



Grass Roots for Conservation



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Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Back to the Future

As I sit here and write about what we, as an SWCD, can and should do. There is a picture on my wall that reminds me of just that. It is the certificate of organization of the Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District dated February 26, 1941. I wonder if back in 1941 those individuals ever thought of a computer or that we would be zooming in for meetings? I seriously doubt whether that crossed their minds and honestly I have no idea what it will look like in another 79 years. All I know is what they were thinking about conservation in Elkhart County in 1941 is still in progress today. My hope for the SWCD office is just that, that 79 years from now they can look back and say the same thing about us.



When I look through all the old books and pamphlets that date back to that era, it makes me think. The programs haven't changed; they were talking about conservation plans, crop rotations, cover crops, drainage, irrigation, and rotational grazing. So when I look at my literature in 2020, it covers the same topics, almost identical to those in 1941. We have better information and resources but the initial conservation concepts are the same; retain soil and foster water quality.

We, Elkhart County SWCD, are going to incorporate new technology and concepts into the same programs. You are going to be seeing more zoom meetings, Facebook updates, online forms, YouTube videos, and web based programs. These are not new concepts, but different ways in which we can accomplish our goals and they are becoming a part of our "normal". Bear with us as we move in different directions and try new things. Grandpa always said "you will never know if you don't try it", well here we go Grandpa, we are going to try it.

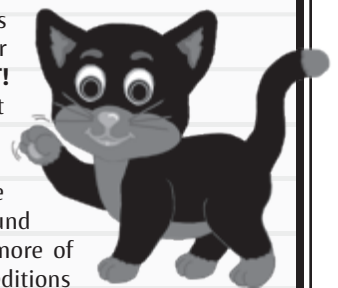
Healthy soil. Healthy life.

Jim Hess

Conservation Education Updates

In these unprecedented times, the Elkhart County SWCD is working hard to adapt to the "new normal". One of the ways we are doing that is by creating resources that are available at the click of a button. Our website is packed full of online educational tools. Included in our online "Conservation Library" are PowerPoints, lesson plans, and newly added videos. All of these resources are free to use for anyone interested in learning about soil and water conservation. Almost all of the lessons can be adapted to most age groups. If you would like to see what it's all about, check out our website elkcoswcd.org under the education tab at the top.

The Elkhart County SWCD has welcomed a new member to our team; **CONSERVATION CAT!** Conservation Cat is a cat that wears many hats. You may see him operating machinery, hanging out with Walden the Worm, or even splashing around our watershed! You can see more of Conservation Cat in future editions of the Grass Roots Newsletter.



Upcoming FSA Deadlines

- June 20** Last day to report Prevent Plant Corn
- June 30** 2020 ARCPLC Signup Deadline
- July 5** Last day to report Prevent Plant Soybeans
- July 15** Acreage Reporting Deadline

Never miss another deadline!
**Sign up for our text alerts by texting
 INElkhart to FSANOW (672-669)**
 No more than one text a month.
 Stay informed....join today!

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.
Thank you and have a safe planting season!

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

APPLICATION DEADLINE JUNE 1ST

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of Indiana is now accepting applications for enrollment in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the nation's largest conservation program. While applications are accepted year-round, interested producers should submit applications to their local NRCS office by June 1st to be considered for the 2020 funding period.

CSP is a Farm Bill Program for producers who are already established conservation stewards and who want to add more conservation benefits on their land, such as improved water and soil quality and enhanced wildlife habitat. Through CSP, agricultural producers and forest landowners earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, ecologically-based pest management, buffer strips, and pollinator and beneficial insect habitat – all while maintaining active agriculture production on their land. CSP also encourages the adoption of cutting-edge technologies and management techniques, such as precision agriculture applications and on-site carbon storage and planting for high-carbon sequestration rate, and soil amendments to improve water quality.

CSP is for private working lands including cropland, pastureland, nonindustrial private forest land and agricultural land. Agricultural producers wanting to enhance current conservation efforts on their land are encouraged to apply.

Information about CSP, including national and state ranking questions and enhancement descriptions, is available at www.nrcs.usda.gov/csp. This one-stop shop, which provides information to help individuals determine whether CSP is right for them, will be continually updated as more information becomes available.

**If you are interested in applying or have questions about the program, please contact
 Amanda Kautz, District Conservationist, at
 (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.**

Welcome back to another edition of Blogging BMP's! I wish that I could say this edition was being composed under better circumstances than last month, but unfortunately it is quite the opposite. COVID-19 is still dominating our lives. We have learned a few more catch phrases like NEW NORMAL and PPE (personal protective equipment). Stay at home orders have isolated all of us from our friends and loved ones. In spite of these regulations, we are somehow closer than ever thanks to a little thing called Zoom.

Truth be told, this deadly virus is changing our world in more ways than we may ever know. People are losing their jobs at an alarming rate. Some are laid off, others furloughed, many will flat out have no job to go back to. My heart goes out to those who are facing these realities and I wish good will on all of those affected by this pandemic. One of the brighter spots through all of this is the continuing growth in Elkhart County. Projects continue to come into the SWCD at a regular clip and businesses are preparing to rebound with a vengeance once the economy is "re-opened". So for me, the wheels just keep turning and the soil continues to be disturbed.

As the work continues, many of the things we often overlook continue as well. I know that anything I see on a daily basis generally doesn't impact me the same way something I only see every now and then will. Like a child for example, if

you see them every day they don't seem to grow, but when Grandma comes over, they've grown like a weed. It is the same thing with a CONSTRUCTION ENTRANCE. When you drive over it every day, only small changes are noticed, but the reality is that it's completely flattened and totally ineffective within a few days. Sediment is tracking all over the road and eventually washing into the storm drain with the next rain. The Best Management Practice is to freshen those stones and create a rough enough surface to knock the sediment off of the tires that are leaving the sight. If they are just too far gone to be grated, haul more stones in to build your base back up. Another way to ensure you maximize your stones is to install a felt underlayment to prevent the stones from penetrating the soil and going deeper every time someone drives over them.

As usual, an ounce of preparation can save pounds of perspiration. Make sure you install your entrance correctly to begin with and maintain it daily to ensure it is effective throughout the life of your project. For further instructions on both installation and maintenance of a CONSTRUCTION ENTRANCE, please visit our website www.elkcoswcd.org and click on the Rule 5 link. If you go to temporary and permanent site stabilization there will be a link to the IDEM stormwater manual which contains directives on all BMP's including construction entrances.

Q: Are earthworms an indicator of a healthy, productive soil? Is there a worm count per acre that is considered optimal, and is it possible to increase worm numbers? I have no-tilled 5 years which I understand is a benefit for worms. (Part 2)



Send your questions to Walden the Worm

The "Dear Abby" of conservation farming!

A: Last month we talked about how worms increase as soil productivity and health increase and began discussing how to count worms by the shovelful of soil. An even better way to inventory your worm population is to count night crawler middens. These are the small piles of dirt and worm castings covered with crop residue surrounding my burrow opening. Mark a 3 x 3 foot square and count middens. Ten is a starting point, and only a starting point. Twenty and above for heavy Elkhart county soil is easy to attain. Never heard of a midden? Of the eight dictionaries in my below ground library only the two printed in 1958 or earlier included the word. Per my dictionaries, midden is a dunghill (manure pile). Both cows and worms use microbes in the rumen (cow) or (worm) gut to digest plant tissue resulting in manure. What is the difference between cow poop and worm poop? Well, mine is naturally spread, and it does not STINK! Animal manure the world around is recognized as a fine soil amendment, so why not worm manure?

To increase the number of night crawlers in your fields, provide food and cover through a growing cover crop or crop residue. You are on the right track with no-till but adding in cover crops and increasing the crops included in your rotation can create a great home for me and my family. In other words, if you follow the four principles of soil health you will increase worm numbers and soil productivity. For those of you unfamiliar with the four principles they are as follows: Disturb as little as possible; Keep the soil covered; Grow diverse crops; and Keep a living root in the soil year-round. Following these principles also increases organic matter in the soil, and as we talked about last month, organic matter helps with many key soil functions for growing crops. Continuous corn will give low worm numbers; a corn and bean rotation gives more. Add wheat and worm counts move still higher as crop diversity and organic matter increase. As they say, "Build it and they will come." Adding a modest amount of manure can be a benefit but be careful what and how you apply. An excess amount of manure, especially high water, salty, low organic matter manure will drive me out of my burrow to meet death from hungry birds or a scalding sun.

Until next month,
— Walden

UPCOMING EVENTS

- May 18 SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, New SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart
- May 25 Memorial Day Holiday:** The SWCD & NRCS Offices will be closed for the Memorial Day Holiday
- June 1 Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Deadline:** See Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) with any questions.
- June 15 LaGrange County Pasture Walk:** Dean Yoder, 8300 W 050 N, Shipshewana, IN 6:00 – 8:30 pm
Topic: Livestock producers employing management intensive rotational grazing
- June 15 SWCD Board Meeting:** 5:30 PM, New SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart
- July 9 LaGrange County Pasture Walk:** 5905 E 300 S, Wolcottville, IN 1:00 – 3:00 pm
Topic: Rotational grazing
- July 15 Crop Certification Deadline:** See Farm Service Agency (FSA) with any questions.
- Aug. 13 LaGrange County Pasture Walk:** 7530 S 075 W, Wolcottville, IN 1:00 – 3:00 pm
Topic: Rotational grazing
- Oct. 8 LaGrange County Pasture Walk:** 9165 W 200 S, Wolcottville, IN 1:00 – 3:00 pm
Topic: Rotational grazing

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