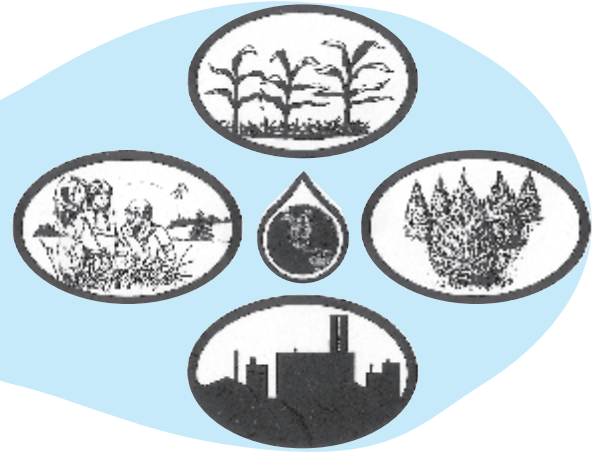




St. Joseph
County
Soil & Water
Conservation
District



Today's Visions for Tomorrow's Future

May/June 2015
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What's Going On...

Events hosted by the St. Joseph County SWCD
& Our Partners in Conservation

May

5th—Primary Election Day
County Holiday

12th—Soils Board Mtg.
Culver, IN

14th—Pasture Walk @
Dan Chupp Farm,
LaGrange County.
For more info, contact
our office.

15th—Annual St. Joseph
River Basin Commission
Symposium, Niles, MI

19th—St. Joseph County
SWCD Board Meeting
(7:00 pm @ Centre
Township Library)

22nd & 23rd—South
Bend 150 Year
Birthday Weekend
Celebration

25th - Memorial Day
Office Closed

June

16th—St. Joseph County
SWCD Board Meeting
(7:00 pm @ Centre
Township Library)

July

3rd—Office closed in
observance of
Independence Day

3rd-11th—St. Joseph
County 4-H Fair

Have You Heard? ...

Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE)

By James Rodriguez, USDA, Natural
Resources Conservation Service

Wetlands play an important role and
function in our lives and the environment. These
systems are responsible for controlling floods,
filtering sediments from surface water runoffs,
retaining excess of pollutants and nutrients,
providing habitat for numerous species of fauna
& flora, and much more.

With the implementation of the 2014 Farm
Bill, the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) got
revamped and placed as a component under the
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
(ACEP) as the new Wetland Reserve Easement
(WRE). ACEP, is a program intended to provide
financial and technical assistance to enhance and
conserve our wetland areas, ensuring they keep
their natural functions. WRE targets to protect
our wetlands by:

- ◆ Restoring its ability to improve water
quality and groundwater recharge.
- ◆ Enhancing natural habitat for fish and
wildlife, including threatened & endangered
species.
- ◆ Support biodiversity.
- ◆ Increase potential for environmental
education, scientific research, limited
recreational activities and aesthetics.

Under this program, the Natural Resources
Conservation Service is able to provide financial
and technical assistance to landowners who are
willing to ensure the function and healthy life of
their wetlands through the purchase of a wetland
reserve easement. To be eligible for enrollment,
areas must be owned for a minimum of two
years and can include prior converted or farmed
wetlands. NRCS is currently offering the option
of "Permanent Easements", where NRCS pays
100% of the easement value for the purchase of
the easement, plus 100% of the restoration costs.
However, additional options for enrolling are
available that we can discuss with interested
landowners.

In St. Joseph County, many landowners
have decided to enroll and protect their wetlands
since the very first Wetlands Reserve Program.
Now, with the WRE program we hope to
continue our efforts in promoting environmental
protection and enhancements. If you're
interested in this program and all its benefits,
please contact us, as we are currently taking
applications. We are more than willing to help
you.



Thank you to our 2015 Gold Sponsors

**Ava Preacher & Coleen Hoover, Keith & Nancy Lineback,
River Bend Hose Specialty**

Help Keep Our Waterways Clean!

By Sarah Harville, St. Joseph County SWCD

When many of us think about water pollution we think of oil spills, toxic waste, and industrial garbage. While these are valid concerns, we don't realize that the largest source of water quality problems don't come from a single source. *Non-point source pollution* occurs when snowmelt, rainfall, or irrigation runs over the land picking up sediment, nutrients, chemicals, and other pollutants and carries them in them into our waterways. We all can make small changes to make a big difference in the health of our water!

- ◆ Wash your vehicle in a grassy area. This prevents detergents and other potential pollutants from running directly into the storm drains and into our waterways. Or take it to a commercial car wash where they treat or recycle their wash water.
- ◆ Repair automobile fluid leaks and dispose of used fluids at a waste disposal facility. Don't rinse or dump it down a storm drain!
- ◆ Clean up after your pet! Pet waste can be a major source of bacteria and nutrients that gets washed into our waters.

- ◆ Be smart with lawn care! Limit your use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Don't apply it if a storm or heavy rain is in the forecast. The nutrients and chemicals (and the money you paid for them) will literally go down the drain!
- ◆ Mulch or compost your leaves and grass clippings. Don't sweep them into the street! These contribute to excess nutrients and organic matter in our waters.
- ◆ Install a rain barrel or rain garden. Rain barrels store water for future use and help prevent storm water systems from being overloaded. Rain gardens give rain water a place to collect and slowly soak into the ground rather than running off.

These are just a few ways that we can help prevent non-point source pollution. For more ideas and helpful links visit www.stjosephswcd.org or www.michianastormwaterpartnership.org and remember that our waterways are a resource worth protecting!

U.S. Senators Stabenow, Peters, Donnelly Highlight \$13.6M Public/Private Investment in St. Joseph Watershed

Over 70 percent of the St. Joseph River is in agricultural use, stretching 210 miles through Michigan and Indiana and covering 15 counties before emptying into Lake Michigan at St. Joseph. The St. Joseph Watershed Conservation Partnership will offer farmers financial and technical assistance to access conservation tools that improve productivity in the field and reduce excessive sediment and nutrients in the St. Joseph River. The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will partner with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and over 30 local organizations on the project.

Support for this project comes through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, which was created by Sen. Stabenow's 2014 Farm Bill. Over \$40 million will support projects across Michigan and the Great Lakes region that invest in clean water, soil, and wildlife conservation. Each project was designed by dozens of local partners including businesses, non-profits, universities, and federal, state, and local governments. Partners are required to match federal funding, effectively doubling the federal investment.

"Hoosier farmers and producers are leaders in preserving the quality of our lands and waters, and I am proud to support them through my work on the Senate Agriculture Committee," Senator

Joe Donnelly said. "The 2014 Farm Bill advanced efforts to ensure our landowners have the tools they need to keep our waters clean, and the RCPP-funded projects such as this one, investing in the St. Joseph Watershed stretching through Indiana and Michigan are a welcome addition. This is a win for farmers to further improve their soil and water quality, and it is an efficient investment to help with water treatment for drinking water. Today, I was pleased to join Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters, along with our Indiana and Michigan partners, to discuss the local impact of these projects."

"Indiana is excited to be part of this groundbreaking initiative that allows public and private entities to work together in effort to expand federal, state and local conservation programs," said Jennifer Thum, Indiana State Department of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation. "These projects will play an extremely important role in demonstrating water quality practices and encouraging additional farmer adoption so we can continue to make our water cleaner. Indiana is looking forward to turning these funds into more boots on the ground and more conservation practices into the fields."

Press release from Senator Stabenow's website.
http://www.stabenow.senate.gov/?p=press_release&id=1595

Five Questions Non-Operator Landowners Should Ask their Farmers about Soil Health

By Elisa O'Halloran, Natural Resources Conservation Service

More farmers, ranchers and others who rely on the land are taking action to improve the health of their soil. Many farmers are actually building the soil. How? By using soil health management systems that include cover crops, diverse rotations and no-till. And when they're building the soil they're doing something else – they're also building the land's production potential over the long term. But how do non-operator landowners (people who rent their land to farmers) know if their tenants are doing everything they need to do to make and keep their soil healthy? Barry Fisher, an Indiana farmer and nationally recognized soil health specialist with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, recommends that they ask their farming partner these five questions.



1. Do you build organic matter in the soil?

Organic matter (carbon) may be the most important indicator of a farm's productivity. The amount of soil organic matter often determines the price farmers will pay to rent or buy land. Finding a farmer who is interested in building organic matter by using practices like no-till and cover crops is like finding a bank with a better rate on a Certificate of Deposit, Fisher says.

2. Do you test the soil at least once every 4 years?

Fisher says maintaining fertility and pH levels are important to your farm's productivity. Regular soil testing can give an indication of trends in soil fertility, pH and organic matter levels in each field. These tests will determine the amount of fertilizer each field needs. If a field has a history of manure application and very high fertility, a farmer could save money by planting cover crops to keep those nutrients in place rather than applying more nutrients that may not be needed.

3. Do you use no-till practices?

Some landowners like the look of a clean-tilled field in the springtime. That "nice look" is short lived, though. "The reality is a field that has bare soil is subject to erosion and loss of organic matter, since it no longer has the protective cover from the crop residue on the surface," Fisher says. "No-till farming utilizes the crop residue to blanket the soil surface to protect it from the forces of intense rainfall and summer heat. This protective blanket will conserve moisture for the crop and prevent loss of soil from wind erosion, water erosion and CO₂ (carbon) that could be burned off by summer heat."

4. Do you use cover crops?

"Like no-till, cover crops provide a green, protective blanket through the winter months or fallow times. The green-growing cover is collecting solar energy, putting down roots and providing habitat when the soil would otherwise be lifeless and barren," says Fisher. This habitat provides food and shelter for a broad population of wildlife above ground and beneficial organisms below ground. As the new life emerges, cover crops hold onto the nutrients left from the previous crop and in turn releases them to the next crop. The solar rays these plants collect are powering photosynthesis, taking in CO₂ from the atmosphere to produce food for the plant and the organisms living in the root zone. This same process also releases clean oxygen to the air and builds nutrient rich organic matter in the soil.

5. What can we do together to improve soil health on my land?

To improve soil health, landowners and tenants have to think in terms of the long-term. According to Fisher, the duration of the lease agreement is perhaps the most critical matter in encouraging the adoption of these soil health management systems. "Farmers can actually build the production capacity and resiliency of their landowner's soil, but it may take several years to realize the full benefits of doing so," Fisher says. He suggests that landowners consider multiple-year leases that provide tenure security for the tenant. Longer tenures give both landowners and tenants more opportunities to improve soil health and realize the resulting longer-term production and profitability gains through sustainable conservation practices.

"Improving soil health can provide long-term, stable dividends for you, your family and your farming partner," Fisher says. Improving soil health also can decrease the effects of flooding, make food production more resilient to weather extremes, and improve the health of water and wildlife, as well," he adds. Fisher encourages landowners to learn more about the basics and benefits of soil health management systems and to begin the soil health discussion with their farming partner right away. "Even if you're not a farmer or landowner, everyone has a great stake in improving the health of our soil," he says.

WASHINGTON, March 17, 2015 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) reports that family-owned farms remain the backbone of the agriculture industry. The latest data comes from the Census of Agriculture farm typology report. To see the whole report see usda.gov and search for News Release No. 0066.15



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St. Joseph County Soil And Water Conservation Partnership

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Scan me to go Green!

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