



# Grass Roots for Conservation



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## Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District

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### **MORE THAN JUST COVERING IT UP**

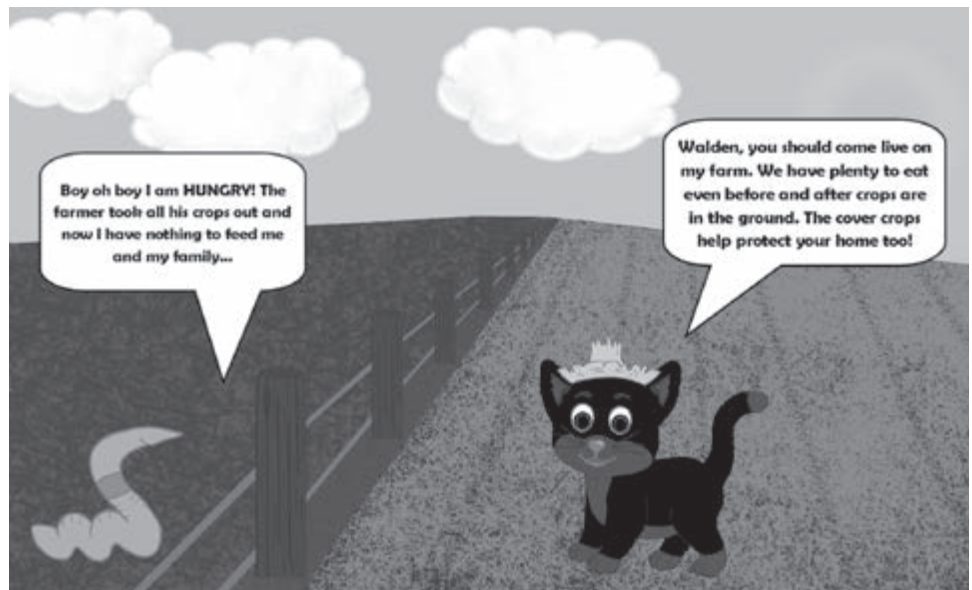
Indiana has become a national leader in utilizing cover crops. The latest available information, indicates over 1.1 million acres were planted in Indiana at that time. There are indications from the current survey that this old practice is enjoying a resurgence in popularity, with more cover crops being planted the last couple of years.

Cover crops are something green that's planted after the regular grain crops have been harvested. This keeps a live root continuously growing in the soil, which helps the soil in many ways. The reasons they're planted are to improve soil health, to decrease soil erosion, to increase soil organic matter content and to repair soil compaction problems.

The most commonly used cover crops are grasses, brassicas or legumes, and what's used depends on the goals for your cropping system. Fall seeded plants include wheat, cereal rye, annual ryegrass or sometime oats that winterkill. Radishes help with compaction issues, and Nitrogen-fixing legumes such as clover, winter peas and vetch provide nitrogen are also used. These "down-time" crops protect the soil from wind and water erosion, and enhance soil properties for the following cash crop.

To maximize productivity, and improve the quality and quantity of production, a winter cover crop could be considered. New York State has some interesting results from Triticale. This wheat/rye hybrid has been around since the 1880s. Traditionally, it's used as a forage for beef cattle, but Dairywomen too can receive benefits from forage and silage. It comes on fast like wheat, but overwinters like rye. Since it has some chemical allelopathy, soybeans or corn for silage should be the next crop. It also stops some weed species as another benefit.

Nitrogen, either as fertilizer left over from the previous crop, or as manure or compost added during the



warm season, slows its release when the weather cools. Fields that are left with nothing growing, lose that nitrogen to the atmosphere, or worse, to the rain water running off the fields. This has negative implications for the bottom line and the environment. Nitrogen lost this way impacts water quality in a negative way, and won't available for the next crop.

These cause summer-time algal blooms from nutrient-rich runoff, and results in closed lakes and beaches. Algae removes oxygen from the water, making it uninhabitable for aquatic life. Fish kills, along with the loss of other species, do a tremendous amount of harm to the ecosystem. This is a driving force of The Dead Zone that occurs in the Gulf of Mexico, which is expected to be larger this year than previously.

One preventive measure is adding cover crops to complete the cropping system. They scavenge nitrogen and other nutrients, keeping them in the field, where they were paid to be. This can also be used in a vegetable garden. The same principals can be used, just scaled down to fit the size. You've paid for the fertilizer, it's best to keep it in place so you get the benefits.

# Storm Water Alliance Management Program (SWAMP)

*Administered by the Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Elkhart County Surveyor.*

What is the Storm Water Alliance Management Program?

The Storm Water Alliance Management Program (*SWAMP*) was established to provide financial assistance to landowners in order to implement conservation practices that reduce non-point source water pollution, especially sediment erosion, into waterways in Elkhart County.

SWAMP is a cost-share program assisting with up to 75% of the total cost of the project. Conservation practices implemented through the program must remain functional on the land for 5 years.

## *Cost-share is available for the following Conservation practices:*

Blind Inlets: \$59.00 per square foot

Cover Crops: \$30.00 per acre

Filter Strips: \$553.00 per acre

Grassed Waterway: \$2350.00 per acre

Exclusion Fencing: \$1.20 per foot

If you have any questions about the Storm Water Alliance Management Program cost-share in Elkhart County or other conservation practices you want to implement on your land, don't hesitate to contact us!

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### **Elkhart County SWCD**

**Office Phone:** (574) 533-4383, ext. 3;

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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.**



Wow! Is it already September? Although this year has been one that I would rather not remember, it has at least gone by in a hurry. The days do seem to be getting a little shorter and the temps are dropping down to a more manageable level. I even saw a little brown and orange in the woods the other day as I cleared what may be the most tenacious patch of rag-weed ever, out from behind the family garden. These are all signs of something that not a lot of people think about, fall planting season. I am guilty of associating the autumn timeframe as one of harvest and dormancy, but this early timeframe is actually one of the most optimum to plant grass and cover crops.

So why is this time so great for getting things to grow? Mostly it has to do with the still warm soil from months of good, summer sun beating down on it. Partner this with moderate day temperatures and cool evenings and you have a perfect recipe for quick germination and establishment of newly sown seed. Now, I should clarify, not all grass seed is best in the fall. You should take care to choose a cool season grass such as bluegrass and ryegrass as these will thrive in the spring and fall and do require more hydration (often received in the form of snowfall).

I am directing this edition of Blogging BMP's to a couple of different people. If you are a contractor and have been waiting to stabilize your jobsite, NOW is that time! Get those spots that have been sitting inactive graded and seeded so they are stabilized for the winter months. Nothing erodes soil faster than a good snow melt or cold winter rain. If you are a homeowner and have been fighting with a hose and sprinkler all summer long, get some topsoil and fill in those holes and bald spots that have been plaguing your beautiful lawn. Fill them with seed and watch your lawn fill back up.

I am as guilty as anyone else in that I love the colors that a northern Indiana Autumn can pepper the landscape with. There is just something about the browns, reds, and yellows of our native trees that remind me why I am proud to call this great state home. But I am equally as guilty of marveling at the dense, green fields and lawns that have been planted with fresh grass or winter wheat that sit in such stark contrast to those fall colors. In closing out this month's blog, I thank you for being such great stewards of the land and look forward to seeing the newly seeded job sites and back yards around Elkhart County



# Welcome, Wes!

I was born and raised in Hampshire, IL where I spent all my childhood. I received a chancellor's scholarship to attend the University of Wisconsin, Platteville free of cost where I double majored in Crop and Soil Science, and Environmental Horticulture and received my B.S. in 2016. Fresh out of school I took a job as a soil conservation technician with a county conservation district in Kansas. Shortly after that I took a job offer in Vermont as a pathways recent graduate for the NRCS in St. Albans, Vermont. I stayed there for a year before being converted into a fully credentialed federal employee in Kentucky. I spent a little over 2 years being a soil conservationist in Kentucky before accepting an offer as a District Conservationist here in Goshen, Indiana. I have learned quite a bit about different types of agriculture in different areas of America from my different job locations and plan to take the best of the things I have learned and apply them here in Elkhart County. I am excited to tackle this new opportunity with all the enthusiasm I have. I love to see live music, go fishing, team rope, and atv. I have been to 50 percent of our national parks and love to travel and see new places in my spare time. I look forward to continue the great conservation efforts that are here in Elkhart County!



## Upcoming FSA Deadlines

- September 30th: PLC Yield Update Deadline**
- October 12th: Office closed for Columbus Day**
- October 13th: 2021 Dairy Margin Coverage Signup Begins**
- October 31st: Organic Cost Share Program Signup Deadline**
- December 15th: Wheat Reporting Deadline**

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.

***Have a safe harvest!***

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- September 21 SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM,  
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,  
SWCD Office,  
59358 County Road 7, Elkhart
- November 11 Veteran's Day Holiday:**  
The SWCD & NRCS Offices will  
be closed for the Veteran's Day  
Holiday
- November 16 SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM,  
SWCD Office  
59358 County Road 7, Elkhart

## SWCD - NRCS CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP DIRECTORY

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