

## 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!



### Thank You

SWCDs are an important link to deliver federal source funds that directly benefit the local and state economy. The economic benefit that SWCDs provide is far greater than the amount of money that is appropriated for their use by the General Assembly.

Thank you for supporting funding levels for the SWCDs for FY2014.

Please support gaming legislation that includes funding for the SWCDs



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## Districts Working to "Keep it Under Cover"

Lately we have been hearing, and reading, a lot about cover crops and how they are good for the farmer and the environment. Okay, just how do they help the environment or the farmer?

There is an organization called the Midwest Cover Crop Council that includes eight states and the Province of Ontario. They are the organization that attracts the experts who do the studies that show us the benefits of cover crops

**First, let's look at cover crops - just what are they?** "Cover crops are plants seeded into agricultural fields, either within or outside of the regular growing season, with the primary purpose of improving or maintaining ecosystem quality." There are a whole list of crops that are used as "cover crops". They include such things as (grasses) Annual ryegrass, Barley, Oats, Millet, Rye, Sorghum-sudangrass, Sweet/grazing corn, Triticale, Wheat, (legumes) Alfalfa, Austrian winter pea, Berseem clover, Chickling vetch, Cowpea, Crimson clover, Field peas, Hairy vetch, Horse beans, Kura clover, Medics, Mung beans, Red clover, Soybean, Subterranean clover, Sunn hemp, Sweet clovers, White clover, Woollpod vetch, (brassicas) Black mustard, Brown mustard, Field mustard, Kale, Oilseed radish, Rapeseed, Turnip, White mustard, Winter canola, and (other non-legume broadleaves), Buckwheat, Flax, Malabar spinach, Marigolds, and Spinach.

Never mind that you are not familiar with some of the plant names, a lot of other people haven't heard of them either.

Let's take a look at some of the things the experts claim cover crops will do.

### What do cover crops do for the environment?

People who have studied cover crops for a long time have come to the realization that they contribute significant benefits to the environment by providing the following functions. They:

- Enhance biodiversity,
- Increase soil infiltration, leading to less flooding, leaching, and runoff,
- Create wildlife habitat,
- Attract honey bees and beneficial insects for agriculture.

### What about agriculture? What benefits do cover crops contribute to the farmer?

Again the experts have come up with a list of good things cover crops can do to benefit the person who grows them. They:

- Reduce erosion,
- Improve soil quality, through increases in
  - Porosity (reduced compaction),
  - Soil organic matter,
  - Water holding capacity,
  - Beneficial microbes,
  - Micro- and macro-invertebrates,
- Retain nutrients that would otherwise be lost,
- Add nitrogen through fixation (leguminous cover crops),
- Combat weeds,
- Break disease cycles.

### Why are we hearing so much about cover crops?

The third bullet point above makes it clear. They retain nutrients. With USEPA threatening to set standards for nutrient loading in waters, anything that will help reduce nutrient loads will help make a difference in how Illinois' agriculture thrives or struggles in the future.

Finding ways to help maintain a strong agriculture is one of the ways the soil and water conservation districts serve the people of Illinois.



## 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 educational assistance to urban and rural decision makers so that they can make wise choices that will protect people and property in the future
- Through education and the various programs they administer, and the technical assistance they provide, SWCD's encourage the protection, conservation and wise use of our environmental 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.

Your efforts as a member of the General Assembly, have resulted in a \$515,000 increase for soil and water conservation districts in the FY14 state operating budget.

THANK YOU!

PROTECT & CONSERVE

# PROTECT & CONSERVE



## Districts' Spotlight

Many of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts are involved in hosting or assisting with tours and field days to expose farmers to cover crops and the benefits they can provide. Following are two newspaper articles on cover crop tours that were held this fall.

### Stephenson County: NEW CONCEPTS DISPLAYED ON COVER CROP TOUR

By Bruce Johnson, For The Journal-Standard, Nov. 16, 2013.

I enjoyed a day in the country on Nov. 8 as I attended the cover crops tour, hosted by the Stephenson County SWCD, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the University of Illinois Extension.

The tour visited four farms in the Lena area that are all incorporating various cover crops being grown to reduce soil erosion, increase soil composition and structure and provide feeding options for livestock.

The four hosts — Bruce Baumgartner, Dan Diaz, Foley Farms and Murry Lobdell — are all incorporating different crops and production practices and are at varying stages in their experiences.

Bruce is a longtime conservation advocate, and Dan began growing food plots 13 years ago before expanding his efforts, while Murry is in his first or second year of growing tillage radishes (a rapidly developing opportunity). Crops such as radishes and turnips are being seeded to help capture and retain nutrients and moisture while improving soil composition and structure.

One of the more interesting resources was Doug Hansen from ProHarvest Seeds of Ashkum, Ill., who spoke at the Diaz farm and was involved in discussions throughout the day. Doug is extremely knowledgeable in the seed and agronomic area and speaks in understandable terms. Dan Diaz is the local representative for the company, and they may be holding some informational meetings here this winter to share more information on this emerging agronomic opportunity.

I think we've only seen the tip of the iceberg as we explore ways to infuse this production technology into mainstream agriculture in an effort to improve productivity and sustainability.

### Rock Island and Mercer Counties: ILLINOIS FARMERS FIGHT SOIL EROSION WITH COVER CROPS

November 13, 2013, by John David.

Farmers are digging in for a hands-on battle against soil erosion in Rock Island County.

Cover crops like oilseed radishes replenish the soil by depositing nutrients and protecting the land. Fall plantings go dormant in time for corn and soybeans.

"Why would you want to leave a piece of ground bare when you can have something growing on it year round to keep it covered and protected?" asked Mark Jackson, a USDA specialist.

That explains this field day in rural Sherrard on a frigid November morning. The experiment includes ten different mini-plots. It's a team effort between the Rock Island and Mercer Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

There are state and federal incentives to try out cover crops. They actually help with weed control and can cut back on pesticide use.

"Like anything new, you always have those innovators out there that want to try something different," said Resource Conservationist Rich Stewart.

The two-year pilot program includes something called cereal rye. Mercer County farmer Keith Kindelsperger conquered the challenges with it and is trying again.

"I'm really impressed by the crop that I had," he said. "I'm going to continue to expand in cover crops."

Benefits will help to protect the land for future generations. Now, it's all about getting more farmers to participate.

The cover crop program is growing each year. It's actually an old farming concept that's becoming new again.

"We're going to have to increase our productivity," Jackson said. "But we're also going to have to be smart about it."

This is environmental education that's helping to ease soil erosion.

"This is one way, I think, that we can explore the possibility of raising better, more crops," Kindelsperger concluded.

At this Sherrard farm, it's all about going green year round.

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YOUR LAND, YOUR WATER, YOUR ILLINOIS

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SOIL &  
WATER

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