

Conservation Kaleidoscope



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Rethinking Our Landscapes

For years, our landscapes have been shaped by aesthetics - lush greenery, vibrant blooms, and tidy groundcovers. Plants like English Ivy, butterfly bush, and Norway maple have long been staples in garden centers and suburban yards. Their appeal is undeniable - showy flowers and fast growth being desirable. But these non-native species can disrupt local ecosystems, outcompete native flora, and fail to support the wildlife that depends on indigenous plants. The growing shift to bring native plants back into our landscapes isn't just about aesthetics, but also about restoring balance to our environment.



Why Native Plants Matter

Supporting Wildlife

Native plants and local wildlife have evolved together over centuries. Birds, bees, butterflies and other creatures rely on these plants for food, shelter, and nesting. Without native plants, many species struggle to find what they need.

Natural Pest Control

Native plants are naturally equipped to handle local pests. They've developed defenses over time and often attract beneficial insects, like ladybugs and lacewings, that help keep harmful pests in check. This means fewer chemicals and a healthier garden.

Low Maintenance and Eco-Friendly

Once established, native plants typically require less water, fertilizer, and care. They're adapted to local soils and climate, making them resilient and sustainable. Their deep roots also help prevent erosion and improve water quality.

Landscaping with native plants is more than a trend - it's a movement toward ecological restoration and sustainability. Whether you're planting a small garden or designing a large landscape, incorporating native species can make a meaningful difference. It's a way to reconnect with nature, support local wildlife, and create a healthier environment for future generations.



**Today's Visions for
Tomorrow's Future**

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NRCS Regenerative Pilot Program

In December 2025, NRCS launched the Regenerative Pilot Program, a farmer first, outcomes-based approach to conservation designed to return the agency to its core mission – helping people help the land. NRCS is investing \$700 million to specifically support regenerative agriculture.



This pilot program addresses whole-farm resource concerns through support for voluntary regenerative agriculture conservation plans. Emphasizing regenerative agriculture builds upon NRCS's 90 years of existing conservation work by restoring land health, improving long-term productivity, and ensuring American grown production for the future.

For producers this means:

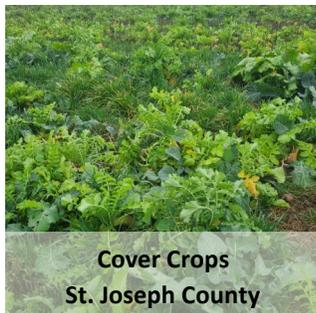
- Bundled practices will be integrated into a **single application**, making programs easier to access and more impactful;
- Whole-farm holistic conservation planning is the centerpiece of the program, ensuring that all resource concerns (soil, water, and natural vitality) are addressed together, not piecemeal;
- Conservation planning and producer objectives drive the process, ensuring site-specific solutions that work for the producer;
- Outcomes are tracked, measured, and credited back to the farmer; and

Producers at every stage, from beginners just starting out with cover crops to advanced operations with years of conservation experience, will find a pathway through this pilot program.

A few of the primary practices include: Conservation Crop Rotation, Cover Crops, Drainage Water Management, Forest Stand Improvement, Irrigation Water Management, Mulching, Nutrient Management, Prescribed Grazing, No-Till, and Reduced Till.

Farmers and ranchers interested in regenerative agriculture are encouraged to apply through their local NRCS Service Center. Applications for both EQIP and CSP can now be submitted under the new single regenerative application process. Farmers and ranchers have until January 15, 2026, to apply for the first batching period.

St. Joseph County SWCD's Own Pilot Program!



The SWCD is looking at a pilot project of our own! We are looking for a few farmers who are interested in trying cover crops on an in-depth, small-scale trial who are willing to commit 10-20 acres of crop ground to a diverse cover crop mix based on the needs of the soil and goals of the farmer. The plan is for the SWCD to assist with selection of, and cover the cost of specific cover crop mix, application, termination, and potentially other expenses that may be related. We will work one on one with each farmer to tailor the program to fit their unique operation. If this sounds like something you may be interested in, please contact our office to discuss further!

Save the Date!

We're already gearing up for an exciting year filled with impactful events and opportunities. Be sure to mark your calendars—many key dates are already in motion!

Conversation with the Conservationist

Tuesday, February 10th ~ 8:00 am
American Legion, North Liberty

Join our County Conservationist and our District Conservationist for breakfast to talk conservation! Whether you're new to regenerative agriculture, or have been utilizing the practices for years, we invite you to join us for breakfast to ask your questions or share your knowledge! Think Breakfast with a Forester, but for conservation ag!

Please note: this is a buy your own breakfast and the American Legion only takes cash.

Producers Workshop

Thursday, February 26th ~ 9:00 am
Lakeville Community Center ("The Barn")

We've got a great lineup for our annual Producers Workshop, including Megan Bourne, clinical assistant professor from Purdue. She will be speaking about making soil health decisions to meet economic goals. Like before, PARP credits will be available and we will provide lunch. Registration is required.



www.StJosephSWCD.org/calendar

66th Annual Meeting Friday, January 30, 2026

6:30 pm

Hedwig Memorial Center
331 S. Scott St. ~ South Bend

Keynote Speaker: Johnny Kleme

Author of American Family Farmland, Co-Owner of Geswein Farm & Family

**Tickets: \$20.00 per person
(includes family-style Polish Dinner)**

Contact the office for more info!



Help us fill our van again!



Native Plant Sale

We're thrilled to announce that our Native Plant Kits will be available again this spring! If you've recently discovered the beauty and benefits of native plants, this is the perfect opportunity to bring them into your space. Ordering begins shortly after the New Year, so stay tuned! In the meantime, visit our website to explore details from last year's sale. Have questions or want to be notified when ordering opens? Contact our office—we're happy to help! Let's grow something great together this spring! www.StJosephSWCD.org/native-plant-kits



Change Service Requested

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& Water Conservation
Partnership**

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Keith Lineback

Farm Service Agency Staff

Gideon Nobbe, CED
Devan Harrell
Diane Stichter
Michael Cuff

Calendar

January

1st - New Years Day - Office Closed
16th - MLK, Jr. Day - Office Closed
20th - Board Meeting
30th - Annual Meeting

February

10th - Conversation with a Conservationist
16th - President's Day - Office Closed
17th - Board Meeting
26th - Producers Workshop



65th Annual Meeting
February 2025

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



Contact us to choose to get your
newsletter by email!

Use the QR code to email us at
info@stjosephswcd.org.

