



ANNUAL REPORT



January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020

Currently, regular monthly meetings are not being held at the USDA Service Center. Follow our website and Facebook pages for meeting announcements. All meetings, either indoors or outdoors, will follow any state or local mandates for public safety; cancellations will be announced as timely as possible.

What in the World is a Soil and Water Conservation District?

We have found that many in the general public do not know what a Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is or what we do. Many conversations while we were set up at farmer's markets this year started exactly like this: "So, what in the world is a SWCD?" The legal answer: Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are subdivisions of state government under the Indiana State Department of Agriculture Division of Soil Conservation which follow the Indiana Code. It is made up of 5 supervisors; 3 locally elected board of supervisors and two appointed. Landowners get to vote on who serves the community on your SWCD board every January.

Our primary job is to identify and address local resource concerns. We do that by educating and aiding the private landowners we work with and working with the Indiana Conservation Partnership made up of many agencies with similar goals. This technical assistance includes helping to identify resource concerns are on a property and working with the landowner and the NRCS District Conservationist to come up with a plan to address those concerns. Many times, this requires surveying and engineering of a practice, providing a seeding plan for native grasses or cover crops, assisting with reaching other agencies, and so much more.

For the last 77 years, we have been providing technical assistance and working closely other offices to meet need of each individual landowner and the natural resource issue they want to address. We often pursue grant funds which will help us offer financial assistance for eligible projects. If you have a concern you would like to address on your property (field, garden, or yard), give us a call! And if the conservation assistance request is more than what the SWCD can help finance, we work closely with Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with other conservation agencies which may be able to help. It is our mission to help you find the assistance you and your land need.

USDA Service Center

Due to the current health crisis, the USDA Service Center is not open to walk-in traffic and this may change throughout the pandemic. Please call the department you wish to work with in advance so they may assist you via e-mail or telephone at this time. The Soil and Water Conservation District continues to support our community, setting up at farmer's markets outside and assisting on conservation technical assistance calls as requested. Face-to-face interactions are extremely limited, but we have also utilized this time to train and to support our mission of protecting our natural resources.



77th Annual Meeting

The 2021 Annual Meeting will look different this year due to the current public health threat. The Annual Meeting will be a business meeting without awards, entertainment or catering. It will still be held at the Spencer County Youth and Community Center at 6 PM on January 25th. Tim Luecke has agreed to run for a second three-year term as Supervisor, but nominations will be taken from the floor and the election for a supervisory role will take place during this meeting.

This insert will serve as the annual report to the county and the financial report, minutes of the 2020 meeting, and the agenda will be available on our website at <http://spencerswcd.org/annual.html> approximately one week prior to the meeting. Anyone wanting to attend must RSVP to 812-649-7003, wear a mask, socially distance, and follow all State and local mandates appropriate for the date of the meeting.

When will the Service Center reopen to the public?

There are certain guidelines that the County Executive Director must follow before allowing the opening of the USDA Service Center:

- A county must show a two-week downward trend in new COVID cases
- The current rate of cases per 10,000 residents in that county must be below 2.0
- The county must have the approval of the SFAC and the FPAC State Pandemic Coordinator

SWCD Mission

Our mission is to provide information about soil, water, and related natural resource conservation; identify and prioritize local soil and water resource concerns; and connect land users to sources of educational, technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices and technologies.

The USDA and its partnering organizations are equal opportunity providers, employers and lenders.



SPENCER COUNTY SWCD - YOUR SWCD

The Spencer County Soil and Water Conservation District is made up of two full-time county employees and one part-time summer intern. The Spencer County SWCD board of supervisors are responsible for filling these positions. Currently, Courtney Hall and Olivia Summers are the District Administrator and District Technician respectively.

Courtney Hall is a graduate of the University of Southern Indiana with a degree in biology, and Ball State University with a master's degree in Natural Resources and Environmental Management. While at Ball State, she was given the opportunity to teach both lectures and laboratory courses to University Core Courses in Natural Resources and Environmental Management. Prior to moving to Muncie for more education, Courtney lived and worked in Spencer County, always intending to return home. She has worked for the District for more than seven years, and greatly enjoys working with residents of all ages. Courtney became interested in natural resources conservation while participating in events like Envirothon, hosted by Soil and Water Conservation districts throughout the United States.

In her free time, Courtney is a mother of three and the wife of a Pastor. She and her husband Matt will be married 20 years in June. She enjoys crafting, painting, knitting, and helping the community in any way she can.

Olivia Summers:

As the District Technician, she is training to do design work for conservation practices such as grassed waterways and

Water and Sediment Control Basins (WASCOBs). The other technical aspects of her job include doing field checks for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and the paperwork that comes with that. She also creates cover crop mixes, plans and leads education events in Spencer County, conducts site visits and collects soil samples from willing participants, and as of 2020 year of COVID-19, she attends many, many Zoom webinars. She is excited to be a part of promoting conservation in Spencer County!

Outside of work, Olivia is heavily involved in her fiancée's family cattle farm. It is a cow/calf operation where they raise beef cattle. She has been raising laying hens as a hobby and had her first productive garden this year. She loves to go on hikes with her dogs and to relax around a campfire.



SURVEYING IN A PASTURE



COURTNEY HALL



OLIVIA SUMMERS

UPCOMING EVENTS FOR 2021:

The Spencer County SWCD observes all Spencer County Holidays.

JANUARY:

1st USDA Service Center is closed
11th/12th The Indiana Association of Soil

and Water Conservation Districts will hold a virtual conference

18th Martin Luther King Jr. Day observed, USDA Service Center Closed

FEBRUARY:

15th President's Day: USDA Service Center is closed.

22nd SWCD scheduled meeting 4th Monday of the month

MARCH:

22nd SWCD scheduled meeting 4th Monday of the month

APRIL:

22nd Earth Day

26th SWCD scheduled meeting 4th Monday of the month

MAY:

31st Memorial Day, USDA Service Center Closed

SWCD scheduled meeting TBD

JUNE:

22nd SWCD scheduled meeting 4th Monday of the month

27th Adventures with Nature at Tipsaw Lake Recreation Area

28th/July 1st Spencer County 4-H Fair

JULY:

5th County Offices Closed in observance of July 4th

26th SWCD scheduled meeting 4th Monday of the month

AUGUST:

23th SWCD scheduled meeting 4th Monday of the month

SEPTEMBER:

6th Labor Day, USDA Service Center Closed

27th SWCD scheduled meeting 4th Monday of the month

OCTOBER:

25th SWCD scheduled meeting 4th Monday of the month

NOVEMBER

22nd SWCD scheduled meeting 4th Monday of the month

TBD Soil Health Day

25th Thanksgiving Day, USDA Service Center Closed

26th County Offices Closed

DECEMBER

5th World Soil Day

23rd County Offices Closed

24th County Offices Closed

27th SWCD scheduled meeting 4th Monday of the month

30th County Offices Closed

31st County Offices Closed

**Deadline
Extended**

*Native
Plant Sale*

**Orders due January 15 30th!
Custom mixes grown in a greenhouse
ready for your garden in May!**

**Visit spencerswcd.org/Natives.html or call
our office at 812-649-9136 ext. 3**

Notes from the office:

Conservation Technical Assistance is Available through Natural Resources Conservation Service

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP helps promote agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

The ACEP is a new program that consolidates three former programs: Wetland Reserve Program, Grassland Reserve Program, and the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural producers to improve conservation systems by improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities and undertaking additional conservation activities.

To learn more about any of the NRCS programs and how they may be right for you, visit the links above. You may also make an appointment to talk to our NRCS District Conservationist, Randy Van Matre at the office at 812-649-9136 ext. 3.

NRCS Accepting Second Round Applications for Reclaimed Mine Lands in Southwest Indiana

Indianapolis, IN, December 28, 2020 – Jerry Raynor, State Conservationist for Indiana's USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), today announced a second round of funding to improve soil health on former mine land in southwestern Indiana. All applications for funding consideration must be received by Feb. 26.

Money is still available for the Reclaimed Coal Mine Lands Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), led by the Knox County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). This project works with farmers, landowners and mine operators to implement a suite of soil health practices on reclaimed mine lands in order to improve the health of the soil, reduce the amount of sediment-laden runoff reaching local waterbodies and improve wildlife habitat.

"The RCPP program is a good example of how we can leverage public dollars to solve local problems. This project has the benefit of leveraging federal funding with locally driven conservation, reclamation professionals and mining industry participants," said Raynor. "The project has the benefit of targeting lands which have historically not had a high participation rate in conservation programs nor a significant application of soil health practices in spite

of the fact that these lands would benefit more than comparable lands that have not been mined or reclaimed."

This RCPP Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) project helps farmers implement conservation practices on their agricultural land. This project is aimed to improve roughly 175,000 acres of reclaimed mine lands that are cropped in the Indiana counties of Vigo, Clay, Sullivan, Greene, Knox, Daviess, Gibson, Pike, Dubois, Warrick and Spencer.

Reclaimed lands tend to be more erosive than comparable non-mined lands due to poor tillth and compaction layers. Sheet and rill erosion and ephemeral gullies continue to afflict these lands for years post-reclamation and is often exacerbated by tillage and low residue levels due to poor plant condition. This project is focused on promoting the implementation of a suite of conservation practices including cover crops, nutrient management, no till and pest management.

For more information about RCPP in Indiana, visit: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/in/programs/farmbill/rcpp/stelprdb1248173/>. To learn about NRCS services visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or contact your district conservationist, Randy Van Matre.

Indiana State Department of Agriculture Resource Specialist

Hello! My name is Amy Sims and I am your Indiana State Department of Agriculture Resource (ISDA) Specialist for the Southwest area. I am stationed at the USDA Service Center in Rockport. While I began my career in conservation in March of 2010 with the Spencer County Soil and Water Conservation District, I moved to the ISDA after 5 years. I was born and raised in Spencer county and grew up on a farm. I understand and appreciate the importance of agriculture. I am excited to share this passion with others and the importance of taking care of our environment and ourselves.

The role I fill with the ISDA is survey, design, lay out, and construction check conservation practices that are funded locally, state and federally. I participate on the steering committee for the state For the Women for the Land learning circles and the Promoting Urban Soil Health committee for the SW area assisting landowners with soil tests and or site visits for potential conservation practices to be implemented which these services are free to the public. I am a member of the Warrick Invasive Species partnership to help eradicate invasive species from invading the state of Indiana particularly in the Southwest area. ISDA assists conservation districts with Clean water Indiana grants, education for all ages agriculturally related, and reports all funded conservation practices so the State of Indiana and the USDA can track conservation progress. I work closely with Purdue Extension, Soil and Water Districts, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Nature Conservancy so if I do not know the answer to your question, I will be glad to assist you by connecting you to the right agency that can.

My husband, Matt and I have been happily married for 13 years and I pray for many, many more together. I have 3 children; Nevaeh, Matayia, and Jaxton Isaiah and we are raising them in the same home I grew up. In my free time, I am a certified Les Mills Rpm (spin) instructor at the local Tri County YMCA in Ferdinand. I also enjoy gardening, reading, and anything active outdoors! If you are looking for assistance with the ISDA, please contact me at asims1@isda.in.gov, or on my office number 812-649-7011.



Amy Sims, Resource Specialist

Completed program: Pollinator Forage Cost-Share

Our pollinator forage program was quite the success when you look at the number of participants who took seeds to plant. The district focused on smaller plots of land which could easily be maintained as a small portion of a backyard landscape with some landowners choosing to plant larger plots, up to one acre in size. The purpose of the pollinator forage plots was to help increase the variety of pollinators such as bees, hummingbirds, and the Monarch Butterfly. While this program ended in 2019, this year was the first year some of the larger projects fully bloomed.



Pollinator Plot
Courtesy of Holly McCutchan



The best wildflower plots do not look like manicured gardens.
Photo Courtesy of Holly McCutchan



Monarch Caterpillar,
photo courtesy of Holly McCutchan



Photo Courtesy of
Holly McCutchan

GRANTS

Grazing Sediment and Nutrient Run-off Reduction Project

Coming in 2021, there will be a new funding opportunity for grazing operations. The Spencer County SWCD has been awarded competitive grant for \$80,100 to help farmers in Spencer, Warrick, and Dubois County implement grazing practices! Practices included are: interseeding of legumes in pasture, internal fencing (not perimeter fencing), Heavy Use Area Protections (HUAPS), Watering facilities, and water pipeline. Funding has also been allotted for cover crops. This grant was awarded to Spencer County by Clean Water Indiana, which gets funding from the Indiana cigarette tax.

If you are interested in implementing rotational grazing on pasture, this grant is for you! Cattle, goat, and sheep farmers are all welcome. This grant aims to increase pasture quality in Spencer, Dubois, and Warrick counties, thereby reducing sediment and nutrient runoff into bodies of water.

Applicants will be ranked, with priority being given to farmers who are fencing out a body of water such as a lake or a stream. Clean Water Indiana is providing the funding, so farmers who are actively increasing water quality will naturally be given precedence. Farmers who have never worked with the SWCD before will be prioritized, as well as beginner farmers.

Please contact SWCD Technician Olivia Summers for more information on this grant and how to apply.

Phone: (812)649-7013

Email: Olivia.summers@in.nacdnet.net



All funds distributed through Clean Water Indiana must follow NRCS specifications.

COVER CROPS

2020 was the second year of a cover crop grant ensuring \$48,000 in funding for many producers wishing to utilize cover crops on their land. In 2019 and 2020, the Spencer County SWCD helped fund many applications. The targeted lands were primarily considered for soils which were highly erodible land, or HEL. According to the USDA NRCS, highly erodible land (HEL) is cropland, hayland or pasture that can erode at excessive rates. The SWCD worked with many producers over the last two years and have had a lot of success with this grant. There is a small amount of funding available in 2021, but we continue to seek new grants to assist our landowners with building their soil health, keeping their ground covered, and reducing the risk of erosion. There is some funding remaining for 2021; applications will be due by June 21, 2021.



Radish, Cereal Rye and Clover Cover Crop mix

2021 Internship Announcement

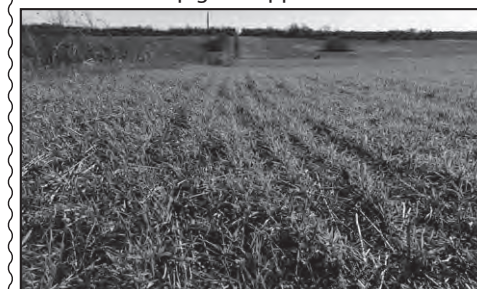
The SWCD will be accepting applications from those interested in the Student Intern position. We were unable to hire an intern for the 2020 season due to the restrictions on building space during the pandemic. Hiring an intern will depend on the status of the pandemic and if the USDA Service Center is able to be open to the public. Applicants must be a graduating high school senior or college student preferably in the fields of agriculture or conservation and be a Spencer County resident. The job requirements include, but are not limited to computer data entry, field work and survey assistance, conservation education programs, and 4-H Fair booth assistance. Spencer County SWCD is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Please contact the Spencer County SWCD at (812)649-9136 ext. 3 for more information.

Please feel free to visit our website and Facebook page to follow along with our activities throughout the year. Resumes and/or applications may be sent to:

Spencer County SWCD
Attention: Courtney Hall
996 N SR 66 Suite 102
Rockport, IN 47635

Working with 23 counties!

The Southwest Conservation Alliance is a group of 23 counties participating in a Clean Water Indiana Grant; something that has never been tried before! This grant will still be available in 2021, but funds are limited. Please apply for the program no later than June 21st so ranking and approval can be made. The ranking system and approval will be the same between cover crop grant opportunities.



Cover Crop- Grant funded

Cover Crops Do More Than Reduce Erosion

**Randy Van Matre,
NRCS District Conservationist**

Over the past decade the use of cover crops has been steadily gaining popularity. When I ask producers what they would like to accomplish with their cover crop most say, "to prevent erosion". While that is a fine and reasonable response, I will offer that while cover crops do substantially reduce erosion, they also produce many other beneficial results.

Reducing compaction, increasing infiltration, and recycling of nutrients can be accomplished through cover cropping. Annual ryegrass works well due to its ability to grow a long root in a short time period. Tillage radishes possess a long taproot but due to the larger canopy do not produce as many roots per acre as ryegrass.

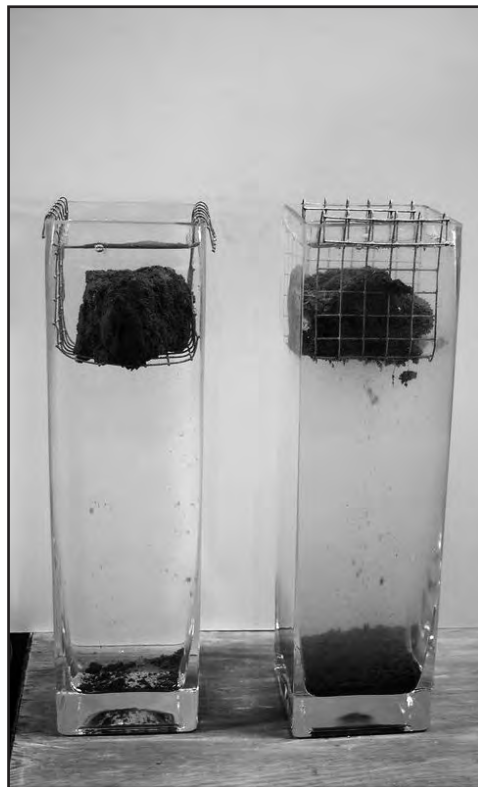
The sheer number of roots is critical for breaking up compacted ground. In addition, the root pathways provide space to capture and store water and create a pathway for the ensuing crop roots to follow. Increased rooting depth of the ensuing crop also provides resilience to weather events such as drought and high wind.

Significant amounts of nutrients remain out of reach in most soils. A cover crop with a long root has the capability to access that, capture them, and redeliver the nutrients to the surface after termination. There are many documented cases of producers discovering that after using cover crops their nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium requirements are reduced.

All cover crops provide some measure of erosion protection, compaction reduction, infiltration increase, and nutrient recycling. However, it has been demonstrated that for compaction issues annual ryegrass seems to work the best but for trapping nutrients (nutrient recycling) brassicas, such as tillage radishes, seem to do better.

For the benefits to be realized you must seed during the proper time period. Seeding too late may not provide enough benefits to justify the expense. Most cover crop species should be planted prior to October 1st. Annual ryegrass can be seeded until October 15th, wheat until October 30th, but not before Hessian fly free date (October 9th), and cereal rye until November 15th. If erosion control is your number one concern you will want to seed as early as possible to get enough growth to provide that benefit.

A proven, straightforward and inexpensive strategy to employ cover crops is the use of cereal rye before soybeans (4-5 bushel yield increase on average). Another is the use of oats and radishes which can be used before any crop. The oats and radishes will winterkill, effectively removing any additional termination management decisions from the equation. Adding a legume, such as crimson or balansa clover, or annual ryegrass to the oats/radish mix is also a simple and effective cover crop choice. In this scenario, the amount of annual ryegrass in the mix is relatively small making termination much easier the following spring.



A comparison of water clarity between a soil sample using no-till and cover crops and a no-till field without cover crops BW

First Grade Soils Activities

One of the things that Courtney loves the most about her position is getting to visit with the smaller learners in the community. Everything has changed this year, but we still made it possible to help first grade students learn about soils and to cover that portion of their science standards. We included fun coloring pages, activity books, soil samples, and materials to make earth bracelets in the classrooms and a lesson plan for the teacher.

YOUTH EDUCATION PROGRAMS

As with much of the rest of 2020 events, our face-to-face activities were cancelled. We did find a way to help meet several standards for educators in the classroom by creating custom education kits that teachers could have delivered to their school. While we are not currently meeting groups in person due to minimizing

contact, if you have a Conservation Education need, please give Courtney a call! We have many resources which we can lend educators, help find, or share with you. If your classes or organization are still meeting in-person, we can provide tailored kits to your need.

Cover Crop Termination of Ryegrass

**Randy Van Matre,
District Conservationist NRCS**

The use of ryegrass as a cover crop has been well documented and has proven to be very effective when managed appropriately. The biggest management concern is termination. Termination issues usually center on timing, mixing and rate but are also affected by the species and seed quality.

Of initial importance is the understanding that rye, ryegrass and annual ryegrass are three separate and distinct species. Rye is a cereal grain crop, Ryegrass is a forage grass that can be a perennial, biennial or a winter annual. This article will focus on the ryegrass species we use as a cover crop, Westerwold diploid annual ryegrass.

Researchers have learned that systemic herbicides are very temperature sensitive. During lower temperatures, less than 40 degrees Fahrenheit or when cold and cloudy, ryegrass will not translocate glyphosate because it is not actively growing. Additionally, because glyphosate requires translocation spraying at this time will be ineffective. If the weather is cooler (still above 40 degrees), you should factor in a minimum 4-hour window before sunset for application. Generally, that means no spraying after 2:00 pm in cold weather.

Annual ryegrass is easiest to kill pre-joint (jointing occurs between 7-10" in height) and when the temperature is above 50 degrees (ideally on a sunny day). Warm weather greatly increase translocation and thus termination success. If annual ryegrass is allowed to reach the flowering stage the control of the plant is easier, but some viable seed may develop and may create additional weed management problems in the future.

The most common management failures are spraying in the afternoon during cold or cloudy weather; using AI nozzles with coarse droplets; using an AMS substitute; using 15-20 gallons of water per acre (ten is recommended); mixing the glyphosate in before the AMS; mixing other herbicides with glyphosate; and using untreated water.

Michael Plumer, University of Illinois Extension agent (retired), studied the use of ryegrass as a cover crop for over 40 years. The following is a takeaway from what he has learned:

- Glyphosate requires a minimum of 3 hours after spraying on an actively growing/transpiring plant before a dark period (night). Most plants stop growing 1-2 hours before sunset. Twenty-five to thirty percent of glyphosate that has not reached the growing point by dark will become bound within the plant and will not be available the next day. If the following day the plant does not actively grow/transpire due to cold, wet, cloudy conditions the next dark period will bind an additional 80% of the glyphosate. In this scenario there will not be any glyphosate left to provide control of the plant. He found that means no spraying after 2pm for best control in cold conditions in March/early April.

- It is critical that the mixing order of glyphosate be followed to ensure the maximum amount of glyphosate is available for control. Glyphosate should never be mixed in untreated water as 40%+ can be "neutralized" at mixing, depending on water quality. Glyphosate is most active at a pH of 3.5 but plants will react by not absorbing spray below 4.5 pH. His trials found that the optimum pH for spray solution is 5-5.2 pH.

- Ryegrass does not actively grow below 40 degrees. If temperatures drop below 35 degrees F, ryegrass will go dormant for 2-3 days and will not uptake glyphosate. Don't spray in this time period, wait until the ryegrass starts growing.

- Soil temperatures at 4" that are less than 40-45 degrees F means ryegrass is not actively growing. Ryegrass will tolerate saturated soils but does not actively grow/transpire in those conditions, limiting glyphosate uptake.

- There are significant control reduction issues when some other herbicides are mixed with the glyphosate.

- Uninformed commercial applicators do not know the importance of glyphosate mixing order and normally get poor control because of mixing in untreated water.

As with anything of value, a learning curve and commitment to learning is required. The rooting depth of annual ryegrass provides a vegetative method to reduce compaction, increase nutrient cycling, and create a soil structure that can withstand heavy rainfall events while creating storage for ensuing periods of droughty conditions.

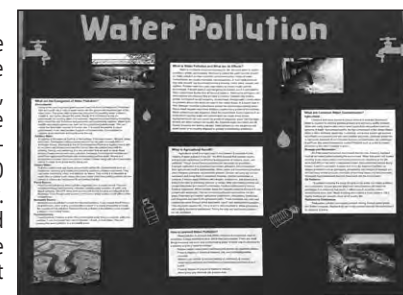
If you operate your own spraying equipment, I encourage you to give annual ryegrass a try. Start small then build up. If you have an operator, other landowner, or use a commercial service for termination please also consider but remember that timing is critical. If your situation is not conducive to following the lessons learned as outlined above, you may be best to go with a winterkill cover crop like oats and radishes. At the end of day any cover crop is better than no cover crop at all.



Cereal rye and radish cover crops following soybeans, SW area USDA-NRCS.

4-H Fair

This year, like many other activities, 4-H went virtual. The Spencer County Soil and Water Conservation District were still asked to be guest judges for several categories: Weeds, Soils, Weather, and Geology. We are very proud of all the participants for stepping up and being as flexible as possible during this time. Our Soils Grand Champion for 2020 was Elliott Rahman; a repeat award winner in this category. Over the years, Elliott has had several projects in the Soil and Water category. The District is happy to be able to recognize Elliott as our Soil Grand Champion, though we regret that we cannot do so at our annual meeting.



Elliott Rahman's 4-H poster

Community and Adult Education Programs

PUSH IT!



PUSH IT stands for Promoting Urban Soil Health In Towns, and it is an action group that your local SWCD technician Olivia Summers and your ISDA Resource Specialist Amy Sims are a part of. Now I know what you're thinking: "Urban Soil? Does Spencer County even have urban soil?" But we do—it's in your back yard! While we do have several towns; in the context of PUSH IT, even the soil in your back yard can be considered "urban soil." And this definition can be of benefit to you!

At the start, the Warrick County SWCD joined forces with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to provide technical services to urban landowners and non-traditional producers an area largely underserved. The partnership provided funds to hire an Urban Conservationist to provide technical assistance to landowners in Warrick County but also to help educate partner staff across the SW NRCS area on how to service non-agricultural customers.

The partnership also includes establishing five local working groups across the southwest NRCS area. The local working groups are designed to bring together resource professionals, backyard gardeners, small or non-traditional agriculture producers, and other conservation minded individuals. The groups focus is to provide educational materials and events, site assessments and technical service to the public in their designated areas. Each individual local working group creates their own name/logo and first determines the primary resource concerns for their area and which initiatives they would like to pursue.

Spencer County falls into the PUSH-IT local working group. PUSH-IT stands for Pushing Urban Soil Health-In Towns. This group includes Gibson, Posey, Spencer, Warrick, Pike, and Vanderburgh Counties. There are representatives from Purdue Extension, the local SWCD's, NRCS, Wesselman Woods, Master Gardeners, Vanderburgh County Engineers Office, local growers and members of the general public. The group has selected a few primary resource concerns for the area and will be handing out information at the Tristate Creation Care workshop Saturday Feb 9th and at the Ohio Valley Small Farm and Garden Conference Saturday, April 6th. The next scheduled PUSH-IT meeting is scheduled for March 7th at the Vanderburgh County 4-H grounds at 9 am. For more information on any of these events or to join the PUSH-IT please contact our office at 812-649-9136 ext. 3.

For Spencer County urban or back yard gardeners, your local SWCD is providing site visits to assess erosion, contamination, and other resource concerns. The Spencer County SWCD is also providing free soil tests for urban landowners and backyard gardeners. This does not include large scale farming operations. Read more about the services offered by your local SWCD in the Soil Tests article.

Virtual Chicken Workshop

February 11th and 16th

Do you want chickens? Are you flirting with the idea of getting chickens? Do you have chickens but love talking about and learning more about chickens? This is the workshop for you!

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the workshop will be held virtually on these two dates. Amanda Mosiman of Purdue Extension and Olivia Summers of the Spencer County SWCD will speak on a wide range of topics including:

- City and county ordinances
- Chicken Terms
- Chicken breeds
- How chickens benefit soil health
- Creative ways to cut feed costs
- How to care for Chickens from when they are chicks through adulthood
- Enrichment ideas

This workshop is for all ages and all experience levels. Chicken keeping is a wonderful hobby as well as an excellent way to get children engaged and learning about where their food comes from and how to care for animals. Not to mention chickens are a wealth of entertainment! They are lively and interesting, each with their own personalities and quirks. Chickens are a natural choice for gardeners because they can provide valuable manure that is free from weed seeds due to how they digest their food.



Olivia Summers' Welsummer Hen



Soil Test photo credit
Purdue Extension Marion County

Soil Health Day

Along with so many of our face-to-face workshops planned, the anticipated soil health day to be held in Perry County this year was postponed until 2021. We hope that you will mark your calendars to join us in 2021 for some great speakers! We have not set a date, but please plan for early November.



Soil Health in Spencer County, photo
courtesy of Joseph and Melanie Kern

Spencer County Board of Supervisors



Brian Rahman,
Chairperson of
the SWCD Board
of Supervisors



Burke Sibrel
Vice Chair of
the Board of
Supervisors



Alan Waninger,
Secretary of
the Board of
Supervisors



Tim Luecke,
Board Member



Mark Lubbehusen
Board Member

Not pictured are affiliate members David Gogel, Mike Roos, and Phillip Schmidt.

Soil Tests

The SWCD has been able to offer free soil tests to "urban" residents to check for contaminants and troubleshoot garden problems. This has been a great opportunity for our District Technician Olivia to get out into the community and be a detective helping people understand what's going on in their garden. Soil tests provided by PUSH-IT have also been a great way

to provide a service to people who aren't large scale farmers.

Soil testing can benefit homeowners who care for vegetables, flowers, or their lawn. A soil sample taken every 3-5 years will tell you quite a bit of information about your garden and may even save you money in the long run. A great resource published for free by Purdue Extension is "Collecting Soil Samples for Testing" by Kyle Daniel & Rosie Lerner and Jason Ackerson.

A soil test will tell you what nutrients are present (or not present) in your soil, what pH level your soil is, and how much organic matter is present in your soil. Knowing what nutrients are in your soil is important so you know what to put back into your ground. Knowing your soil's pH is important because pH affects how well plants can absorb nutrients from the soil. If the soil is too acidic or too basic, the plants simply can't access the nutrients, even if they are present. A good pH to shoot for is 6.5, a neutral to slightly acidic pH. Organic matter is important because it feeds the insects, worms and other living things in the soil, which in turn bolster soil health and put nutrients in the soil through the decaying process of the organic matter. If you decide to get a soil test done on your own, call or email Olivia and she can help you interpret the results of your soil test.

Community and Adult Education Programs

Gardening Workshop



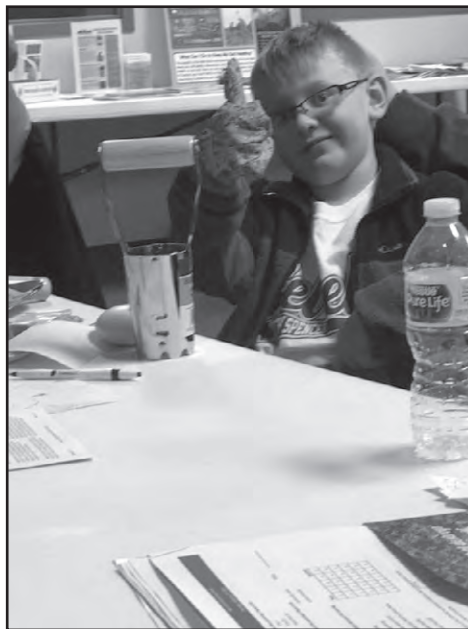
Gardening Workshop

The first installment of the Back-Porch Series was a success! The Spencer County SWCD combined forces with the Warrick County SWCD, Spencer County residents Holly McCutchan and Whitney McGrew, to make this event happen. COVID-19 threw a wrench into the Series, but the virtual continuation is planned for this February. Read more about this upcoming virtual workshop in the Chicken Workshop article.

This pre-COVID-19 in-person workshop covered popular beginner gardening topics such as site selection and preparation, alternative types of gardens (raised beds, container gardens, etc.), choosing crops, starting seeds indoors, and pest control. If you are interested in seeing the information presented at this workshop please email our technician Olivia at Olivia.summers@in.nacdnet.net for more information!

Participants also drew for prizes generously donated by the following local businesses: Dale Floral and Gifts, Flint Hill Landscape Supply, Lauer Floral and Gift Shop, K&K Dirtworks, and Obermeier Hardware and Rental. Thank you again to those businesses for donating such popular prizes!

The best outcome of this workshop was to see people with zero years of experience gardening talking to people with thirty years of experience. That sharing of experience between members of the community is more valuable than any expert's lecture, and the SWCD was glad to facilitate such a sharing of knowledge.



Gardening Workshop, Jadon Hall



The Kern Farm, no-till and Cover Crops lead to a healthy weed-free stand

Garden Cover Crop Seed

This past fall, the Spencer County SWCD handed out 25 bags of cover crop seed to gardeners in the county! This cover crop seed was provided by the PUSH-IT group and was a mix of oats, daikon radishes, and winter pea. The seed was provided in bags to cover up to 1000 square feet.

Cover crops can benefit even the smallest gardens. They help suppress weeds, break up compaction, and fix nutrients into the soil. As you can see in the picture below, there is not a weed in sight! This gardener had a problem with palmer amaranth, also known as pigweed, due to use of cattle manure as fertilizer. She hopes to see a reduction in weeds next spring. She also plans to expand her garden in the spring.

Please contact Olivia Summers to get your name on the list for next year's garden cover crop seed giveaway!



Garden Cover Cover crop seed through PUSH-IT, credit Olivia Summers

Field work will be more easily completed

In October of 2020, the County Council appropriated funds for the Spencer County SWCD to utilize to purchase a vehicle for field work. Due to COVID restrictions and other hurdles, the SWCD employees no longer had access to the Federal Government vehicles, which was a benefit of the partnership that we had long enjoyed. The district employees worked with Sternberg's in Dale to find a vehicle that would be appropriate for field work and was a certified pre-owned vehicle.



Garden Cover Crop from Tyler Luecke



SWCD Vehicle

Contractors List

Did you know that we keep a list of local contractors who have asked to be included? If you have a project you need to select a contractor, we would be happy to share that list with you! We also post these contractors on our website for your convenience; updated approximately twice a year.

We are constantly updating our in-office list! If you are a contractor and would like to make sure your name is on our list, or would like to update your information, please contact our office at 812-649-9136 ext. 3 or e-mail Courtney at courtney.hall@in.nacdnet.net. We have a one-page survey to help identify your areas of expertise which is also available on our webpage <http://spencerswcd.org>

Important Information

Indiana Law: Invasive Species and the Terrestrial Plant Rule

The Indiana Terrestrial Plant Rule is meant to help reduce the number of Invasive Species that escape into our natural environment, woodlands, and croplands. These plants can create economic and ecosystem damage for years to come. This law designates 44 species of plants as invasive pests. This rule makes it illegal to sell, gift, barter, exchange, distribute, transport, or introduce these plants in the State of Indiana. Learn what you need to know in the Terrestrial Plant Rule Brochure. This rule went into effect April 18, 2019. Please visit <https://www.in.gov/dnr/6351.htm> for more information and the complete list.

Callery Pear, Bradford Pear, is a serious problem

New invasive partnership wants homeowners to know about the invasive callery pear.

Callery pear, also known as flowering pear or Bradford pear, is among the most popular ornamental trees in the United States. The white flowers produced by the tree is one of the first signs of spring in the Midwest, and Callery pear is a common feature of plantings, urban trees, and housing additions. Unfortunately, the species is an aggressive invader of native forest and prairie habitats across the eastern United States. Expansion of Callery pear is a serious problem as the species outcompetes and suppresses native species that are much more desirable for wildlife habitat and forest health.

Callery pear trees grow very quickly and produce pollen and fruit as early as three years. The abundant fruits are quickly dispersed by birds, including European Starlings and American Robins. This results in new Callery pear trees growing in a variety of habitats where birds travel and roost including forest, fields, and under powerlines. Their continued use as an ornamental tree further contributes to the problem of expansion. In addition to their negative impacts on forests and wildlife, Callery pears are not a good choice for landscaping. Their tight branch angles and overall poor structure means they readily break under windy and icy conditions. This presents a danger to people and nearby structures where they are planted.

Controlling this invasive species can be a challenge. Callery pear has a deep, strong tap root that limits pulling even small stems. Additionally, it actively stump sprouts meaning when cut or girdled, new sprouts will grow; follow up herbicide treatment is necessary to kill an individual plant. Finally, the general form of most stems is rather spindly with leaves close to the stem (and each other). This means spray herbicide application has limited success. As is the case with many invasive species, successive mechanical and/or herbicide treatments are most successful in effectively controlling and eradicating this species. For more information please contact Kaila Knies (812) 631-7913



Bradford Pear trees to be disposed

Pandemic Gardening

Did you find yourself along with many other Americans looking for fruits, vegetables, and seeds at already picked over stores late in the spring or early in the summer? You would have noticed that the pickings were slim, this especially if you were one of us who chose to start a garden slightly late. There was a phenomenon not unlike the "Victory" Gardens of WWII. According to Jennifer Atkinson at Washington University, "Americans have long turned to the soil in moments of upheaval to manage anxieties and imagine alternatives." To me, there is just something about getting your hands into soil and seeing "nature" do what it does best.

Here are some valuable tips if you are interested in gardening next spring and summer:

1. Order or purchase your seeds early!
2. Start small, hobby gardening can become overwhelming.
3. Pick an area of land that has 6-8 hours of sunlight a day.
4. Plant at least 10 feet away from a septic system, including leaching fields
5. If you are on well water, plant at least 100 feet away from your well head.
6. Consider having a soil sample run in the winter
7. Start with
 - a. A smaller number of crops; 5-10
 - b. What you enjoy eating
 - c. What is expensive at the store.
8. Choose plants that grow well in your area. Northern Spencer County is in zone 6b, while southern Spencer County is in zone 6a. There is only a slight difference, and most some 6 plants should grow well.
9. If you do not have enough ground space, try container gardening!
10. If at first you don't succeed, don't give up!

Thank you 2020 Affiliate Members

Thank you to the following Affiliate Members for your dedication and support of the Spencer County Soil and Water Conservation District and its mission to increase conservation awareness and adoption of conservation measures:

PLATINUM

American Electric Power
Farm Credit Mid America
Lindauer Farms
Superior Ag
Leiberling & Sons, INC

GOLD

German American Bank - Rockport
Hoosier Hills Credit Union
Hurm Farms
McDaniel Farms
Reinke Farm Supply
Tempel Land & Livestock LLC

SILVER

Blesch Brothers Equipment Co. INC
Brosmer Land Surveying & Engineering, Inc
Burroughs Farms
Dubois County Tire & Supply
Evrard Construction
Giles Farms INC
HD Construction
Hohl Family Farms, Inc.
Jeaneda and Christopher Middleton
John's Tractor Service, Inc
Keith and Betsy Wilkinson
Kiesel Enterprises, Inc
Ken Shourds Equipment, Inc.

Lynam Farms

Mariah Hill Lumber and Feed
PSC
Randall Haaff, Financial Advisor, CFP®, AAMS®,
Raymond James & Associates, Inc., Member
New York Stock Exchange/SIPC
Richard and Betty Michel
Seng Brothers Partnership
Sigler Farms
Singleton Farms
SMS Price Farms
Spencer County Bank
Spencer Treasures Incorporated
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Steve & Linda Daming
Top Auto Center, LLC
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Contributing Members
All Seasons Lawn Equipment
Breivogel Farms
Dilger Brothers
Grandview Aluminum Products, Incorporated
Lubbehusen Farms LLC

Are you interested in becoming an Affiliate Member of the SWCD?

2020 was a difficult year for many; giving was down across the board. The soil and water conservation district was affected, as well, receiving less financial support than in the past several years. We are thankful for all support, but to reach the community in various ways, and more creative ways (including digital media and social media) we must seek funding from outside the County Government to provide additional services and support to the community. We attempt to help all who need assistance with erosion control, soil health, and any number of activities, even though the doors are still locked due to the ongoing health crisis.

All contributions are tax-deductible, and Affiliate Members will be recognized at events throughout the year, on social media, our website, the annual report, and annual meeting every January. There are many levels of support:

Platinum (\$300+)
Gold (\$151 - \$299)
Silver (\$50 - \$150)
Bronze (\$25 - \$49)
Contributor (\$15 - \$24)

If you have any questions about becoming an affiliate member, please feel free to contact the office. If you would like to donate, please make your check payable to:

Spencer County Soil & Water Conservation District
Spencer County SWCD
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Rockport, IN 47635