

**Soil & Water
Conservation
Districts (SWCDs)**

There are 97 soil and water conservation districts making a difference in your community. No matter how big or small, each of the 102 counties has the services of a SWCD. From educating homeowners on practical utilization of water to helping rural landowners save soil and improve water quality; it takes everyone working together to protect our soil and water! Without these vital resources our communities cannot thrive!



The 2013 State Budget contains funding levels for the 97 SWCDs that are \$739,500 (more than 10%) less than 2012 levels, an amount that is sure to see many SWCDs falter and cease providing services during the 2013 fiscal year. Without further action by the General Assembly it is likely that 31 SWCDs will be unable to function by January 1, 2013.

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Many people look at soil and water conservation districts as the people who put conservation on the land but there is much more that must be done before many people have an awareness that there is a need for conservation.

During the summer and winter months when construction of conservation practices normally will not be occurring, Illinois' Soil and Water Conservation Districts often sponsor tours and other educational opportunities for rural and urban landowners to become more aware of natural resource related issues such as water quality and environmental degradation.

Soil and water conservation districts utilize a number of methods to reach out to those who may have an interest in protecting the environment. Through meetings, field days, tours, classroom presentations, contests, agronomy days, conferences, printed materials, sale of fish, trees and conservation plants and other means open to them, the soil and water conservation districts do what they can to inform and educate people about the need to improve and conserve and protect water quality and our environment.

This educational effort is important as future generations get farther and farther away from the farm and the knowledge of common practices used for generations to sustain our environmental resources becomes less prevalent. That is not to say that all farmers are environmental stewards but most have

learned that for the land to sustain them and their family it must be cared for and protected.

We have learned many harsh lessons over the years since this country was first settled by the early Europeans including the lessons taught by the dust bowl and the continuous droughts that plague the western states. There is little doubt we will continue to be taught new lessons in how to live within our environmental limitations.

Such things as climate change, whether influenced by man or just part of a natural cycle, may bring about significant changes in our weather and may even affect the foods we are able to grow in areas where they have been grown for as long as we have been a civilization.

All of these future lessons and challenges will have to be met with determination and good science. Right now, much of that determination and science rests with the people who work with the environmental resources on a daily basis. That includes the soil and water conservation districts. Though the SWCDs don't have any special knowledge of what the climate will do, they do know how to address issues related to conserving and protecting the environmental resources we do have but they will not be able to do anything to help this generation or those of the future without adequate funding. As legislators, you hold the key to providing assurances that Illinois' natural resources will continue to support our economy and our people. Please support adequate funding for the SWCDs.



Soil and Water Conservation Districts Provide Many Kinds of Services and Assistance.

- The 97 SWCDs are continually involved in implementing the most up-to-date conservation practices to maximize use of available resources while also protecting these essential environmental resources.
- SWCDs provide needed information for urban and rural decision makers so that they can make wise choices that will protect people and property in the future
- Through the various programs they administer and the technical assistance they provide, SWCD's encourage the protection, conservation and wise use of our natural resources to assure sustainability for future generations.



NOTE: SWCDs DO NOT have taxing authority and must rely on state source funding to employ staff to administer programs.

Gaming expansion legislation being considered by the 97th General Assembly has the potential to create thousands of jobs and fund SWCDs at a

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Districts' Spotlight

DeWitt County: On August 15, 2012, The Dewitt County NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation Districts teamed up with Pheasants Forever, the Farm Bureau, University of Illinois Extension, and local landowners to host a countywide conservation bus tour. Throughout the county, we toured a number of different conservation sites that included terraces, waterways, wetland, block chutes, rock chutes, windbreaks, filter strips, and grass plantings. The Clinton Lake Watershed project was toured as well. Shannon Allen, the District Conservationist, and Jonah Cooley, the Resource Conservationist, spoke at each of the conservation sites to explain the benefits of each practice, and encouraged participants to get a closer look at the projects by getting off the bus and walking to the various sites. Between sites, short video clips about cover crops and water table management were viewed. The bus tour began and ended at Weldon Springs State Park, and at the conclusion of the tour lunch was provided for all participants by the Dewitt County Farm Bureau and The Soil and Water District. Overall, the bus tour was a success, and we look forward to hosting another tour in the near future to continue to raise awareness concerning conservation throughout our county.



Tour participants view a water and sediment control basin.

Macon County: "Improve your BMP's for Nutrient Management" is the title of a conference that will be held on Tuesday, Dec. 11 at the Macon County Extension Office in Decatur, Ill. The Heart of the Sangamon Eco-partnership is sponsoring the conference. Its members include: the DeWitt, Macon and Piatt County SWCD's, NRCS, U of I Extension, the Macon and Piatt County Farm Bureaus, the City of Decatur, the Macon County Conservation District, Reetz Agronomic LLC and the Agricultural Watershed Institute.

The conference will be highlighted by several panel discussions that will be of interest to farmers and landowners. Four local farmers will discuss their experiences with "Cover Crops". All levels of cover crop expertise will be present on this panel with two of the farmers having worked with these crops for about 20 years each.

Another panel will discuss the important issue of drainage. The "Drainage Water Management" panel will discuss new developments in tile system design, its installation and the benefits of managing the water draining from your fields. Dr. Richard Cooke, U of I researcher; Ruth Book, NRCS engineer; and a local drainage contractor will share their knowledge.

"Strip Tillage" will be the focus of the last panel discussion. This tillage system is a great way for farmers and landowners to increase yields while at the same time reducing the risk of soil erosion and planting delays. Our panel members is made up of three local farmers from the Macon County area.

In addition to the three panel sessions, Dr. Shalamar Armstrong, assistant professor in the Dept. of Agriculture at Ill. State University, will discuss how this year's drought will affect your nutrient management plans. Dan Schaefer of the Ill. Council of Best Management Practices will review the "4R's of Nutrient Management" and present the Illinois "Keep It in the Crop (KIC) 2025" program.

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SOIL &
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