlined above, soil function is lost. And a soil unable to function is a degraded soil. When a soil is degraded, we see more water and wind erosion and less infiltration; a build-up of crop residues and nutrient losses because there is no nutrient cycling; a field that cannot physically support farming operations; a loss of soil biology and most importantly we see a less resilient field and system.

When all these functions are performing to the best of their abilities, then we see resiliency in our cropping systems; resiliency to extreme weather events and to pest and disease pressures that can negatively impact the system and its profits.

It is crucial to your farm's viability that you stop the soil degradation and start building soil function by working to implement these soil health principles on your farm today. A great place to start is to talk to your neighbors who have experience with these soil health cropping systems. Or, watch for workshops or field days where you can learn about how these systems can help your farm. Talk to someone at your local Soil and Water Conservation District; they are a great resource and willing to help.

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How Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever Farm Bill Wildlife Biologists Works with SWCD and NRCS



In Indiana, we currently have 4 Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever Farm Bill Wildlife Biologists. Although we are employed by Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever, our positions are in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Each of us are stationed in an NRCS Area Office and work closely with NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD)

to promote wildlife habitat throughout the state, with a primary focus on early successional habitats, i.e. native wildflower and grass plantings. We often accompany NRCS and SWCD staff when making site visits with landowners interested in improving or establishing wildlife habitat on their property and can help make recommendations on how to accomplish the goals they have in mind. Many times, there is a program available to help those landowners cover the cost of installing the habitat, and we can provide guidance on navigating the ins and outs of each of these cost share opportunities.

The native wildflower and grass plantings we focus on are beneficial to a whole host of wildlife species including quail, pheasants, deer, turkey, and songbirds, as well as beneficial insects. Not only do these plantings support

wildlife, but they also do a fantastic job of reducing erosion and filtering runoff, leading to more sustainable agriculture and cleaner water. In many situations, farmers can install wildlife friendly practices on unproductive areas of the farm, which can lead to higher average yields and reduced input cost across their operations, while reducing erosion and improving water quality.

In addition to providing individualized assistance to landowners, we also help our local Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever chapters deliver our organization’s mission of the “conservation of pheasants, quail, and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public awareness, education, and land management policies and programs.” Our dedicated chapter volunteers have made a lasting impact on wildlife across the state through planting habitat and helping to introduce youth to the outdoors.

If you are interested in improving wildlife habitat on your property or have an interest in joining like minded conservationists through a local Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever chapter, reach out to the Northeast Wildlife Biologist, Ryan Owen at 260-226-5884 or rowen@pheasantsforever.org.



Wetland Restoration

Wetlands Reserve Easement Program protects, restores and enhances the original hydrology, vegetation, and functional values of wetland habitats in an agricultural landscape. This program is intended to help achieve the national goal of no net loss of wetlands, and to improve the general environment of the country. Emphasis is placed on the protection and restoration of habitat for migratory birds and threatened and endangered species, protection of native flora and fauna contributing to the nation’s natural heritage, water quality protections, flood reduction, and ground water recharge.

Talking with Jim Wicks and Tom Malcolm, who have recently signed up for WRE, we asked them how the partnership with NRCS has impacted their land management goals and if they would be able to achieve their goals without NRCS? They both replied; “No, the expertise is the part we are really impressed with. We wouldn’t know how to do it. If we were to do it by ourselves it would probably end up looking like an abandoned field and

nothing more than that. Working with NRCS gives us a procedure to go through, completely apart from the cost share which is invaluable, and having the technical support, we wouldn’t have an idea what to do otherwise. NRCS knew how to correct our problem of a 40-foot diameter sink hole that had developed in the front of our property from water coming across the fields and then going back to the woods and back to other wetlands.”

For more information on NRCS easement programs visit their website, www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/in/programs/easements.



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