

The Conservation Spotlight

A Supplement to the
St. Joseph County SWCD's
Quarterly Newsletter:
The Conservation Kaleidoscope



Issue 1.8, Late Nov./Early Dec. 2010

OUR MISSION

*To provide guidance
and education to the
youth and adults of
St. Joseph County
and to administer
programs
to preserve,
protect and improve
soil, water, air, plant,
and animal
resources
for future
generations.*

Hello, Producers!

We hope that everyone has had a safe and successful harvest this year and are planning on doing the same in 2011!

In this edition of The Conservation Spotlight, you can read about the **Farm Service Agency's (FSA's)** Conservation Loan, ACRE program, and DCP program. If you are wondering whether these programs are right for you, turn to page 7 to learn more. On pages 2-4, you can also read about SWCD winter cover crop programs in Kosciusko and **St. Joseph Counties, including information on our own "Cover It Green" cost-share program.** Learn about other conservation programs you might be eligible for on page 5, **and if you're interested in the connection between conservation programs and the reduction of soil erosion, be sure to check out page 6.**

Lastly, take a look at page 8 for important dates and deadlines, including information on our 51st Annual Meeting dinner on Jan. 28, 2011.

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Kosciusko County Taking the Lead ~ Winter Cover Crop Use on the Rise

*Reprinted with permission from the Kosciusko County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD)
(Stationed in Warsaw, IN)*

Many conservation farmers in Kosciusko and surrounding counties have recently seeded winter cover crops on their corn and soybean fields using aerial application methods. The aerial seeding operation which resulted in 16,000 acres of cover crop seeding in 8 counties was coordinated by J. A. Scott Farms and the Kosciusko SWCD.

Eighteen hundred pound bags of seed were raised with a boom truck and loaded into airplanes at 7 different airports and airstrips. Most of the crop acres were seeded with Annual Ryegrass, but Cereal Rye, Oilseed radishes and various Clover varieties were also used on lesser acreage. By seeding the cover crops into standing corn and soybeans the small seed will be established before the full season crops are harvested and then they will grow through the fall months until we have a hard freeze.

Cover crops lay dormant during most of the winter and then grow early in the spring so that their roots are well established by April. The cover crops are then killed with a contact herbicide and corn or soybeans are no-till planted.

Local farmers are realizing great benefits from adding cover crops to their continuous no-till system. Some of those benefits include: rising organic matter levels, improved infiltration of water in spring, more available water in summer, increased nutrient cycling which makes more nutrients available to the crop.



A demonstration plot which contains 12 different combinations of cover crops has been established on land belonging to A.J. Brown Farms on State Road 13 south of Pierceton. Farmers are welcome to **stop and look at the plot which is located on the east side of State Road 13 about ½ miles south of county road 650 south.** The plot is 2 miles north of Sidney and 5 miles south of Pierceton. Any farmer who has questions about cover crops can call Sam St.Clair or Kevin Shide at 574-267-7445 ext. 3 or Jamie Scott at 574-551-1276.



St. Joseph County SWCD Looks Ahead to Our Second Year of **“Cover It Green” Winter Cover Crop Cost-Share Program**

In 2010, the St. Joseph County SWCD was awarded a grant by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation under the Clean Water Indiana Fund. This grant helped fund the first year of our **“Cover It Green” cover crop cost-share program**. We anticipate being awarded another Clean Water Indiana grant that will allow us to fund this program for a second year in 2011.

In 2010, the Clean Water Indiana Grant enabled us to provide \$5,140.00 cost share dollars to six (6) St. Joseph County producers to establish winter cover crops. In total, there were 257 acres of cover crops planted in the county with funding from our cost-share program. Planting methods for the 6 funded producers included aerial seeding, manure slurry seeding, drilling, and a combination of discing/drilling. The type of cover crops planted included:

Cover Crop	# Acres funded by “Cover It Green” Cost-Share Program	Where Planted
Annual Ryegrass	27 acres	Lakeville, IN
Annual Ryegrass	19 acres	New Carlisle, IN
Annual Ryegrass	113 acres	North Liberty, IN
Annual Ryegrass	80 acres	Walkerton, IN
Annual Ryegrass/ Radish/ Clover Mix	18 acres	South Bend, IN

The St. Joseph County SWCD accepted applications for the 2010 **“Cover It Green”** program until July 1, 2010, with the intention of funding \$20/acre with a maximum of 25 acres (or \$500) per producer. With only 6 applicants this first year of the program, our Conservation Planning Committee decided to fund each applicant for the entire acreage requested on their applications, some of which exceeded the 25 acre maximum.



Lakeville, IN—Photo taken on October 26, 2010 depicting the growth of annual ryegrass planted a few weeks prior for the St. Joseph County SWCD’s **“Cover It Green” Cover Crop Cost-Share Program**. The green growth is somewhat subtle in the fall. During the winter dormant months, even if you cannot see any obvious growth, root growth continues except when the ground is frozen.

*St. Joseph County SWCD Looks Ahead to Our Second Year of
“Cover It Green” Cover Crop Cost-Share Program, cont.*

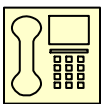
In 2011, we intend to fund \$25/acre with a maximum of 23 acres (or \$575) per producer. This takes into consideration that the average cost per acre in 2010 for aerial seeding of annual ryegrass (which included the seeds and the actual flying-on of the cover crop) was \$26.50. By increasing funding to \$25/acre, we are hoping to encourage applicants in 2011 to try this method of planting. One specific benefit of aerial seeding is that you can fly-on the cover crop behind corn before harvesting.

Our total “pot” of monies for the 2011 “Cover It Green” cost-share program will likely be \$6000. At a rate of \$25/acre, this should allow a minimum of 10 or 11 producers to plant 240 acres of 2011 “Cover It Green” cover crops on the land throughout St. Joseph County. For producers who may already be receiving funding for cover crops through another USDA conservation program like EQIP, the SWCD’s cost-share funds may be awarded in addition to any funds the producer is eligible for under another USDA program

The SWCD’s “Cover It Green” cost-share program promotes the use of cover crops since this is a practice that the SWCD feel is very important to improving soil and water quality in the St. Joseph County, Indiana area. Cover crops are an effective tool to reduce soil erosion and increase nutrient recycling on farmlands, which in turn reduces the sediment nutrient loads entering lakes and waterways. Cover crops also have a multitude of other benefits including pest management, weed suppression, increased water infiltration, improved soil quality and wildlife habitat. As the research on cover crops continues to grow, so does the adoption of the cover cropping practice by Indiana farmers.

As of November 12, 2010, the funding for our 2011 “Cover It Green” program is still pending approval by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture’s State Soil Conservation Board, but we are very optimistic that we will be able to continue this program for 2011. Once we get official funding for this program, we will announce the dates for when we will be accepting applications and the deadline for applications.

We are also tentatively planning to hold a **Spring 2011 Producers’ Breakfast and Pesticide Re-Certification Meeting** in mid-March, 2011 and a cover-crop field day in late-summer, early fall of 2011. More details will following in the coming months.



If you have any questions about the St. Joseph County SWCD’s “Cover It Green” cost-share program, our future promotion of planting winter cover crops in St. Joseph County, or cover crops in general, give us a call at 574.291.7444 ext. 3, or visit us at the St. Joseph County USDA Service Center located in the Farm Bureau Insurance Building at 5605 US 31 South, Suite 4, in South Bend.



Walkerton, IN—Photo taken on October 26, 2010 depicting the growth of annual ryegrass planted a few weeks prior for the St. Joseph County SWCD’s “Cover It Green” Cover Crop Cost-Share Program.

St. Joseph County Soil & Water Partnership Gearing Up for **USDA Fiscal Year 2011 Conservation Programs ...**

What Can We Do For YOU?

DID YOU KNOW that you may be eligible for technical and/or financial assistance for the following conservation practices: cover crops, field border, filter strip, grazing systems, grassed waterway, irrigation, manure management, nutrient management, organic farming transition, pasture plantings, pest management, precision farming, residue & tillage management, tree plantings, wetlands, wildlife areas, woodland management, and MORE...

For a more complete list of qualifying practices that may be eligible for technical and/or financial assistance, check out www.nrcs.usda.gov/program or www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/farmers.html or give our office a call at the number below. In this issue of The Conservation Spotlight, we wanted to elaborate on two conservation programs that you might like to consider.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Do you already have no-till planting, filter strips, or other stewardship practices implemented in your farming operation? Want to try adding some more practices to your operation? Then now is the time to check out the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). CSP is an incentive program that gives producers who are already implementing good stewardship practices a chance to turn things up a notch.

CSP does this by offering producers a five year, flat rate, point based payment for continuing their current stewardship practices and for starting at least one additional practice. The points used to calculate the yearly payments are based on both currently implemented AND additionally implemented, stewardship practices in their operations. For example, if a producer already has a filter strip system in place and adds an additional practice such a cover cropping, that producer maybe eligible for CSP funding.



To get a full list of qualifying practices, eligibility requirements, and incentive rates for the CSP by contacting the St. Joseph County USDA Service Center at 574.291.7444 ext. 3 by Jan. 1, 2011 so the office can meet our administrative deadlines.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

Everyone knows that farming is not only a profession, but it is also a way of life. One of the many aspects of the farming life style includes grazing of animals. Through out the years, many other lifestyles have begun to put more and more pressure on the grazing community. Burdens such as rising crop prices forcing more ground into production, to urban sprawl taking more grassland away from pastures, have stressed farmers who are looking to hang onto their grass pastures.

Now there is a program that may help take some of the burden off of these grazers, in the form of the Grassland Reserve Program! The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program that offers farmers a rental rate of approximately \$16/acre for farmers to keep existing grassland as such for a ten-year period. The GRP also offers another alternative to the farmer, in the form of a one-time easement purchase. The easement helps to ensure that the grassland being used grazing is available for grazing, indefinitely.

GRP is not a cost share program, which means we are trying to emphasize the retention of existing grazing lands, rather than paying to convert crop ground to pasture. This being the case there are some specific requirements that will have to be met to be eligible for this program.



If you are interested in finding out if you do qualify for the GRP program and would like more information, contact the St. Joseph County USDA Service Center at 574.291.7444 ext. 3 by Jan. 20, 2011 so the office can meet our administrative deadlines.

Data Confirms that Conservation Programs Reduce Erosion

INDIANAPOLIS, October 6, 2010 - Soil erosion on U.S. cropland decreased by more than 40% during the past 25 years, while more than one-third of all development of U.S. land occurred during the same period, according to a USDA report released this year.

The information was contained in the latest National Resource Inventory (NRI) conducted by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in cooperation with Iowa State University's Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology. The inventory uses information from a series of points on non-federal lands across the nation to monitor resource changes such as land use changes, erosion trends and natural resource status.

USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan said, "The NRI results are significant because they provide a scientifically-based snapshot of the nation's natural resources and the ability to track trends in natural resource use and condition. The NRI provides a wealth of information that can be used by agricultural and environmental policymakers to make informed decisions about the nation's natural resources."

The inventory showed that erosion on cultivated and non-cultivated cropland across the nation decreased from 3 billion tons per year in 1982 to 1.7 billion tons per year in 2007. It also showed that cropland acreage decreased by 15 percent, from 420 million acres in 1982 to 357 million acres in 2007. Half of the reduction was reflected in enrollments of environmentally sensitive cropland in USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Nationally, Prime farmland acreage decreased from 339 million acres in 1982 to 325 million acres in 2007. Most of this loss is due to development.

Forty million acres of land were newly developed between 1982 and 2007, bringing the national total of developed land to around 111 million acres, an area equal to the combined surface area of Illinois, Iowa and Michigan. For the NRI, developed land includes rural transportation corridors such as roads and railroads, as well as urban and built-up areas which include residential, industrial, commercial and other land uses.

In Indiana, the inventory showed decreases in sheet and rill erosion on cultivated cropland, non-cultivated cropland, CRP land and pasture land. Wind erosion decreased on cultivated cropland and CRP land. Prime farmland decreased from about 13.3 million acres in 1982 to 12.8 million acres in 2007.

According to NRCS State Conservationist Jane Hardisty, "The NRI shows that conservation programs are having an effect. It's not possible to get to zero soil erosion, but we continue to provide conservation planning with landowners to plan for a manageable level. Over the last 20-30 years, erosion levels have dropped considerably."

A manageable level of soil erosion is known as "T" (the tolerable level of soil loss). For most Indiana soils, "T" is three to five tons per acre per year which is how much topsoil it can lose and still be productive. While soil conservation has come a long way in Indiana, more than three million acres continue to lose top-soil at a rate faster than "T". Those soils are in need of some type of conservation treatment.

Formerly, the inventory was taken every five years. Now, it is taken annually. For more information about NRI, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/nri.



A Word from the St. Joseph County Farm Service Agency's County Executive Director, Morgan Thornburg

I. FSA Conservation Loan Program

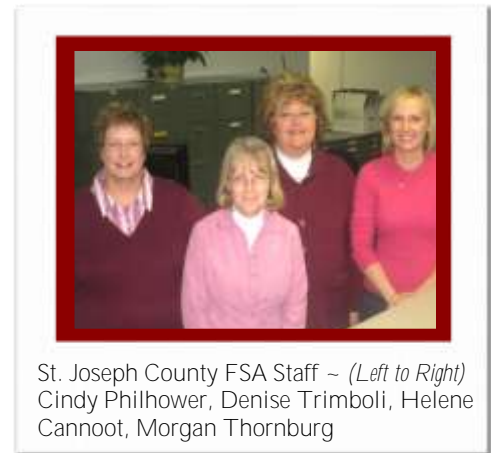
The Farm Service Agency (FSA) makes and guarantees conservation loans on farms and ranches to help conserve our natural resources. The Conservation Loan (CL) Program provides farmers with the credit necessary to implement conservation measures on their land.

The direct CLs loan limit is up to \$300,000 and guaranteed CLs up to \$1,112,000 (amount adjusted for inflation), may be available by applying with lenders working with FSA to obtain a guarantee.

Applicants will work with Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) staff to develop a conservation plan. Conservation practices must be approved by NRCS before FSA can provide financing.

Examples of conservation practices eligible for CL loans include (but are not limited to):

Installation of conservation structures	Installation of water conservation measures	Transitioning to organic production
Establish-ment of forest cover	Establishment or improvement of permanent pastures	Manure management, including manure digestion systems



St. Joseph County FSA Staff ~ (Left to Right) Cindy Philhower, Denise Trimboli, Helene Cannoot, Morgan Thornburg



The CL program for St. Joseph County residents is administered in Kosciusko County. For information please contact the Kosciusko County Farm Loan Program Office at 574-267-7445 ext. 114.

II. 2011 DCP and ACRE Signup

The St. Joseph County FSA would like to announce that enrollment for the 2011 Direct and Counter-cyclical Program (DCP) and the Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE) program has begun and will continue through June 1, 2011. For 2011, eligible producers may request to receive advance direct payments based on 22 % of the direct payment. USDA will issue advance direct payments beginning December 1, 2010.

The optional ACRE Program provides a safety net based on state revenue losses and acts in place of the price-based safety net of counter-cyclical payments under DCP. A farm's payment is based on a revenue guarantee calculated using a 5-year average state yield and the most recent 2-year national price for each eligible commodity. For the 2011 crop, the 2-year price average will be based on the 2009 and 2010 crop years.

An ACRE payment is issued when both the state and the farm have incurred a revenue loss. The payment is based on 83.3 % (85 % in 2012) of the farm's planted acres times the difference between the State ACRE guarantee and the state revenue times the ratio of the farm's yield divided by the state expected yield. The total number of planted acres for which a producer may receive ACRE payments may not exceed the total base on the farm. In exchange for participating in ACRE, in addition to not receiving counter-cyclical payments, a farm's direct payment is reduced by 20 %, and marketing assistance loan rates are reduced by 30 %.

The decision to enroll in the ACRE Program is irrevocable. The owner of the farm and all producers on the farm must agree to enroll in ACRE. Once enrolled, the farm shall be enrolled for that initial crop year and will remain in ACRE through the 2012 crop year. The June 1, 2011, deadline is mandatory for all participants. USDA will not accept any late-filed applications.



These are just two of the programs we administer through our office. Don't hesitate to call the St. Joseph County Farm Service Agency office at 574-291-7444 ext. 2.



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Dates to Jot Down

- 12/1/2010 ~ Date to start receiving advance payments under **FSA's** DCP/ACRE Programs (*see p. 5*)
- 1/7/2011 ~ Deadline to apply for **NRCS's CSP Program** (*see p. 6*)
- 1/12 to 1/15/2011 ~ National No-till Conference / Cincinnati, OH
~ The 19th annual No-till Conference will offer more than 80 sessions over four days delivering great learning and networking opportunities with the best in the no-till farming community
- 1/20/2011 ~ Deadline for Reservations to the St. Joseph County **SWCD's 51st Annual Meeting** on January 28, 2011 (*see below for details*)
- 1/25/2011 ~ Deadline to apply for **NRCS's GRP Program** (*see p. 6*)
- 1/28/2011 ~ (Friday) COME JOIN US for the St. Joseph County **SWCD's 51st Annual Meeting** for a polish family-style dinner and a night of entertainment with Charlie Adams, motivational speaker and former news/sports anchor for WSBT-TV Channel 22.
Location: St. Hedwig Parish/South Bend. Time: 6:30PM EST.
Tickets for Dinner: \$10/each. Reservations will be accepted until Thursday, January 20, 2011. *Give our office a call at 574-291-7444 ext. 3 for more details.*
- 2/25/2011 ~ Deadline to apply for current round of **NRCS's EQIP & WHIP** Programs
- 3/31/2011 ~ Deadline to apply for **NRCS's WRP Programs**
- 6/1/2011 ~ Deadline to apply for **FSA's DCP/ACRE Program** (*see p. 7*)