



Grass Roots for Conservation



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Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Between the Rows

I love to stand and look down corn rows, it's like that feeling you get while watching that baby calf out in the field or when you walk into the farrowing house and see a fresh litter of pigs. It's new life. Yep, I love seeing all those plants, perfectly aligned, breathing life into the soil.

Last month I asked the question, what is your value of stewardship? We all have one, some may be the same as everybody else's and others may be really different. You know what? It doesn't really matter, what matters is what it means to you. As I look down this row of corn I admire the green leaves, the shining sun, and I think "wow I might have a straight row of corn this year!" But then I stop and look some more and I realize there is something missing. All our lives we have been striving for good stands, proper nutrients, and correct herbicides. It is a cycle that I'm sure many of you can understand.

So I'll ask the question, what can I do with the rest of the 26" in between the corn? When I look at the value of soil per acre I want to use all of it. I get pretty excited to see corn pop up in 30" rows, imagining what it would be like to see something living in between the rows. I know what you are all

thinking, weeds do that Jim, and yes I do know how to grow weeds effortlessly. I also have a few tricks to try to get rid of them. When I was growing up I had my bike, a good sharp hoe, and thermos of water. Looking back, I should have been classified as Dad's herbicide. It's one of the reasons I despise weeds and I probably should apologize to all the monarch butterflies for hoeing out every milkweed plant I could see. I guess it's rather ironic, because

now I recommend planting milkweed in our pollinator mix. I am not at all saying to plant that

26" space to all milkweed, I am merely trying to inspire thoughts of creativity. As farmers, homeowners, and backyard gardeners we need to really look hard at our R&D programs and embrace the fact that we

are all innovators. I don't care if you are 60", 38", 30", 20", 15", 10", or 7.5" there is always room for something.

My challenge to you is to look down your rows, out your back window, or over your yard and think about what you could put between the rows that would make it better. Now, think about it with no iron or jugs involved. I think it will come with something that has always been here and that is... nature. Nature is our classroom, let's learn to work with her rather than against her.



Education Keeps Going

It's summer time! I don't know about you, but I am ready to take on this summer with kayaking, fishing, adventures, and of course ice cream. Summer is a great time for students to take a break from the monotonous work of school, but it doesn't mean that the learning has to stop. There are many ways for students to learn even though they are not in school. Every day we are constantly learning how the world around us works and for kids this is even more so. Learning in summer doesn't have to be formal. This is where you, caregivers, come in. Take the kids outside for a walk or hangout in the backyard exploring. Let them ask all the questions or help guide learning by asking them open ended questions. What sounds do you hear? What do you see? Give them objects such as magnifying glass to look at things closer or a camera for capturing all the cool things they see. You will be amazed at how they pick up on things or ask mind boggling questions. If you have ever met a preschooler, you know they ask a million questions. That's because they strive to learn as much as they can, so they can understand the world around them. So, get out and go explore!



Silvopasture Can Help Diversify Ag Operations and Expand Income

Harming your land is never part of the plan, but without proper grazing practices, the land's productivity could decline. Improving your land's quality can start with good grazing management techniques. One popular grazing technique is silvopasture, a grazing system that combines trees, forage and livestock as a single practice on the same acreage.

Silvopasture can help with critical issues including lack of income, economic risks, lack of income diversity in timber or livestock, controlling weeds and providing shade and shelter. Using silvopasture, you can start creating and enhancing wildlife habitat by establishing a diverse blend of plant species. When these plants attract wildlife, this helps increase income opportunities for hunting leases.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service can provide technical and financial assistance to help you create a silvopasture system on your land. The assistance includes help with planting trees and pruning, building fences, fertilizing, multiple row plantings and other activities. For more information, contact your District Conservationist [Wes Krug] at the Elkhart County USDA Service Center at (574) 533-4383, ext 3 or visit nrcs.usda.gov.



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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! Summer is finally here again and I can't begin to express how much the green fields, trees, gardens and yards have lifted my spirits over the last few weeks. I have commented in several other editions of this blog how the different aspects of seasonal change can influence how I feel or how much I appreciate that beauty of what Elkhart County has to offer, but Summer is different. Summer is full of life and lively people, days at the lake or on the river, and the windows open at the ice cream shop. Another thing that Summer brings is that rolling thunderstorm that seems to be visible for miles. Those are the storms that always seem to be the talk of the town for a day or two. Conversations swirl about the trees that are down, the power that was out for hours, and the rain total at the house. Thunderstorms own coffee-talk every time.

The thing about thunderstorms, they can be destructive and necessary at the same time. The rain they bring keeps the life cycle going for tons of living things both large and small. My daily conversation over coffee is a little different when it comes to rain. I think about the gallons and gallons of water that go straight into our waterways, unfiltered and untreated. Formally known as Stormwater, the rain that goes into the various roadside storm drains making its way to the ditch, creek, river, and ultimately to Lake Michigan and beyond. Kind of makes you wonder, how do we manage all of that rain?

Here in Elkhart, we have what is called an MS4 that encompasses much of the county.

What is an MS4?

MS4 stands for Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System. It refers to a conveyance or system of conveyances that is owned by a state, city, town or other public entity, that discharges to the waters of the U.S. and is designed to collect or convey stormwater (including storm drains, pipes, ditches, etc.). It does not include combined sewers and is not part of a publicly owned treatment works (wastewater treatment plant).

The Greater Elkhart County Stormwater Partnership is a cooperative effort to implement the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) plan of four local government entities in Elkhart County, Indiana: Town of Bristol, City of Elkhart, City of Goshen, Elkhart County.

The plan includes six minimum control measures and outlines programs to improve the quality of stormwater that runs off of land and into rivers, lakes, and streams.

Six minimum control measures are addressed in the Greater Elkhart County Stormwater partnership Rule 13 Stormwater Quality Management Plan (SWQMP):

- Public Education and Outreach
- Public Participation and Involvement
- Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination
- Construction Site Storm Water Run-off Management
- Post Construction Storm Water Run-off Control
- Good Housekeeping and Pollution Prevention

So why is this important? Well, as you read earlier, our water goes a long way and we are making every effort to keep it clean. If you are interested in ways that you can help or interested in learning more about the Greater Elkhart County Stormwater partnership, visit our website <https://www.elkcoswcd.org/greater-elkhart-county-stormwater-partnership/about-the-partnership/>

LOCAL MAKES SENSE



The roadside vegetable stand is a classic summer-time scene. Whether a flatbed wagon or a table and tent, the piles of red ripe tomatoes, sun yellow squash, and juicy melons are an enticing treat to our dulled winter taste buds.

However, these summer produce stands offer more than a nostalgic tradition. Along with their counterparts—farmers' markets and community supported agriculture—these local businesses are valuable assets to our community, environment, and health. Furthermore, the markets in our area offer a vast array of products. Everything from blueberries, apples, cucumbers, onions, meat, poultry, eggs, cheese, nuts, breads, desserts, honey, syrup, jams, and herbs fill the bins and cases.

The benefits of purchasing products from these home-grown businesses are numerous. First, buying locally supports the local economy. It keeps money cycling within your neighborhood, helps support farmers' livelihoods, and can create job opportunities. Buying direct from local producers means they keep more of the profits, helping to sustain their operation.

Second, produce raised locally requires less energy consumption from field to table. An apple grown in Washington will be transported hundreds of miles to Elkhart County where you buy it at a supermarket. All this shipping consumes fuel and creates air, water, soil, and noise pollution. A local farmer can bring food to your table in just a few miles.

Third, locally-grown produce is flavorful, fresher, and may contain more nutrients than fruits and veggies shipped across the country. Since growers can sell their products within several hours after harvesting, fruits and vegetables are at the height of their flavor and nutrient value. Produce raised here can be grown for flavor, whereas produce raised for distant markets is grown to withstand days in shipment.

Fourth, buying from local markets creates connectivity within communities. It connects you to the land from which your food comes and the people who plant, care, and harvest it for you.

As the seasons change, the roadside stands will close, but many area farmers' markets stay open year-round. Although, the produce may not be as bountiful, dairy, breads, meat, and preserved items are available.

There are many stands and markets in our area. Word of mouth is an excellent way to locate local produce businesses. However you locate them, the important thing is to make buying locally a habit. Soon, the sights, smells, and sounds of the market will have you filling bags to the brim.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- June 21 **SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN
- June 26 **Downtown Summer Block Party:** Downtown Goshen is closing Main Street between Lincoln and Jefferson for a summer block party. Here at Fables Books, they'll have five local authors signing their books on the street. 10:00 am – 4:00 pm
- July 8 **Pasture Walk:** Andy Mast – 1-3 pm
10572 County Road 18, Middlebury, IN – **Topic:** Dairy
- July 19 **SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN
- July 23-31 **Elkhart County 4-H Fair:** *More info to come...*
- August 7 **Elkhart EnviroFest:** The Region's Largest Environmental Festival! Tickets are \$5 per family; kids are free! The 25th Annual EnviroFest will include food vendors, booths, raffle & silent auction, live music, kids' area and entertainment.
- August 12 **Pasture Walk:** Steve Kauffman – 1-3 pm
13586 County Road 28, Middlebury, IN – **Topic:** Jersey Dairy
- August 16 **SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN
- August 28 **Middlebury RiverFest and the Regatta of Recyclables:** A miniature boat race, a race down the river down at Riverbend Park during RiverFest! Race starts at 12 pm! RiverFest runs from 10 am – 2 pm.
- Sept. 20 **SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart, IN

SWCD - NRCS CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP DIRECTORY

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