

Conservation Kaleidoscope

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A Breath of Fresh Air

How Green Spaces Heal Our Cities

As our towns and cities continue to grow, natural landscapes are often replaced with concrete and development. Tree canopy shrinks, water flow patterns shift, and air temperatures rise. In this expanding urban world, meaningful green space becomes not a luxury, but an essential part of every healthy community.

Cooling Communities & Clean Ecosystems

Cities often suffer from the "urban heat island" effect, where dark surfaces such as roads and rooftops trap heat. Integrating nature into urban areas brings vital environmental benefits.

- *Natural Cooling:* trees and other leafy vegetation provide shade and release water vapor, helping to cool the surrounding air.
- *Smart Water Management:* impervious surfaces like pavement increase runoff and contribute to flooding and water pollution. Porous, green landscapes absorb rainfall and naturally filter it before it reaches waterways.



A Natural Remedy for Urban Stress

City life often comes with noise, traffic, and a fast pace—all of which can contribute to chronic stress. Access to green space acts as a "biological reset," helping our bodies and minds recover from the sensory overload of urban environments.

- *Stress Reduction and Mental Clarity:* Spending time in nature lowers cortisol levels and heart rates within minutes, and helps you regain focus and productivity.
- *Physical Vitality:* Green corridors and trails encourage walking and cycling, reducing the risk of sedentary-related illnesses.
- *Community Bonds:* Shared gardens and parks serve as "social glue," reducing feelings of isolation and strengthening neighborly trust.
- *Better Sleep:* Regular exposure to natural light and fresh air helps regulate circadian rhythms for deeper rest.

Rebuilding the Village in the City



Traditional parks offer valuable escapes, but a growing movement is bringing purpose-driven green spaces into urban neighborhoods. When a green space takes the shape of a working farm, the benefits expand even further. Urban farms shorten the distance between families and their food, nurture local ecosystems, and support stronger, more connected communities.

Continuing the Conversation

Join us on June 18th at The Blueberry Ranch as we continue exploring the importance of farms in the city and their role in building resilient, vibrant communities. Turn the page for more details!



Protecting Soil
Preserving Water
Serving Community

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Native Plants for the Next Generation



The St. Joseph County SWCD started a pilot project in Spring 2024, giving classrooms in St. Joseph County the supplies necessary to start Black-eyed Susan plants from seed. The program has been growing each year! This year we distributed 24 kits at 9 schools, with nearly 600 students participating. Our educator visited the classes and gave a presentation on the importance of native plants, and the students will spend April and May growing the plants indoors. Most classes will send the plants home with the students, and hopefully a few schools will plant some around the school buildings.

Teachers who would like a kit and presentation for next year can email or call for details. Education@StJosephSWCD.org or 574-936-2024x4

Only Rain Down the Drain

Have you ever, as a child, run along the street splashing through rainwater as it flowed down the gutter, watching it disappear into the nearest storm drain? While it may have been fun then, clogged storm drains are far less enjoyable as adults—especially when they lead to roadway flooding. And flooding is only one of several concerns linked to storm drains.

Many people are unaware that storm drains flow directly into our local waterways. Stormwater—precipitation that runs off surfaces—enters these drains and travels through underground pipes that empty straight into streams, rivers, and ponds without any treatment or filtration.

In natural landscapes, vegetation slows the movement of water and allows it to soak into the ground. Urban areas, however, are filled with hard surfaces such as roofs, streets, driveways, and compacted lawns, which reduce the amount of water that can infiltrate the soil. As a result, stormwater flows quickly across these surfaces, increasing the risk of flooding and erosion.

As stormwater travels, it also collects pollutants—such as leaves, litter, fertilizers, oil, and pet waste. These contaminants are carried into our waterways, degrading water quality and posing risks to people, wildlife, and plant communities.

The good news is that each of us can help reduce pollution entering our water systems by taking simple, everyday actions:

- Pick up your trash, and any litter you notice.
- Clean up pet waste promptly.
- Dispose of household chemicals properly.
- Rake and remove leaves rather than allowing them to accumulate in streets or gutters.
- Use lawn care chemicals only as directed on their labels.

Small actions like these make a meaningful difference in protecting the quality of our water.



*Storm Drain in South Bend
Before and After*



Meet Your Farmer 2026

The Blueberry Ranch



The St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District is pleased to bring the community to the farmer again for our Third Annual Meet Your Farmer gathering!

We have been to a large-scale row crop farm. We have been to a small, market farm. And now we're heading to a perennial crop farm - The Blueberry Ranch in Mishawaka!

A Legacy of Stewardship

Established in 1953, The Blueberry Ranch is one of the oldest u-pick blueberry operations in the Midwest. Current owner, John Nelson, purchased the farm in 1981. In 1991, Nelson introduced organic blueberries to the farm, and by 2009 the entire ranch was 100% certified organic.

This commitment isn't just about labels; it's about the soil beneath the bushes. During our visit, we will explore:

- The Power of Perennials: How long-term crops like blueberry bushes stabilize soil structure and promote a thriving underground ecosystem.
- Organic Impact: The specific ways organic certification and chemical-free practices enhance nutrient density and microbial life in the soil.
- Community Food Security: The vital role this "agri-treasure" plays in providing fresh, local food to the Mishawaka area.

Join us for an evening of education, community and a shared meal in the heart of the farm. This offers a chance to hear directly from John Nelson about the rewards and challenges of maintaining an organic legacy.

Meet Your Farmer 2026 will be held on Thursday, June 18, from 5:30 to 7:30 pm. Dinner is provided and space is limited, so registration is required.

www.stjosephswcd.org/myfgathering.com



Walk on the Wild Side!

at the St. Joseph County 4-H Fair

Join us as for a
Celebration of Conservation!



July 7, 2026

1 pm to 4 pm

by the Nature Center



Activities along the path & presentations at the gazebo! Fun for the whole family!



Congrats to our local invasives group, SMIPP, on winning the Weed Wrangler 2025 award! And check out their new website!

www.SMIPP.org



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Water Conservation
Partnership**

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Randy Matthys
Richard Schmidt
Dave Straughn
Dru Wrasse
Mike Burkholder
Scott Laidig
Joe Gregory

SWCD Honorary Members:

Keith Lineback

Farm Service Agency Staff

Gideon Nobbe, CED
Devan Harrell
Diane Stichter
Michael Cuff

Calendar

May

2nd - Wild Ones Plant Sale
5th - Primary Day - No County Staff
14th - SMIPP Land Stewards Support
Group
19th - Board Meeting
25th - Memorial Day - Office Closed

June

16th - Board Meeting
18th - Meet Your Farmer
19th - Juneteenth - Office Closed



**Meet Your Farmer
June 18, 2026
Blueberry Ranch**

Visit our website & watch Facebook for info on events and more!

Go Green!

Choose to get your newsletter by email!
Use the QR Code or email us at info@stjosephswcd.org.
Be sure to include your mailing address!

