



Grass Roots for Conservation



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Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District

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The SWCD is having

"Fun at Every Turn"

on Green Earth Education Day in
Heritage Park at the Elkhart County 4-H Fair
Friday, July 22, 2022

Come join us and explore the different methods of improving water quality and how we learn from what lives in our waterways.

"Fun with Water Quality"

Elkhart County SWCD Staff and Partners will be on hand to demonstrate the Infiltration Cart and explain water quality through Macro invertebrates.

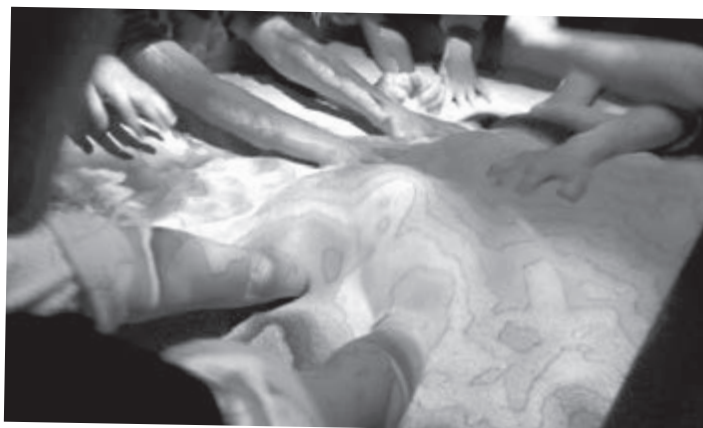
Stop by and have fun in Heritage Park!!!



After you have fun in Heritage Park, turn the corner, head over to Ag Hall, and have fun playing in the

Augmented Reality Sandbox

**THE ELKHART COUNTY 4-H FAIR
"FUN AT EVERY TURN"!**



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 another edition of Blogging BMP's! As I flipped my calendar over to the new month, I couldn't help but notice the best week of the year is almost here! What week is that you ask? Well, it's Elkhart County 4H fair week, of course. In my younger years, this would not have been a revelation on the first day of July, rather a year long process of building up to this week working on projects that I would eventually show at the fair and then sell when the week was over. The annual whirlwind of fair week rivaled any holiday, sporting event, and even vacation in my mind and to this day, brings a little bit of that childhood joy that seems to be so elusive in my older age.

As an adult with children of my own, all of those great moments in life are still wonderful, but now taken with a grain of salt. I guess the curtain has been pulled back on all of the magic and I realize the wizard was actually hundreds of dedicated leaders and parents that poured their heart and soul into making sure kids like me got to enjoy the magic of the fair and not worry about everything that goes into it. It is a cultural phenomenon that can only be fully understood **after** you have played the role of leader, parent **AND** child.

Something else I never thought about as a kid brings us to the water quality part of this blog. One of the many daily routines I was required to do with my projects (pigs and steers for those of you who are wondering) was give them a bath at the wash rack facilities provided at the fairgrounds. As you may or may not know, pigs and steers eat a lot, and as a result, defecate just as much. You can only imagine how much of that happens at the wash rack when 100 steers and 300 hogs make their way through the bathing facilities. I cannot recall one time someone bringing a shovel to the wash rack to clean up the mess, it was more like target practice with the spray nozzle to get it down the drain as fast as possible so you didn't have to stand in it. So, where did it go?

You will be happy to know that within the last 15 years the fairgrounds has routed the water from the wash rack facilities to the sanitary sewer system that is managed by the City of Goshen. Prior to that it went through a pipe and directly into our waterways, manure and all. Why was this infrastructure upgrade important? Here are a few things you should know about animal waste and water quality.

Livestock manure contains bacteria, nitrogen, ammonia, and phosphates. When rain falls on manure, these contaminants can be carried to local waterways by rainwater runoff, or in this case, directly through a storm-water pipe. Many of the County's creeks and rivers contain *fecal coliform bacteria* from both human and animal waste. Its presence is an indicator that more harmful bacteria that cause dysentery, hepatitis, and giardia, are likely also present in local creeks.

Excess amounts of nitrogen and phosphorous cause algae blooms which produce toxins dangerous to humans, livestock, and marine life. These nutrients result in dead zones, or areas that lack the amount of oxygen needed to sustain wildlife such as fish and macro invertebrates. **When these pollutants enter our waterways, they pose a threat to people, pets, and livestock.**

How can you make a difference?

- Clean-up manure on a regular basis, especially during the wet season.
- Compost manure to reduce volume, pests, and carbon emissions, and to create an optimum nutrient source for your soil.
- Store manure and compost piles on a flat, dry, and impermeable surface. Make sure your storage area is not near a creek or storm drain nor at the top of a hill. Keep storage piles contained and covered at all times.
- Spread manure over pasture surfaces in a layer no thicker than 1 inch to increase vegetation productivity. Do not spread near creeks, ditches, or other waterways.
- Dispose of manure as a recyclable waste at a commercial compost site, or as trash at most landfills every seven days.

Even if you are not in the livestock industry, you can still do the little things like clean up after your dog when on a walk or at the park and dispose of the waste properly. Another way you can help is by letting us know if you suspect any type of pollution, including animal waste that is going into our waterways. You can do this by visiting our website at <https://www.elkcoswcd.org/homeowners/report-a-polluter/> or simply scan the QR code on the page. Thanks for following along and make sure to get out to the fair and support the present and future leaders of Elkhart County!



RESPECT THE PROCESS

Have you ever just sat back and observed a child playing? When we give children the tools, space, and encouragement, they can become expert problem solvers and teachers. As someone who likes to be organized and have everything go according to plan, it is often hard for me to just sit back and not worry about the outcome. Recently I have come to realize that when I give up control of the outcome and let kids lead a planned activity, they learn so much more. In the Montessori Method of teaching, there are five main principles: 1) respect for the child 2) absorbent mind 3) sensitive periods 4) a prepared environment 5) auto education. This month I want to focus on the first principle: respect for the child.

I was recently teaching a group of young students about soil texture. I had three tubs one with sand, one with clay, and one with a loamy soil. I asked the students to observe with their eyes first and then they observed by feeling it with their hands. When I asked what they noticed they were spot on in telling the difference by color, feel, and particle sizes. Then, to my surprise, a student scooped up some soil from the ground and started analyzing the texture comparing it to the other samples.

As adults, we often forget that children (even infants) are just tiny humans that have thoughts, feelings, and the capacity to be genius. Although their brains are still growing, we can foster maturation by giving them the space to have individual thoughts and feelings and guide them through them. Respecting a child is shown through freedom to make their own choices, doing things for themselves, learning for themselves, and not interrupting their concentration. When we see a child struggle with an everyday task, such as putting on shoes, we want to rush in and do it for them. If we give them the space to do it on their own, they may show us that they can solve the problem for themselves. Respecting a child means that we trust them to make their own decisions (within reason). Respect builds a relationship, which can lead to understanding and more learning.



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ARE YOU READY TO “GO GREEN” AND HELP US SAVE MONEY AND NATURAL RESOURCES???

We can deliver your Grass Roots newsletter by email, just give
Lora a call at (574) 523-2030 or send her an email at
latkins@elkhartcounty.com and tell us you'd like to “GO GREEN”

**Thank
You!**

Q. Carbon is the topic of many Ag magazine articles. What role does carbon play in the soil?



Send your questions to
Walden the Worm

The "Dear Abby" of Conservation

A: Walden here. Carbon, which is usually called soil organic matter, is the stuff that makes your fields productive. I like to work in soils that are high in organic matter because they are porous and I can move through them with much less effort. The organic matter acts as a sponge between the mineral particles of the soil. This serves several functions. Since it is sponge like it greatly reduces the yield-reducing problem of compaction. Organic matter helps to keep the soil moist. I like moist soil because of my thin skin. High organic soil will take in rain fostering less run off. Loss of water, soil and crop nutrients lowers production leading to less food for us worms and less jingle in your pocket. Mr. Farmer if you manage your soil to maintain or increase soil organic matter we will both be happy. I enjoy having fun at every turn too.

From my underground library. Remember organic matter will absorb water the same way a paper towel or sponge will. To absorb is to engross completely and occupy wholly. The mineral portion of soil will only absorb water. Meaning water is held only in an outer surface, as is the case with playground sand. Soil organic matter is more than crop roots, residue and manure. It should be thought of as the engine that powers your soil. James B. Nardi, Biologist writes the following from, "Life in the Soil", pg. 31 and 243. "As microbes and animals of the soil break down the remains of various creatures into simpler compounds, they add organic matter to the soil. Such organic matter also happens to be the main source of certain essential elements of the soil such as nitrogen, phosphorous, and sulfur. Eventually the organic matter transforms to tiny particles of a dark organic matter known as humus. Calcium, potassium and magnesium are leached from top soil and washed out of reach of plant roots unless they are bound by negatively charged particles of humus."

– Walden

Send your questions to elkhartcountyswcd@gmail.com or drop them off at the office and have your question answered by Walden the Worm in upcoming Grassroots publications!

UPCOMING EVENTS

- August 11 **Pasture Walk:** Vernon Borkholder – 1-3 pm @ Nappanee, IN – **Topic:** Organic Dairy
- August 15 **SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN
- Sept. 5 **Labor Day Holiday:** The SWCD Office will be closed for the Labor Day Holiday
- Sept. 12 **Pasture Walk:** Kevin Miller – **Monday**, 6 pm @ Millersburg, IN – **Topic:** Sheep/Grazing
- Sept. 19 **SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN
- Oct. 13 **Pasture Walk:** Kenneth Imhoff – 1-3 pm @ Tippecanoe, IN – **Topic:** Organic Dairy/Pasture Irrigation/Bees
- Oct. 17 **SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN
- Oct. 22 **Forestry Field Day:** 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM, ACCELL Farm - 51242 Ash Rd. Granger, IN 46530
- Nov. 11 **Veteran's Day Holiday:** The SWCD Office will be closed for the Veteran's Day Holiday
- Nov. 21 **SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN
- Nov. 24-25 **Thanksgiving Holiday:** The SWCD Office will be closed for the Thanksgiving Holiday
- Dec. 19 **SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN
- Dec. 26 **Christmas Holiday:** The SWCD Office will be closed for the Christmas Day Holiday - being observed

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