



# Grass Roots for Conservation



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## Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District

17746 County Rd. 34, Ste. B ~ Goshen, IN 46528 ~ Phone: (574) 533-4383 ext. 3 – [jhess@elkhartcounty.com](mailto:jhess@elkhartcounty.com)

### ***Stoney M Farms, Elkhart County's 2020 River Friendly Farmer***

In these days of water quality concerns, there are those that are utilizing conservation practices on their farms that are protecting waterways and water quality in Indiana and beyond. In Elkhart County, Ernest Miller, Stoney-M Farms of Middlebury is among 31 farmers who received the statewide award of 'River-Friendly Farmer.' This award, hosted by the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD), recognizes landowners and farmers in the state of Indiana for the work they do on their land to protect Indiana's natural resources.

The Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District nominated Stoney-M Farms for the award based upon their farm management practices.

Some of the conservation practices that are used on the Miller farm are mulch till, conservation crop rotations, nutrient and pest management plans, and cover cropping. The livestock conservation practices that are being used are pasture renovation, rotational grazing, exclusion fencing, watering systems, and heavy use areas.



Since 1999, key conservation and agricultural organizations have sponsored the River Friendly Farmer (RFF) Program. The statewide initiative recognizes farmers, who through good production management practices helps keep Indiana's rivers, lakes and streams clean.

The River-Friendly Farmer Award has been presented by the IASWCD and sponsored by the 92 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Indiana Farm Bureau, Inc. This year's group of award winners brings the total number of River-Friendly Farmers in Indiana since the awards beginning to 992.

# 2020 Elkhart County Indiana Master Naturalist Program

An introductory program of nature discovery and service learning for adults brought to you by the Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)



## 2020 Classes

Classes will be held at locations throughout Elkhart County Tuesdays and Thursdays the month of September  
5:30pm–8:30pm.

## Dates

September 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29 and October 1

## Topics

- |           |              |                   |                 |
|-----------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| • Forests | • Geology    | • Birds & Mammals | • Native Plants |
| • Water   | • Entomology | • Fish & Herps    | • People        |

## Requirements

- Be at least 18 years old
- Submit registration form to the Elkhart County SWCD
- Pay class fee of \$175 once registration is confirmed
- Attend at least 8 classes
- Complete final open book quiz
- Complete 24 hours of volunteer service

For More Information:  
visit [www.elkcoswcd.org](http://www.elkcoswcd.org)

To register  
call 574-533-4383 ext 3  
Or  
email [jwait@elkhartcounty.com](mailto:jwait@elkhartcounty.com)  
Registration Ends  
September 1, 2020

## UPCOMING FSA DEADLINES

- August 28th:** Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) Signup Deadline
- September 1st:** Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) buy-up coverage premiums due
- September 7th:** Offices Closed – Labor Day Holiday
- September 30th:** PLC Yield Update Deadline

The **Coronavirus Food Assistance Program**, or CFAP, provides vital financial assistance to producers of agricultural commodities who have suffered a five-percent-or-greater price decline or who had losses due to market supply chain disruptions due to COVID-19 and face additional significant market costs. To learn more or to see if you qualify, give the office a call or visit [farmers.gov/cfap](http://farmers.gov/cfap).

USDA Service Centers are open for business by phone appointment only. Please contact the Elkhart County FSA and NRCS service center by phone (574) 533-4383, ext. 2 to schedule time for program services or with any questions.

# BLOGGING BMP'S

**A monthly Blog discussing the Best Management Practices (BMP's) that must be used to aid in erosion and sediment control.**



Welcome back to Blogging BMP's! I hope everyone is staying healthy and taking this unique opportunity in today's world to get back to nature and appreciate all of the wonderful things this beautiful area has to offer. I know for me, social distancing has in some ways been a curse, but lately I realize what a blessing it can be. I have been in the yard and outside way more than in the recent past. Pulling weeds has become almost therapeutic as I methodically work my way through the yard and garden feeling as though when I pull one weed two grow back in its place. My girls walk along with me and pull a few here and there, making a game of it as they go. It is all work, but the dirt under my nails and the endless piles of weeds in the lawn don't seem to bother me

as much as they would any other year.

Recently, it occurred to me that many of the exact weeds that are growing in my yard are the very same that plague so many of our urban and rural construction sites in and around Elkhart County. The shallow roots of these invasive plants take hold instantly and spread in what seems like the blink of an eye. Most contractors combat this problem with a fresh load of top soil and a good coating of hydroseed or fresh sod. These are perfectly acceptable ways to stabilize a lawn area or retention basin, but I feel like we could do better. Here are a few ideas that the SWCD suggests and encourages rather than the status quo we have grown accustomed to.



## Native Plants in Retention Basins

In many construction projects, a retention basin is required to make up for the amount of impervious surfaces being installed such as roofs and pavement. Most retention basins are seeded with grass which has a short root system. An alternative to grass are native plants which have deep root systems that help storm water to infiltrate deep into the soil. Not only do native plants help infiltration, but they also act as a filter for storm water pollutants and create a view more pleasing than traditional retention basins.



## Rain Garden Instead of Storm Drains

A rain garden is a garden of native shrubs, perennials, and flowers planted in a small depression, which is generally formed on a natural slope. It is designed to temporarily hold and soak in storm water runoff that flows from roofs, driveways, patios or lawns. Rain gardens help to reduce the amount of water that goes into the storm drains or water ways and they create a beautiful landscape as well. Pollinators also benefit from native plants in rain gardens.



## Bio-Swale

A bio-swale is an above ground vegetative storm water runoff conveyance system. It can be a great environmentally sound alternative for storm sewers or paved ditches. These can be applied in both rural and agricultural settings. Bio-swales help to reduce erosion and channel flow on open land, reduce the amount of water going through pipes, they filter out storm water pollutants, create a microhabitat and are aesthetically pleasing.

**Q: How important is gypsum? Does it need to be added to all soil types? Will some soils benefit from gypsum more than others?**



# Send your questions to Walden the Worm

*The "Dear Abby" of conservation farming!*

A: Walden here,

Tough question but, I can handle it. As I eat my way through dirt day after day I am aware of lower levels

of sulfur in fields. Less sulfur is put into the air from fewer smoke stacks, hence less sulfur is returned to soils from rain, also higher crop yields remove more sulfur. Gypsum is a good product for all soils to provide all crops with needed sulfur. With the help of my underground library I will list some benefits of Gypsum.

Gypsum is calcium sulfate approximately 20% cal. 16% sulfate, sulfate is a form of sulfur which is readily available for crops to use. Some is mined, some comes from the scrubbing of smoke stacks. Gypsum can be purchased as a low cost powder and broadcast at a rate of 500 lbs. per acre on low C.E.C soils, up to 2 Ton per acre on high C.E.C. soils. This will provide sulfur for more than one year. Note the powder is very dusty making a uniform spread difficult, will ruts from heavy trucks be a problem? Gypsum can be purchased in pellet form then mixed with dry potash. In this method sulfur that is needed for one year is quick, easy and accurate to apply. The calcium in gypsum is more water soluble than calcium carbonate of ag lime allowing it to go deep into the soil giving deeper rooting than ag lime can. The calcium of gypsum will supply calcium to crops but, it will not raise them soil ph.

Soils with high magnesium levels, a base saturation above 13 %, will benefit greatly from gypsum. The high magnesium levels will be lowered, increasing crop production. On clay soils, gypsum can improve rain infiltration and drainage. This is due to the flocculating agent of gypsum. Simply put, fine clay soil particles are grouped, bound together, giving more pore space, improving water movement. Gypsum has other benefits as well. Do your homework and apply based on your soil and crop. Lastly, the NRCS in past years offered cost shares for gypsum use because of the soil health benefits. Check with your local office to see what programs are or will be available.

Until next month,

— *Walden*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**September 7 Labor Day Holiday:**

The NRCS/SWCD Office will be closed for the Labor Day Holiday

**September 10 LaGrange County Pasture Walk:**

Jay Lehman,  
0055 S. 1000 W. Middlebury, IN  
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm • *Topic: TBD*

**September 21 SWCD Board Meeting:**

5:30 PM, New SWCD Office,  
59358 County Road 7, Elkhart

**October 8 LaGrange County Pasture Walk:**

Wayne Helmuth  
9165 W 200 S, Wolcottville, IN  
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm • *Topic: Rotational Grazing*

**October 19 SWCD Board Meeting:**

5:30 PM, New SWCD Office,  
59358 County Road 7, Elkhart

**November 11 Veteran's Day Holiday:**

The SWCD & NRCS Offices will be closed to observe Veteran's Day

**November 16 SWCD Board Meeting:**

5:30 PM, New SWCD Office,  
59358 County Road 7, Elkhart

## SWCD - NRCS CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP DIRECTORY

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