



# Decatur County Soil & Water Conservation District Update

Fall 2011

"A Quarterly Newsletter Devoted to Conservation"

Volume 4, Issue 3

## 2012 Annual Meeting

Mark your calendars for the 2012 Annual Meeting on February 13, 2012 at the Knights of St. John's Hall in Greensburg.



The Decatur County SWCD is accepting nominations for a vacant SWCD elected supervisor position through November 21st . Elected supervisors are public officials responsible for setting policy that develops programs to address local natural resource concerns. Interested persons may pick up an application form at: 1333 N Liberty Circle E, Greensburg.

Elected supervisors must maintain permanent residence within the district (county). For more information please call or stop by our office.

### SWCD Board of Supervisors

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**A. Brian Cruser**

-Vice Chairman

**Roger Wenning**

-Secretary

**Reuben Kissel**

-Member

**Tom Cherry**

-Member

### SWCD Staff

**Jenna Nicholson**

-District Coordinator

**Scott Sanders**

-Natural Resource Specialist

### NRCS Staff

**Mike Hughes**

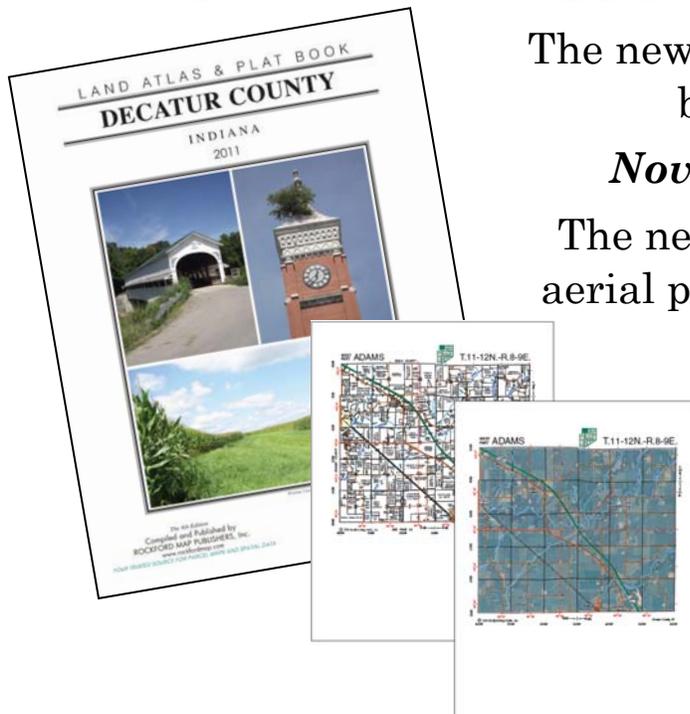
-District Conservationist

# 2011 Plat Books

The new 2011 Plat Books will be available on

***November 7th, 2011.***

The new plat books include aerial photos next to the plat maps. The price for the new books is \$20. Please stop by and pick up the new plat books!



## How is the Soil Health on Your Farm?

We've tackled a lot of resource concerns in Decatur County over the years. Hind sight should tell us that we will always be striving for better water quality and soil erosion control all while trying to maintain our standard of living. A new term called "*Soil Health*" has hit the horizon as a concern, and could yield a lot of benefit if the concepts and ideas are taken into consideration. Soil Health is defined as "the capacity of a soil to function." How well is your soil functioning to infiltrate water and cycle nutrients to water and feed growing plants?

Soil is full of life with billions upon billions of macroscopic and microscopic organisms taking up residence. There are more individual organisms in a teaspoon of soil than there are people on earth. These organisms are in control of the soil and should be considered as another resource to reaching your goals for your overall farming operation. Managing for soil health can be thought of as providing suitable habitat for all the creatures living in your soil.

Tillage, fertilizer, livestock, pesticides, and other management tools can be used to improve soil health, or they can significantly damage soil health if not applied correctly. Soil Health Management can be obtained by disturbing the soil as little as possible, growing as many different species of plants as practical, keeping living plants in the soil as often as possible, and keeping the soil covered all the time.

### Ways YOU can improve your soil health are:

**Enhance organic matter:** Whether your soil is naturally high or low in organic matter, adding new organic matter every year is perhaps the most important way to improve and maintain soil quality. Regular additions of organic matter improve soil structure, enhance water and nutrient holding capacity, protect soil from erosion and compaction, and support a healthy community of soil organisms. Practices that increase organic matter include: leaving crop residues in the field, choosing crop rotations that include high residue plants, using optimal nutrient and water management practices to grow healthy plants with large amounts of roots and residue, growing cover crops, applying manure or compost, using low or no tillage systems, and mulching.

**Avoid excessive tillage:** Reducing tillage minimizes the loss of organic matter and protects the soil surface with plant residue. Tillage is used to loosen surface soil, prepare the seedbed, and control weeds and pests. But tillage can also break up soil structure, speed the decomposition and loss of organic matter, increase the threat of erosion, destroy the habitat of helpful organisms, and cause compaction. New equipment allows crop production with minimal disturbance of the soil.

**Manage pests and nutrients efficiently:** An important function of soil is to buffer and detoxify chemicals, but soil's capacity for detoxification is limited. Pesticides and chemical fertilizers have valuable benefits, but they also can harm non-target organisms and pollute water and air if they are mismanaged. Nutrients from organic sources also can pollute when misapplied or over-applied. Efficient pest and nutrient management means testing and monitoring soil and pests; applying only the necessary chemicals, at the right time and place to get the job done; and taking advantage of non-chemical approaches to pest and nutrient management such as crop rotations, cover crops, and manure management.

**Prevent soil compaction:** Compaction reduces the amount of air, water, and space available to roots and soil organisms. Compaction is caused by repeated traffic, heavy traffic, or traveling on wet soil. Deep compaction by heavy equipment is difficult or impossible to remedy, so prevention is essential.

**Keep the ground covered:** Bare soil is susceptible to wind and water erosion, and to drying and crusting. Ground cover protects soil, provides habitats for larger soil organisms, such as insects and earthworms, and can improve water availability. Ground can be covered by leaving crop residue on the surface or by planting cover crops. In addition to ground cover, living cover crops provide additional organic matter, and continuous cover and food for soil organisms. Ground cover must be managed to prevent problems with delayed soil warming in spring, diseases, and excessive build-up of phosphorus at the surface.

**Diversify cropping systems:** Diversity is beneficial for several reasons. Each plant contributes a unique root structure and type of residue to the soil. A diversity of soil organisms can help control pest populations, and a diversity of cultural practices can reduce weed and disease pressures. Diversity across the landscape can be increased by using buffer strips, small fields, or contour strip cropping. Diversity over time can be increased by using long crop rotations. Changing vegetation across the landscape or over time not only increases plant diversity, but also the types of insects, microorganisms, and wildlife that live on your farm.

Our soil is alive with multitudes of biological cycles and activity being conducted that directly affects how well your cropland achieves maximum benefits. If the aforementioned management tools are implemented, over time maximum results and benefits will be granted to you and your farm.

## Soil Health Workshop: July 14, 2011

On July 14th, approximately 75 local farmers and landowners gathered at Wenning Farms to be informed about discuss soil health and the economic impacts of conservation farming practices. Ray Archuleta started the day off speaking about understanding soil function in a conservation farming system. Next our host Roger Wenning and Alex Case, representing Premier Ag, addressed why soil quality is so important to farmers and ways to improve soil health on their own farms. Lunch was sponsored by the Indiana Soybean Alliance and the Indiana Corn Marketing Council.

After lunch producers were given information on managing carbon to nitrogen ratios by Barry Fisher, NRCS and Hans Kok, Indiana Conservation Cropping Initiative. Hans next spoke about soil compaction, how a conservation farming system using no-till, and cover crops can greatly reduce soil compaction. Everyone next went to the field where a soil pit was dug. Barry Fisher showed the crowd the practical benefits of cover crops, examining the root depth, organic matter, and soil tilth. District Conservationist, Mike Hughes wrapped up the day by discussing some of the programs available to producers interested conservation farming practices. The Conservation Technology Information Center helped to co-sponsor our event.

*The Decatur County SWCD would like to thank the Wenning family, our speakers, sponsors, and everyone who attended for a great day.*

## Wildlife & Forestry Field Day

The Decatur County SWCD sponsored a field day to highlight conservation practices for land owners interested in wildlife habitat and improving woodlands. The event was hosted by Matt Raver, of Raver Farms on County Road 950 E, near Lake Santee. Local consultant Nick Crusier spoke about invasive species. Nick provided examples of some of the invasive species producers need to be aware of and the treatments available to eradicate them. Attendees then boarded a hay wagon to tour the rest of the farm. The next stop was in the woods where DNR District Forrester Rob McGriff, and Forrester timber buyers Al Meyer and Jeff Page, addressed timber stand improvement. Rob provided information on using best management practices to improve woodlands, including species selection and maintenance. Al and Jeff explained the process a landowner interested in a timber sale might pursue. They gave a good synopsis of what timber buyers look for when purchasing trees and what landowners need to know. Chris Grauel, DNR Wildlife Biologist concluded the day with a look at warm season grass



plantings for wildlife habitat. Chris provided information on establishing grasses for upland birds, including quail, and food plots for turkey and deer. *Thanks to attendees, speakers, and the Raver Family for a great day.*

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## River Friendly Farmer Award



(Lt. Governor Becky Skillman, Alan Kramer, Indiana Farm Bureau President Don Villwock)



(Lt. Governor Becky Skillman, Dennis Dickman, Indiana Farm Bureau President Don Villwock)

Congratulations Alan and Teresa and Dennis thank you for your continued conservation work!

## Earth Team Volunteer



(Mike Hughes, NRCS & Aaron Nicholson)

Aaron Nicholson spent a few days at the end of the summer as an Earth Team Volunteer for the Decatur County NRCS and SWCD office helping within the office and assisting with the Soil Health Workshop. He is a freshman at Greensburg Community High School.

A big thank you to Aaron for volunteering with us this summer!

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# Kids Corner

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## Upcoming Events

November 7: Board Mtg @ 7pm at USDA Service Center  
November 8: Election Day (OFFICE CLOSED)  
November 11: Veterans' Day (OFFICE CLOSED)  
November 24: Thanksgiving (OFFICE CLOSED)  
November 25: Lincoln's Birthday (OFFICE CLOSED)

## Rental/Sales Information

- \* Decatur County Soil Survey data is available in several different formats—FREE
- \* Straw blower rental: \$55 for half day, \$25 additional half day
- \* No-till drill rental: 10' wide model—\$10/acre

## *Wetland/HEL Determinations*

If you are needing a wetland or highly erodible land determination on your farm, please remember that it is imperative to allow adequate time for the determination to be completed before you are ready to begin working. Determinations should be requested **at least three months** before you are ready to begin. Please see FSA to fill out the proper paperwork.

### **Decatur County SWCD Mission**

To promote the wise use of our soil, water, and related natural resources. Each county in Indiana has a soil and water conservation district (SWCD). SWCDs are subdivisions of state government led by a 5 member board of supervisors. SWCDs determine and address natural resource needs in their counties. SWCDs address issues such as agricultural conservation, urban conservation, forestry, wildlife, water management, and natural resource education.

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