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Heart to Heart ... with Hardisty

Indiana farmers are on a Health Kick...a Soil Health Kick that is!

Soil Health is soil managed to its maximum potential through a system of conservation practices, including never-till, cover crops, advanced nutrient and pest management, and buffers and drainage systems where appropriate. This approach results in healthy soil that reduces erosion, requires less nutrient inputs, manages the effects of flood and drought, and reduces nutrient and sediment loading to streams and rivers.



 On October 21st, Shannon Zezula, Barry Fisher, Ray Archuleta and I met with Chief White to demonstrate the environmental and economic benefits of installing a conservation cropping system on farmland. This demonstration was such a success, we were asked to return on November 14th and give an abbreviated demonstration to the Office of Budget and Management at the White House Executive Conference Center. I anticipate the impact of these presentations will push soil health to the top of NRCS' priority list for 2012. As such, Indiana NRCS will be making soil health a priority for FY12.

 Now is the time for Indiana NRCS and our partners to take production and conservation further with conservation cropping systems. Because Indiana's success with this approach is getting national attention, Indiana's Leadership Team is developing a statewide strategy for soil health and will be ensuring that more resources be put towards this endeavor. We expect all employees to support this conservation approach, while our District Conservationists will become key contacts for educating and promoting soil health.

 Never before have farmers had access to the assistance they need to make these much needed transitions. Indiana NRCS and our strong local partnerships are providing a wealth of information, planning and financial assistance and evaluation of these systems to provide maximum benefits for our environment and our producers. Keep up the good work!

Jane E. Hardisty

***** Employee Spotlight *****

Kathy Judd, Area Program Specialist—Southeast Indiana

Q: Kathy, you've worked for NRCS in several states. Tell us a little bit about where you've been and your experiences.

Indiana is the fourth state I have worked in with NRCS. I started with NRCS in June, 1997 as a WAE (student intern) in the Madison, Wisconsin (go Badgers!) field office. Then in October of that year, Illinois NRCS hired me on full time as a Soil Conservationist and then a District Conservationist. After spending four years in central Illinois, where it seemed like all I did was install CRP filter strips and waterways, I was ready for a new challenge. So I packed my bags and headed east to New Hampshire as a District Conservationist. New Hampshire was a totally different experience and I enjoyed every minute of the three years I spent there. The majority of our workload was on forestry related practices. But, I decided that I wanted to be closer to my family in Wisconsin so in January of 2008, I packed up once again and found myself in North Vernon, Indiana as the Area Program Specialist. Luckily for Darrell, I haven't felt the itch to move to a new location yet. Working in multiple states was a great experience and you learn very quickly that every state is different in terms of how the agency works. You see sights that you never thought you would see and meet some great people as well.

Q: You've had many positions with the agency. Tell us about your time as an Area Program Specialist.

I know some people think I am crazy, but I actually enjoy being an Area Program Specialist. It feels like it's the perfect fit for me. Basically, I see myself first and foremost as a detective (makes it sound much more interesting) trying to figure out what the problem is and then how it can be fixed. I like the challenge and the constant change. It's keeps things interesting.

Q: You took on an important role this year as the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Coordinator. What sparked your interest in this position?

I was raised with the belief that you give back to others who need a helping hand, whether it be time, financially or both. Serving as the CFC coordinator and helping out with the Feds Feed Families food drive are both ways in

which I can give both time and financially. I really believe in the CFC and I thought we had an excellent year. It was a privilege to be able to serve as the CFC Coordinator.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your goals, either professional or personal, for 2012

One of my goals for 2012 is to finish the Indianapolis 500 Mini-Marathon on May 5th. I have done some 5k's this year and have a few races scheduled in the spring before the Mini so I should be good to go. My only goal is that I finish it in under the time allowed and to prove to myself that I can do it.

Q: Do you have any other hobbies or special interests you'd like to share?

I do quite a bit of reading, mainly mysteries, in my spare time. One of my other loves is Tai Chi. I discovered Tai Chi one and a half years ago through a class at Ivy Tech and have been doing it ever since. The form portion is very meditative and relaxing. Then there is the application side of Tai Chi, which I find very stimulating and exciting. I think it's because I get to physically push people who are much bigger than me around. It's pretty fun.

Q: I love visiting your office because you always have a fun, new toy we can talk about. But my most recent visit has me wondering something. Why do you have a Oscar Mayer Weinermobile Hot Wheel® car in your office?

My Grandma Skram's house was right across the street from Oscar Mayer's. When they are not traveling throughout the country, all of the Weinermobiles are stored there in the parking lot. They have always been a part of my life. I also have banks, whistles, magnets and other Weinermobile items at home.



Hoosier Happenings

KUDOS to...

****Pattie Thomas and Tamara Williams** for assisting the Public Affairs staff in excessing old equipment. Here's to getting rid of the walensacks! Submitted by Kris Vance—Acting Public Affairs Specialist, Indianapolis

SOIL HEALTH—A CENTRAL FOCUS FOR NRCS

Over the past 10 years, Indiana NRCS has been assisting producers in integrating practices into a Conservation Cropping System that leads to high soil health. Soil managed according to this system with several core practices (no-till, cover crops, crop rotation, advanced nutrient and pest management, smart drainage and buffers) has greater resilience and a higher function than soil managed under more conventional methods.

SLAKE TEST



Conventional Tilled Soil after rain event



40 year No-tilled Soil after rain event

This message, along with several demonstrations on how a Conservation Cropping System succeeds, was the topic of conversation during State Conservationist, Jane Hardisty's recent trip to Washington D.C.

Ms. Hardisty, along with Shannon Zezula (State Resource Conservationist), Barry Fisher (State Agronomist) and Ray Archuleta (Conservation Agronomist) visited the White House Executive Conference Center on Monday, November 14th to discuss Indiana's focus on building soil health knowledge among field staff and farmers.

The group discussed the concept of a Conservation Cropping System and its environmental and economic impacts. After the brief discussion, they demonstrated the environmental impacts of incorporating a series of conservation practice on farmland. Four demonstrations, including a slake test, infiltration test, nitrogen test and rainfall simulator proved the Conservation Cropping System concept works.

The message this team brought to D.C. has had enormous impact on NRCS' future role with soil health. Look for it to become a central focus for Indiana NRCS is 2012.

VOLUNTEER UTILIZES EDUCATION TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY

The job of conserving our natural resources cannot be done by one agency alone. Often times, we rely on volunteers help in reducing soil erosion, conserving our water and improving its quality, and developing pride in our country's natural resource heritage.



Sandy Smith



Earth Team volunteers are an integral part of the conservation partnership and each member takes pride in the fact that they maintain and improve our natural resources and environment on private lands. Sandra Smith is a standout NRCS Earth Team Volunteer who assisted the Clinton County Soil and Water Conservation District with a number of tasks for the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed Management Project (SFWCP).

As a Geography student at the University of Arizona, one of Sandra's primary duties included learning and applying skills related to Geographic Information Systems and mapping. Utilizing her knowledge and skills, Sandra assisted with the mapping of various hydrologic features, soil properties including hydric and highly erodible soil types, location data from volunteer-led windshield surveys, and assorted data from IDEM's Office of Land Quality for each of the 11 subwatersheds of the South Fork Wildcat Creek Watershed. Sandra also helped SWCD staff in the field collecting water quality samples from across the watershed. These water quality samples were used to evaluate E.coli loadings across the drainage area.

By utilizing Sandra's talents, the SFWCP was able to produce a detailed Watershed Management Plan that identifies critical areas within the watershed. This plan will be used by the Clinton County SWCD to obtain future funding for landowners living within the South Fork Wildcat Creek watershed. Funding will be used to install conservation practices within the watershed and aid in the improvement of South Fork Wildcat Creek and its many tributaries.

For more information about Earth Team, contact your regional coordinator or check out the ETV website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/volunteers/>

**** SPECIAL EMPHASIS ****

American Indian Heritage Month

In 1986, President Reagan designated November 23-30 as American Indian Week. Four years later, President Bush proclaimed the first National American Indian Heritage Month. Each year since, U.S. Presidents have proclaimed November as American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month. This provides an opportunity to learn about the history of American Indians and their contributions to the world.

NRCS recognizes and celebrates the many different cultures of the American Indians. One of the ways NRCS nationally celebrates American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month is by distributing a poster created by an American Indian artist. Each year artists from selected states have the opportunity to exhibit their talents and heritage on a national level.

This year's winner of the American Indian/Alaska Heritage Poster contest is Carrie Silverhorn of Miami, Oklahoma. Silverhorn is a member of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma and is of Eastern Shawnee/Wyandotte decent. The 32 year old has been an artist since childhood and claims, "Art is the passion that drives me to create beauty from my surroundings and allows me to produce what my imagination whispers to me."



For many Tribes, protecting Mother Earth and all her natural resources is critical for life to flourish. Ms. Silverhorn's illustration of a hand of a youth and a hand of an Elder depicts the connection and underscores why protecting our natural resources for our future generations is vital in order to sustain our natural resources for our future generations.

For more information, contact Kelley Barkell, American Indian/Alaska Native SEPM at: kelly.barkell@in.usda.gov

Partnership Links

- IN Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, Weekly Updates:** www.iaswcd.org/whatsnew/index.html
- IN Conservation Partnership:** www.iaswcd.org/icp/index.html
- IN Dept. of Environmental Management:** www.in.gov/idem
- IN Dept. of Natural Resources:** www.in.gov/dnr
- IN State Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation:** <http://www.in.gov/isda/soil/>
- Purdue University:** www.purdue.edu
- USDA Farm Service Agency:** www.fsa.usda.gov

Hoosier Happenings (cont.)

SOUTHEAST COVER CROP WORKSHOP A SUCCESS

On August 23, 2011, Marshall Alford set out with Clint Harrison, NRCS District Conservationist, Vickie Smith, Dearborn County SWCD Technician, and Heather Wirth, Dearborn County SWCD Watershed Coordinator, to plant several acres of cover crops on his Dearborn County farm. Nearly two and a half months later, Marshall's sweat paid off as he hosted the 2011 Dearborn County Cover Crop Field Day.



Vickie Smith, DCSWCD Technician, Heather Wirth, DCSWCD Watershed Coordinator, and Marshall Alford, Dearborn County Landowner use Dearborn County SWCD's Great Plains No-Till Drill to plant a cover crop seed mixture of buckwheat and radish

Just over 50 landowners joined Marshall on November 3rd to learn from a panel of experts the importance of healthy soil and the role cover crops can play in improving soil. Barry Fisher, NRCS State Agronomist, lead the field day by discussing the importance of improving soil productivity; Hans Kok, Conservation Cropping System Initiative Coordinator, discussed the benefits of incorporating cover crops on farmland; and Greg Downing, Cisco Company Agronomist, rounded out the field day by helping landowners understand how to implement a cover crop system on their land.

"This was a great day with a lot of knowledge shared with our landowners in the southeast," said Smith "I'm looking forward to a spring workshop which will demonstrate just how effective the cover crop system really is."

The 2011 Dearborn County Cover Crop Field Day was sponsored, in part, by NRCS, Dearborn County SWCD, the Cisco Seed Companies, Hogan Creek Watershed Project, Dearborn County Farm Bureau Inc., and Laughery Valley Ag Coop—Dillsboro.

SLAKE TEST SHOWS THE IMPORTANCE OF SOIL

"What are you trying to show with that soil?" was by far the most common question at the NRCS Soil Health exhibit during the recent Indiana Farm Bureau Convention. From seed sales consultants, to small hobby farmers, to fellow exhibitors—everyone was curious about those water-filled jars. Even State Treasurer (and senatorial challenger) Richard Mourdock stopped by to ask about the Slake Demonstration, also known as the Aggregate Stability Test. Most visitors agreed that the demonstration clearly show how good soil health is important to water quality. After explaining how no-till improves soil structure and seeing the test, convention-goers were amazed. Also, several Farm Bureau "Ag In the Classroom" educators stopped by to pick up instructions for doing Slake Demonstrations as part of their lessons. Special thanks to District Conservationists Don Donovan, Doris Scully, and Andrew Brown for staffing the exhibit. You never know the impact visual demonstrations like this can have on our agricultural community!

Personnel Update

REASSIGNMENTS

Rebecca Fletcher, RC&D Coordinator at Hoosier Heartland reassigned to State Public Affairs Specialist—effective 11-20-11
Dan Fleming, RC&D Coordinator at Northwest Territory reassigned to District Conservationist, Rensselaer—effective 11-20-11
Susan Meadows, RC&D Coordinator at Sycamore Trails reassigned to Natural Resources Specialist, State Office—effective 11-20-11
Nancy Manion, RC&D Assistant at Arrowhead Country reassigned to Office Assistant, Winamac—effective 11-20-11
Pamela Devoss-Sherrard, RC&D Assistant at Northwest Territory reassigned to Office Assistant, Valparaiso—effective 11-20-11
Mary Beth Wilkinson, RC&D Assistant at Lincoln Hills reassigned to Office Assistant, Rockport—effective 11-20-11
Randall Dickson, RC&D Coordinator at Arrowhead Country reassigned to Soil Conservationist, Rensselaer—effective 11-20-11

SELECTIONS FROM VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Peter Bednarski, Engineering Technician, Greencastle CIT Staff—effective 12-18-11
Lynette Horton-Harmon, District Conservationist, Goshen Field Office—effective 12-18-11
Ron Roth, Engineering Technician, Albion CIT Staff—effective 1-1-12

RETIREMENTS

Chuck White, Engineering Technician, Princeton CIT Staff—effective 12-2-11

INDIANA NRCS WEBSITE UPDATES

The following updates have been made to the Indiana NRCS Website: <http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/>

Homepage

About Us

Outreach page updated
Civil Rights page updated

Programs

Programs Main Page Updated
EQIP Homepage Updated
WHIP Homepage Updated

News

Indiana Bulletins added

Technical Resources

Conservation Planning Tools Site Updated
Indiana GIS-GPS Updated
Indiana Wetland Science Site Updated
Rapid Watershed Assessment Site Updated
Indiana Energy Site Added

Mark Your Calendar

DECEMBER

20: Area Conservationist Meeting
Indiana Conservation Partnership Meeting
26: Holiday—Offices Closed

JANUARY

2: Holiday—Offices Closed
9-11: IASWCD Conference
10: SAC/FAC Meeting
17-19: HORT Congress—Indianapolis
25: Southwest Area Meeting
26: INLICA Convention
31: Northwest Area Meeting

FEBRUARY

1: Winter Engineering/ET Training
Southern Grazing Meeting
7: Northeast Area Meeting
8: Southeast Area Meeting
9: Snow Date—Winter Engineering/ET Training



Helping People Help the Land