



St. Joseph
County
Soil & Water
Conservation
District



Today's Visions for Tomorrow's Future

September/October 2016
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What's Going On...

*Events hosted by the St. Joseph County SWCD
& Our Partners in Conservation*

September

- 5th** - Labor Day - Office Closed
- 8th** - Pasture Walk - Lavern Fry 8070 N 700 W Ligonier, IN 46767 - For more information contact the Lagrange Co SWCD at.
- 17th** - Forestry Field Day (See page 4 for details.)
- 20th** - St. Joseph County SWCD Board Meeting (7:00 pm @ Centre Township Library)

October

- 10th** - Columbus Day - Office Closed
- 13th** - Pasture Walk - Devon Yoder- 6805 W 400 S Topeka, IN 46571
- 18th** - St. Joseph County SWCD Board Meeting (7:00 pm @ Centre Township Library)
- 25th** - Women's Learning Circle ----->

November

- 8th** - Election Day - County Holiday
- 11th** - Veteran's Day - Office Closed
- 15th** - St. Joseph County SWCD Board Meeting (7:00 pm @ Centre Township Library)
- 24th** - Thanksgiving Day - office closed
- 25th** - County Holiday



Women's Learning Circle Coming Soon

Elkhart, Marshall, and St. Joseph Counties are partnering to hold a Women's Learning Circle, October 25, 2016 (location TBA). Women-only learning circles bring women landowners together with conservation professionals – also women – to have an informal discussion about their hopes and dreams for their land and to share ideas with each other.

According to the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture, the number of women farmers in the United States was 969,672. In Indiana, there are 58,695 farms and of those, 5,745 or 10.22% had women as principal operators. Research shows that women landowners who lease their land face greater gender barriers in managing their land for long-term sustainability. Their farming tenants may dismiss their conservation goals, or they may not know how to approach the resource management agencies (like Soil and Water Conservation Districts) for help. A wide range of local experts, including USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Soil and Water Conservation District; and Purdue Extension, will be brought in to provide information that will help the attendees make informed decisions about soil and water conservation. Our learning circle will focus on the basics of soil health and

conservation practices that can lead to healthier more productive soil on the land. The morning will be an indoor discussion, including some interactive soil health demonstrations. The afternoon will provide the opportunity to tour a local farm putting conservation practices into action to improve their soil health.

All ages and experience levels are welcome! If you are interested in attending (or know someone who would benefit from this meeting) please contact the Elkhart County SWCD office at 574-533-4383 Ext. 3 to get your name put on the notification list to receive more information as the details are finalized.

We look forward to seeing you in October!



5 reasons why you should not grow cover crops this year

By Tom Bechman, Indiana Prairie Farmer

You can't pick up a farm magazine or read a website, including this one, without hearing about cover crops and soil health. But you're still just not sold on the idea of spending money to throw seed on the ground this fall.

Here are five arguments you can use to explain to your neighbors why you're staying away from cover crops.

1. If cover crops were so good, my grandpa would have used them 50 years ago.

Guess what? Odds are reasonably good that Grandfather did use cover crops. And he likely included a hay or meadow crop in his three- or four-year rotation. Prairie Farmer articles dating back to the '50s talk about planting either wheat or legumes as cover crops to protect the soil over winter. Many times the crop was plowed under as "green manure" the next spring. That's because Grandpa knew about cover crops, but he hadn't heard of no-till yet.

2. I am allergic to bee stings, and I don't want to get stung!

Die-hard cover-croppers figured out how to take out other cover crop species and let crimson clover grow. The results, especially this year, were beautiful fields of red blooms from crimson clover before planting. Roger Wenning and his son, Nick, counted an astronomical number of bees in a small area of clover. As far as we know, they didn't get stung by the pollinators.

3. I don't lose soil over the winter, so why do I need to keep it covered?

Are you sure? Odds are your neighbor across the fence in

the direction your water flows is pretty pleased that you leave the soil bare. He gets free topsoil every time it rains. And even if your field is flat, he gets free topsoil every time the wind blows during winter.

4. My son asks me to help dig his 4-H corn plants, and shallower roots mean less digging.

That's true. It's possible you can't dig too far because you have worked the soil wet at some time. There may be compacted layers that limit root growth and cause roots to go sideways. The plants your son exhibits at the fair will likely look like they have pancakes for roots. One young lady, Maddy Kerr, exhibited three corn plants at the Franklin County 4-H Fair this summer that just happened to come from a field where her dad planted cereal rye. Some of the corn roots were 18 inches long. She said her dad didn't complain, though, because it wasn't hard work to dig that deep in the field.

5. I won't be able to kill that annual ryegrass next spring, and cereal rye will get too tall.

The most avid cover crop enthusiast will tell you killing annual ryegrass means following a pretty strict set of guidelines. Do that and it will die in most cases. Cereal rye did get taller than some liked this spring before it could be terminated. Think of it this way: Has marestail ever escaped control? How many years out of the last five have you been satisfied with marestail control in soybeans? Not everything works perfectly every time. And by the way, no-tillers we talk to insist cereal rye pays for itself in marestail suppression alone.

Want to try cover crops, no-till, nutrient management or filter strips? Did you know the St. Joseph County SWCD can help you with cost-share opportunities for these conservation practices? The goal of this program is to encourage producers to utilize all aspects of the cropping system which will increase soil health and improve water quality.

The SWCD will cost share practice acres as follows:

- ◆ No-till - \$15.00/ acre (max 100 acres per producer)
- ◆ Cover crops - \$20.00/ acre (max 100 acres per producer)
- ◆ Nutrient management - \$20.00/ acre (max 100 acres per producer)
- ◆ Filter strips - \$350.00/ acre

Ness Farms Named 2016 River Friendly Farmer of Indiana



On Aug. 17th Ness Farms was honored as the St. Joseph County winner of the Indiana Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts' (IASWCD) 2016 River Friendly Farmer Award. The Award is given to those farmers across Indiana who have shown a dedication to improving the quality of their local waterways through sound conservation farming techniques.

Ness Farms produces corn, soybeans and beef cattle. A sustainable cropping system is a management strategy that protects our natural resources and actually improves the soil. Ness Farms has a complete conservation cropping system including no-till, cover crops, filter strips, as well as irrigation & nutrient management.

The conservation practices implemented on the farm also reduces the risk of nutrient and sediment runoff into the waterways, improving water quality downstream. Located just north of the Kankakee River this means improving water quality throughout the Kankakee watershed which eventually leads to the Gulf of Mexico.

Nathaniel Ness stated that conservation practices are important to their operation because they want to improve soil health and water quality for the benefit of current and future generations. They share their message of commitment to conservation not only with their neighbors but with their community through Farm Bureau.



CCSI releasing Two Case Studies featuring Higher Yields & Healthier Soil

Indianapolis, IN (July 11, 2016) - Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI) is releasing two new case studies featuring cover crop solutions that have proven higher yields and healthier soil.

Roger Wenning realized that skyrocketing land prices limited his opportunities to build his farm by expanding beyond the 650 acres he farms with his sister Marita Field and sons Nick and Kevin near Greensburg, Indiana. That pushed his thinking into a new direction. "I can't grow my farm horizontally-land's too expensive-but I can grow it vertically," he says. "I can get higher yields with the same inputs, just growing it deeper." Growing deeper means building soils for better root growth and higher productivity. That requires a system that combines no-till, drainage, intensive nutrient management, cover crops and careful attention to everything that touches the soil, Wenning says, "You've got to put the whole thing together," he explains. "Two plus two equals six when you're doing this. It's a systems approach."

Mike Shuter is a big believer in building healthy soils and he wants to give cover crops every possible day to help him do it. That means seeding cover crops into standing corn and soybeans so the soil-building cover is up and running before harvest. He has designed a high-clearance seeder to help him achieve this goal. After years of trial and

modification on his own unit, he's now custom-building them for other farmers eager to seed their cover crops early and often.

Mike states, "A lot of these cover crops -annual ryegrass, especially- need to have good growth in the fall to get good root development. With better root development, we'll get soil organic matter and we're developing soil health," Shuter says. "Part of our evolution in cover crops is getting them seeded earlier every year."

Wenning's and Shuter's Case Studies along with additional case studies showcasing farms in Fountain, Ripley, Hamilton and Kosciusko counties can be found on the CCSI website at: <http://ccsin.iaswcd.org/economics-of-soil-health>.

The Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative was launched in 2009 with funding from the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Indiana State Soil Conservation Board. CCSI is administered by the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, with many partners cooperating on the project. The Initiative organizes training workshops, field days, and research for producers around the state of Indiana to share conservation practices including no-till and cover crops with a focus on regenerative soil health.



Even in winter, cover crops feed and protect soils.



Seeding into standing corn

NRCS Conservation Client Gateway



"What used to require a trip to a USDA service center can now be done from a home computer through Conservation Client Gateway. NRCS is committed to providing effective, efficient assistance to its clients, and Conservation Client Gateway is one way to improve customer service." Said Jane Hardisty, Indiana State Conservationist.

With this tool, producers and private landowners will be able to conveniently and securely;

- ◆ Request help on a natural resource issue or request a conservation plan on your property;

- ◆ Review and sign conservation plans and practice schedules;
- ◆ Complete and sign an application for a conservation program;
- ◆ Electronically sign key documents, such as financial assistance conservation program applications and contracts;
- ◆ Document completed practices and request certification of completed practices;
- ◆ Request and track payments for conservation programs; and
- ◆ Store and retrieve technical and financial files, including documents and photographs;
- ◆ Request updates (e.g. address, e-mail, phone numbers) to your customer profile information.

Producers who want to learn more about Conservation Client Gateway may contact their local NRCS office (574) 936-2024 ext. 4 or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway to access the online portal. NRCS also has a YouTube video with more information about this technology; https://youtu.be/l5mT_5nBk5Q.



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SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
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St. Joseph County Soil And Water Conservation Partnership



Sponsored by the Elkhart,
Kosciusko, Marshall &
St. Joseph County SWCD's.

Forestry Field Day

Hosted by the
Elkhart County SWCD

Saturday September 17, 2016
9 am-Noon

Northwest corner of CR 20 at CR
33 Southwest of Middlebury, IN

Featured Topics:

- History behind the property
- Timber stand management
- Timber Harvest & Sales
- Classified forests
- Alternative Income
- This is a Walking Event!

Field Day is FREE but Please
RSVP! 574-533-4383 ext. 3

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Are you ready to "GO GREEN" and help us save money and natural resources?
We can deliver your "Conservation Kaleidoscope" newsletter by email ... Give us
a call or send us an email and tell us you'd like to "GO GREEN" THANK YOU!!!!



Scan me to
go Green!